

# **University of Huddersfield**

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MARCH 2007

## **Preface**

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) exists to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education (HE) qualifications and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of HE.

To do this QAA carries out reviews of individual HE institutions (universities and colleges of HE). In England and Northern Ireland this process is known as institutional audit. QAA operates similar but separate processes in Scotland and Wales. For institutions that have large and complex provision offered through partnerships, QAA conducts collaborative provision audits in addition to institutional audits.

## **The purpose of collaborative provision audit**

Collaborative provision audit shares the aims of institutional audit: to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges are:

- providing HE, awards and qualifications of an acceptable quality and an appropriate academic standard, and
- exercising their legal powers to award degrees in a proper manner.

## **Judgements**

Collaborative provision audit results in judgements about the institutions being reviewed. Judgements are made about:

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements
- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the present and likely future capacity of the awarding institution to satisfy itself that the learning opportunities offered to students through its collaborative arrangements are managed effectively and meet its requirements; and
- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, (or authorises to be published) about the quality of its programmes offered through collaborative provision that lead to its awards and the standards of those awards.

These judgements are expressed as either **broad confidence**, **limited confidence** or **no confidence** and are accompanied by examples of good practice and recommendations for improvement.

## **Nationally agreed standards**

Collaborative provision audit uses a set of nationally agreed reference points, known as the 'Academic Infrastructure', to consider an institution's standards and quality. These are published by QAA and consist of:

- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*, which includes descriptions of different HE qualifications
- *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects

- guidelines for preparing programme specifications, which are descriptions of the what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study. They outline the intended knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes of a student completing that programme. They also give details of teaching and assessment methods and link the programme to the FHEQ.

### **The audit process**

Collaborative provision audits are carried out by teams of academics who review the way in which institutions oversee their academic quality and standards. Because they are evaluating their equals, the process is called 'peer review'.

The main elements of collaborative provision audit are:

- a preliminary visit by QAA to the institution nine months before the audit visit
- a self-evaluation document submitted by the institution four months before the audit visit
- a written submission by the student representative body, if they have chosen to do so, four months before the audit visit
- a detailed briefing visit to the institution by the audit team six weeks before the audit visit
- visits to up to six partner institutions by members of the audit team
- the audit visit, which lasts five days
- the publication of a report on the audit team's judgements and findings 22 weeks after the audit visit.

### **The evidence for the audit**

In order to obtain the evidence for its judgement, the audit team carries out a number of activities, including:

- reviewing the institution's own internal procedures and documents, such as regulations, policy statements, codes of practice, recruitment publications and minutes of relevant meetings, as well as the self-evaluation document itself
- reviewing the written submission from students
- asking questions of relevant staff from the institution and from partners
- talking to students from partner institutions about their experiences
- exploring how the institution uses the Academic Infrastructure.

The audit team also gathers evidence by focusing on examples of the institution's internal quality assurance processes at work through visits to partners. In addition, the audit team may focus on a particular theme that runs throughout the institution's management of its standards and quality. This is known as a 'thematic enquiry'.

From 2004, institutions will be required to publish information about the quality and standards of their programmes and awards in a format recommended in document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*, published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The audit team reviews how institutions are working towards this requirement.

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## Summary

### Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Huddersfield (the University) from 26 to 30 March 2007 to carry out a collaborative provision (CP) audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the courses offered by the University through collaborative arrangements with partner organisations, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements.

To arrive at its conclusions, the audit team spoke to members of staff of the University and read a wide range of documents relating to the way the University manages the academic aspects of its CP. As part of the process, the team visited two of the University's partner organisations in the UK where it met with staff and students, and conducted by video conference equivalent meetings with staff and students from two further overseas partners.

The words 'academic standards' are used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the UK.

'Academic quality' is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate teaching, support, assessment and learning resources are provided for them.

The term 'collaborative provision' is taken to mean 'educational provision leading to an award, or to specific credit toward an award, of an awarding institution delivered and/or supported and/or assessed through an arrangement with a partner organisation' (*Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* - September 2004, paragraph 13, published by QAA).

In a CP audit both academic standards and academic quality are reviewed.

### Outcome of the audit

As a result of its investigations the audit team's view is that:

- broad confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements
- broad confidence can reasonably be placed in the present and likely future capacity of the University to satisfy itself that the learning opportunities offered to students through its collaborative arrangements are managed effectively and meet its requirements.

### Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas as good practice:

- the role of the Designated Academic Liaison Officer in supporting the management of standards and the quality in collaborative provision, as exemplified by the development of staff at partner institutions
- the Consortium for Post-Compulsory Education and Training which allows for the effective management of standards and quality, in particular, the staff development networks and the research activities that underpin course delivery
- the Annual Executive Meeting as a mechanism for enhancing communication between the University and partner institutions, and providing a strategic overview of the partnerships that ensures that all developments are in line with the University's intentions for collaborative provision
- the action planning process which enables a swift and effective response by the University to the reports of external examiners.

## **Recommendations for action**

The audit team also recommends that the University should consider further action in a number of areas to ensure that the academic quality of courses and the standards of awards it offers through collaborative arrangements are maintained.

Recommendations for actions that are advisable:

- review and develop further institutional oversight of standards and quality in collaborative provision, so that the University can assure itself that its policies and procedures operate effectively and are implemented consistently across all partners
- adhere to, and ensure consistent implementation of, University procedures in relation to publicity materials and certificates across all partners.

Recommendations for actions that are desirable:

- give a stronger central direction to the University's emerging Teaching and Learning and E-Learning strategies in relation to collaborative provision
- review the current classification of collaborative provision to ensure continuing fit with the increasingly diverse nature of collaborative arrangements being established
- revise the reporting form for external examiners to allow the comments relating to individual partner institutions to be better identified
- strengthen its oversight and analysis of statistical information in relation to collaborative provision
- take steps to ensure that all students have appropriate learning resources available to them through partner institutions, and ensure that all students are made aware of their entitlements to the learning resources, academic and pastoral support services provided by the University, and how these can be accessed.

## **National reference points**

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team also investigated the use made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure which QAA has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that help to define both good practice and academic standards. The findings of the audit suggest that the University was making effective use of the Academic Infrastructure in the context of its CP.

The audit team was satisfied that at the time of the audit. The information the University and its partner organisations were publishing about the quality of collaborative courses and the standards of the University's awards was reliable.



# **Main report**

## **Main report**

1 An audit of the collaborative provision (CP) offered by the University of Huddersfield (the University) was undertaken from 26 to 30 March 2007. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the courses offered by the University through collaborative arrangements with partner organisations, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements.

2 CP audit is supplementary to the institutional audit of the University's own provision. It is carried out by a process developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in partnership with higher education institutions (HEIs) in England. It provides a separate scrutiny of the CP of an HEI with degree-awarding powers (awarding institution) where such CP was too large or complex to have been included in its institutional audit. The term 'collaborative provision' is taken to mean 'educational provision leading to an award, or to specific credit toward an award, of an awarding institution delivered and/or supported and/or assessed through an arrangement with a partner organisation' (*Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* - September 2004, paragraph 13, published by QAA).

3 In relation to collaborative arrangements, the audit checked the effectiveness of the University's procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of its academic awards; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of the courses leading to those awards; for publishing reliable information about its CP; and for the discharge of its responsibilities as an awarding institution. As part of the process, the audit team visited two of the University's partner organisations in the UK where it met with staff and students, and conducted by video-conference equivalent meetings with staff and students from a further two overseas organisations.

## **Section 1: Introduction: the University of Huddersfield**

### **The institution and its mission as it relates to collaborative provision**

4 The University was founded in 1992 although it has existed for the last 160 years in various forms such as the Mechanics Institution, the College of Technology, and Huddersfield Polytechnic.

5 Its mission, which extends to CP, is to 'enable students to achieve their utmost by raising their aspirations and providing an excellent student experience in a high quality learning environment'. The University describes itself as a teaching-led institution and a major provider of sandwich education. It is committed to providing opportunities for underrepresented groups and those with non-standard entry qualifications. The collaborative provision self-evaluation document (CPSED) noted that the University has made a significant contribution to widening participation and performs above national benchmarks for access to higher education (HE).

6 The University currently has 60 partner institutions, 19 of which are located overseas. The majority of UK partners are further education colleges, 29 of whom plus the University form the Consortium for Post-Compulsory Education and Training (CPCET, the Consortium) which serves teacher education in the post-compulsory sector. The University considers the primary purpose of these collaborations is to widen participation in HE and to make a contribution to the regional agenda for local access to HE. The remaining UK collaborations are with a small number of partners and deliver specialist areas of HE to meet specific demands and establish areas of national excellence. Partnerships with overseas institutions are formed on a selective basis for the purpose of supporting the achievement of the University's mission through providing access to UK HE for those unable to travel to the UK. The University intends to consolidate its overseas activities in key regions to maximise

the support it is able to offer to partners. This is part of the University's wider strategy to consolidate all CP activity into a smaller number of partners.

7 The University as a whole currently has 19,275 students, of which 5,855 are CP students; 4,491 CP students are part-time and 1,364 full-time. The largest CP arrangement is franchised provision with over 3,000 students predominantly through the CPCET network. Off-campus delivery of university provision led by university staff (ODUPLUS) provision accounts for 660 students and designed and delivered for about 1,400. Less than 300 students study under Flexible and Distributed learning arrangements.

8 The majority of CP provision is at undergraduate level with currently 4,860 students; 995 students study at postgraduate level. There is also some sub-degree provision including individual modules, higher national certificates/diplomas (HNC/D) as well as 12 Foundation Degrees.

9 The University is spread over three campuses, but CP provision is only linked with the main campus. The University is organised into seven academic schools: Applied Sciences; Art, Design and Architecture, Computing and Engineering; Education and Professional Development; Human and Health Sciences; Music, Humanities and Media; and Huddersfield University Business School, all of which are involved in CP. There are a number of central services, some of which are directly involved in the management and support of CP (for example, Computing and Library Services (CLS) and Student Services).

### **Background information**

10 The published information available for this audit included:

- the information on the University's website
- the overseas audit report for the University and Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Singapore) 2002
- the University's institutional audit report, December 2004

- the Foundation Degree reviews: Community Governance and Public Sector Management, April 2005; and Learning Support, April 2005

- the major review of healthcare programmes, December 2005.

11 The University provided the QAA with the following:

- the CPSED
- documentation linked to the CPSED, as listed in an appendix to the CPSED
- access to the University intranet
- documentation relating to the partner institutions visited by the audit team.

12 During the briefing and audit visits, the audit team was given ready access to a range of the University's internal documents in hardcopy or on the intranet. The team identified a number of partnership arrangements that illustrated further aspects of the University's provision, and additional documentation describing these was provided for the team during the audit visit. The team was grateful for the prompt and helpful responses to its requests for information.

### **The collaborative provision audit process**

13 Following a preliminary meeting at the University in September 2006 between a QAA officer and representatives of the University and students, the University provided its CPSED in November 2006. QAA confirmed in December 2006 that four partner visits would be conducted between the briefing and audit visits. The University provided QAA with briefing documentation in January 2007 for each of the selected partner institutions.

14 The audit team visited the University from 19 to 21 February 2007, to explore with senior members of staff of the University, senior representatives from partner institutions, and a group of students who had studied at a range of partner institutions, matters relating to the management of quality and academic standards in CP raised by the University's

CPSED and other documentation, and to assist the team in building a clear understanding of the University's approach to collaborative arrangements. At the close of the briefing visit, a programme of meetings for the audit was agreed with the University. It was also agreed that two partner institutions would be visited and meetings would take place via video-conference links with staff and students from a further two partners.

15 During the visits to partners, members of the audit team met senior staff, teaching staff and student representatives. The team is grateful to all the students and staff involved in these meetings for their help in gaining an understanding of the University's arrangements for managing its collaborative arrangements.

16 The audit visit took place from 26 to 30 March 2007, and included further meetings with staff. The audit team is grateful to all the staff both of the University and its partners who participated in meetings.

17 The audit team comprised Professor M Davies, Professor P Periton, Dr M Ruthe, Dr C Vielba (auditors), and Ms E Smith (audit secretary). The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mrs E Harries Jenkins, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

### **Developments since the institutional audit of the awarding institution**

18 The findings of the institutional audit report (December 2004) highlighted a number of points which were relevant to the audit of the University's CP. In relation to good practice these included the steps taken by the University to support its students; the use it makes of its Applicant and Student Information System (ASIS); the design it has adopted for annual evaluation and for responding to external examiners' reports; its arrangements for thematic reviews and services reviews; and its draft e-learning strategy. A number of recommendations were also identified and in the CPSED the University provided the audit team with a summary of its response to these.

19 The University was advised to clarify the discretion allowed to Course Assessment Boards (CABS) when deciding upon degree classification arrangements. At its September 2006 meeting the University Teaching and Learning Committee (UTLC) approved a 1 per cent discretion band to be implemented in the academic year 2006-07 and be used in conjunction with the guidelines on discretion as set out in the University's Regulations for Awards. The CPSED noted that the University has considered carefully the advisory recommendations relating to the operation of exam boards. CABS are now required to note and record formally confirmation of module marks including any changes resulting from external examiner scrutiny. Similarly, the process of moderation for all assessed work is deemed to have been tightened. From this current academic year 2006-07 the moderation and second-marking is to be formally noted on the marking sheet and recorded at CABS.

20 The audit report advised the University that all professional related provision, including courses leading to the examinations of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, should be included in its own annual and periodic arrangements for monitoring and review. All schools have confirmed to UTLC that all provision including CP is now covered by such quality assurance arrangements.

21 The CPSED noted that the University has also published guidance in its Quality Assurance Procedures for Taught Courses handbook to ensure alignment of its FDL provision with the *Code of practice, Section 2*. This handbook now makes clear the requirements for external participation in all validations.

22 In response to the institutional audit report the University has also undertaken considerable work to design and implement policies which involve a more active approach to disseminating and embedding good practice. Many of these measures were in their infancy at the time of the CP audit but the audit team considered that they demonstrate a potential to enhance the University's provision

including its CP. The first University e-zine 'Teaching and Learning Matters' has been published with the intention of having three editions a year; a forthcoming edition will specifically focus on CP. A new teaching and learning journal is planned which will invite collaborative partners to contribute. The University hosted its first CP Network Conference for UK partners in November 2006 and a further conference for international partners is planned for 2007. Similarly, the University has established training sessions and forums to discuss key issues impacting on policy and practice relating to teaching and learning. Of particular note is a designated academic liaison officer (DALO)/institutional liaison officer (ILO) forum to disseminate good practice and support staff in these roles (see paragraph 109).

23 The audit team learnt of the various ways in which the University was developing its support for teaching and learning including its CP. These included a new Teaching and Learning Strategy as well as a draft e-learning strategy. At present improvements in the student learning experience often evolved from activities in schools arising from the work of individuals. The CPCET, however, took a more structured view of support for learning improvements which had enabled the development of a coherent and successful enhancement programme across the Consortium. The team concluded that improvements in the student learning experience in CP, especially in respect of the virtual learning environment (VLE), would benefit from the University giving a stronger central direction to such developments. As such the audit team considered it would be desirable for the University to build this into its emerging Teaching and Learning and E-Learning Strategies in relation to CP.

24 The audit team considered that the University has engaged with the recommendations made in the institutional audit report. It has put in place mechanisms to ensure a more robust management of CP arrangements based on a strengthening of its

quality assurance procedures. The intended impact of the measures taken was appropriate but it was too early to judge fully their eventual effectiveness.

## **Section 2: The collaborative provision audit investigations: the awarding institution's processes for quality management in collaborative provision**

### **The awarding institution's strategic approach to collaborative provision**

25 The CPSED described the University's approach to assuring academic standards and quality in its CP as the application of mainstream systems and processes with additional safeguards that recognise the higher risks involved in such activity. Additional mechanisms include committee oversight, the identification of key roles and responsibilities, formal documentation and handbooks specifically for CP.

26 The CPSED also noted that CP plays a significant and growing role in the University's provision. This growth was a key factor behind the University's decision to undertake a thematic review of the management of CP in 2005. The recommendations arising from the review were taken forward by the Collaborative Provision Working Party (CPWP) chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Affairs) (PVC(AA)) and the subsequent proposals approved by Senate in March 2006. The outcome has been a strengthening of the mechanisms applied to the management and oversight of CP. The structures and processes involved are still being embedded and their effectiveness demonstrated. The CP strategy is also in the course of development.

27 The University adopts three principles in seeking to protect standards and quality in CP. Firstly, it aims to bridge and reduce differences in approach between the University and its partners, for example, by developing forums for

the interchange of ideas and dissemination of good practice. Second, it aims to ensure full compliance by partners with University regulations. Third, it aims to ensure that students studying on CP enjoy an equivalent learning experience to students studying on-campus.

28 In the CPSED the University made reference to five models of its CP, depending largely on mode of delivery, but which also distinguished different patterns of relationship between the University and the partner organisation. The main text of the Handbook for Collaborative Provision defines four types of collaborative arrangement, while in an appendix provides details about five models. From the documentation available to it the audit team identified five approaches to CP:

- Franchised provision: the largest category in terms of the number of students, involves the delivery of all or a part of a course, validated on-campus, by staff of a partner institution
- ODUPLUS (Off-Campus Delivery of University Provision Led by University Staff): where courses are delivered at the partner by University staff and may also involve local staff teaching up to two-thirds of the formal class contact hours
- Designed and Delivered: whereby University awards are developed and delivered fully by partner institutions
- Articulation: where students in partner institutions have an agreed progression route with advanced standing onto a University award. The team heard at the time of the audit there was no provision of this type
- Flexible and Distributed Learning (FDL): which overlaps with the other categories to some extent and which accounts for only a small amount of provision.

29 Foundation Degrees are recognised separately and a small number are offered through CP. The University does not have any dual or joint awards but has set up a working group to consider this form of collaboration.

30 Within each category there is a variety of provision reflecting the varied partners and subject areas involved. The Designed and Delivered category contains a particularly broad range of provision from full degrees to single 20-credit modules. The categorisation of provision determines the details of validation, monitoring and quality assurance arrangements. The audit team noted that the processes in place for a particular category were more effective in relation to some provision than others. For example, the Designed and Delivered processes assume management structures and quality assurance processes that may not be present in partners delivering single modules. While the existing classification captures effectively most of the variation in CP, it does not take account of differences in scale, such as single modules or whole degrees, or the ease with which the partner can undertake related management and support roles according to the nature of the partner organisation involved. Some types of CP do not fit comfortably within the current framework, such as distance learning which overlaps with other types, and articulation agreements which exist only in name.

31 The audit team considers that it would be desirable for the University to keep under review its typology and associated procedures for the operation of its CP to ensure that they support the increasing diversity of collaborative arrangements being established.

### **The awarding institution's framework for managing the quality of the students' experience and academic standards in collaborative provision**

32 The Senate is ultimately responsible for the management of quality and standards in CP, but delegates considerable responsibility for this task to the University Teaching and Learning Committee (UTLC) and its subcommittee, the Standing Committee on Collaborative Provision (SCCP). School boards and their committees also have responsibilities in relation to CP and there are special arrangements in place for CPCET (see paragraph 38).

33 The Senate has been actively involved in developing the quality assurance framework for the oversight and management of CP through the Thematic Review of Collaborative Provision which it commissioned in 2005. It is also kept informed of key developments relating to partner institutions through the PVC(AA) who is a member of Senate and also the chair of UTLC and SCCP. The PVC(AA) has overall responsibility for quality and standards within the University including its CP.

34 UTLC plays a central role in the oversight of CP through the scrutiny of minutes from subcommittees and school level committees and validation and revalidation reports. It also receives summaries of all annual reviews and external examiners reports which allow it to monitor overall quality in CP. SCCP was established in April 2006 to succeed the previous Standing Panel on Collaborative Provision (SPCP) in order to strengthen the University's framework for managing CP. SCCP is responsible to UTLC for the development and formulation of the University's strategy for CP and for the validation, monitoring and quality assurance of all collaborative arrangements. SCCP has representation from all schools and key University services.

35 The CPSED noted that at school level the configuration of committees varies but normally involves a teaching committee and an accreditation and validation panel responsible to a school board. Schools play an important role in the proposal, validation, monitoring and day-to-day management of CP. However, schools typically have complex organisational and committee structures resulting in a broad interface between the home school and CP. One school has established a school collaborative provision committee which reports to the school board in order to oversee and coordinate the CP activity at school level.

36 There is limited cross-institutional membership of central institutional committees. No University committees have members drawn from partner institutions, and only a few partners have University representatives on their boards. At school level, partner institutions may

nominate a representative to the relevant University course committee and be represented at CABs held at the University. Some schools also have representation from partner institutions on teaching committees or other relevant groups.

37 Oversight of Foundation Degrees is through the Foundation Degree Committee established in 2005 as a subcommittee of UTLC to succeed the former Foundation Degrees Forum. The work of this subcommittee in relation to Foundation Degrees parallels the work of SCCP in relation to other CP. The audit team heard that the University plans to review the relationship between these two committees to ensure coordination, and the team would support this proposal.

38 The CPCET was established in 2001 as the successor to the Post Compulsory Education and Training Network which dates back to the mid 1960s. It oversees the provision of the University's qualifications in the field of education from foundation to postgraduate level in 29 colleges. It sits within the School of Education and Professional Development and its staff, a full-time Director and Deputy-Director, Network Manager (Quality Assurance) and support staff, are based there. The Consortium Board is the main decision-making body of the Consortium. It has representatives from all the partners who chair it in rotation, and meets annually. The Board delegates a number of matters to a steering committee of elected members that deals with such matters as student numbers, finance, Consortium membership, staff development, research projects and quality assurance. Operational management is overseen by a formal Network Tutors meeting comprising school and partner representatives.

39 The University has identified a number of key roles in relation to the management of quality and standards in CP. Link tutors called designated academic liaison officer (DALOs) are appointed for every course approved through a collaborative partner institution. The DALO is responsible for a wide range of management and quality assurance activities and acts as the

key contact point between the partner institution, its staff and students, and the school and University. DALOs have a formal role descriptor and are provided with briefing and training. There are plans in place to develop a handbook for DALOs and ILOs. Where the relationship between a partner and the University is complex and involves multiple schools and courses, an ILO is appointed who maintains contact with the senior staff in the partner and coordinates the work of the DALOs. The ILO is accountable to the PVC(AA) and reports to deans or heads of department. Schools may additionally appoint a contract manager to handle the financial aspects of arrangements with the partner. The audit team formed the view that the role of the DALO is central to supporting the management of standards and quality effectively and is a feature of good practice

40 A number of networks have been established to facilitate coordination amongst those involved in the management of CP, including meetings between DALOs and ILOs at school and also at University level; the regular CPCET Network Tutors meeting which includes all CPCET DALOs and the CP Network Conference (see paragraphs 22, 47, 110).

41 The CPSED stated that quality assurance is seen to be the 'full responsibility' of the University. Much of this responsibility is devolved to schools and aspects of quality control are further devolved to partner institutions. The University regulations and procedures for assuring quality and safeguarding academic standards in relation to CP are outlined in four key handbooks: Quality Assurance Procedures for Taught Courses; Regulations for Awards; Students' Handbook of Regulation; and a Handbook for Collaborative Provision. These handbooks are available in hard copy and online to everyone in the University and partner institutions.

42 The relationship between the University and its partners is enshrined in formal documents. The approval of a new partner involves signing a Memorandum of Understanding which confirms the purpose

and scope of collaboration. For each element of validated provision a standard Contract of Collaboration is signed that sets out in detail the responsibilities of the University and the partner organisation. This is supplemented by an annual financial schedule. Members of the CPCET sign two such documents, one with the Consortium as a whole, and one bilaterally with the University.

43 The University maintains oversight of student achievement in CP through the assessment process. CP is required to follow the same University regulations regarding assessment as on-campus provision. The DALO is responsible for ensuring that the regulations are adhered to including requirements for moderation and second-marking. For Franchised and ODUPLUS provision, moderation is undertaken by University staff. In Designed and Delivered provision the task is undertaken within the partner institutions. In the case of CPCET, special arrangements are in place to allow for moderation to take place across all partners. All assessment boards, whether held on or off-campus, are chaired by a member of University staff. Partner institutions are required to establish a course committee to manage the provision within the framework of delegation established in the Contract of Collaboration. These meet at least twice a year and include student representation (see paragraph 92). The DALO is a member and the minutes of such committees have been made available to the University through the Annual Evaluation process. This process is under review and in some schools minutes of course committees in CP now go directly to the School Course Committee or School Board.

44 In developing its quality assurance framework the University has made reference to the *Code of practice, Section 2*. In 2005 the University mapped its procedures against this revised section of the *Code* and identified areas for attention by SPCP. The institutional audit report (December 2004) concluded that the University had a 'broadly effective framework for managing the quality of its provision and the academic standards of its awards'. The report also made a number of recommendations



about assessment processes that apply to both campus-based and CP (see paragraph 19). Related issues were also identified in an internal review of Foundation Degree provision carried out around the same time. In response to these recommendations the University has made changes to the procedures of assessment boards and procedures for moderation.

45 The audit team was able to confirm the University has a framework in place for managing the quality of students' experience and academic standards in CP that is generally effective and robust. The framework has been recently reviewed and strengthened. The arrangements for the management of the CPCET are particularly strong and provide an example of good practice in the management of CP. However, while the centralisation of decision-making through SCCP and UTLC is appropriate given the growing complexity of CP, the University needs to assure itself that the processes for the management of its CP at the local level operate effectively and consistently in all cases. In this context the team recommend as advisable that the University review and develop further institutional oversight of standards and quality in CP.

### **The awarding institution's intentions for enhancing the management of its collaborative provision**

46 The CPSED indicated that the University is developing its strategy to consolidate its CP and, over the next five years, will focus on a smaller number of strategic links. This was confirmed to the audit team by senior staff and evidenced by the planned withdrawal from some CP. The intention is to select partners carefully to ensure that there is a shared commitment to vocationally relevant, high quality education and to reduce the number of single provision arrangements. Whilst the strategy is broadly in place, it is still being developed, due in part to the recent appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor. The team would encourage the University to ensure that the selection and approval of new partners meet the intentions of this strategy.

47 The University is beginning to place greater emphasis on quality enhancement in its relationship with its partner institutions. It is intended that there will be greater interaction between the University and its partners in respect of the delivery of courses and the curriculum. This will be facilitated by regular partner conferences at which presentations will reflect both the partners' and University's experiences (see paragraph 22). Staff with whom the audit team met stressed the mutual learning experience between the University and its collaborative partners. The planned open access Teaching and Learning Journal will also have a dedicated section for articles relating to CP. The team welcomed the intended direction for CP relationships and would encourage the University to see that such developments become fully embedded in its operational practices.

48 The University is intending to develop mechanisms to enable the views of students in partner institutions to be more effectively represented on University committees. At present the University Student Council provides a forum in which students can raise issues of concern but as yet no student representatives for partner organisations have attended such meetings. The University hopes to enhance student contribution through the development of a joint action plan with the Students' Union (SU).

49 The audit team concluded that the University had a clear understanding of the ongoing measures needed to enhance the management of its CP. The team also supported the intention for quality assurance of the University's CP to become more enhancement led and student focused.

### **The awarding institution's internal approval, monitoring and review arrangements for collaborative provision leading to its awards**

#### **Validation and approval of new provision**

50 Since 2006 the University has required separate processes of institutional and course validation. Although in practice these two processes have taken place sequentially at

the same event. The steps to be followed in gaining institutional approval are set out in the Handbook for Collaborative Provision. It notes that regardless of whether an idea for a new collaboration is developed centrally or locally, the agreement of both the relevant dean and the PVC(AA) are required before negotiations can begin.

51 In the case of a new partner, an enhanced business case, using a standard template with commentaries from key University central services, is presented to SCCP for provisional approval. Once this has been granted, an institutional visit is arranged which is normally conducted by a member of the senior management team, known as the rapporteur. The rapporteur prepares a report using a standard template which is sent to the relevant dean for consideration and, if appropriate, to the SCCP for permission to proceed to validation. Where the University has had no previous links with the proposed partner, institutional approval takes place which requires a visit to the institution undertaken by the PVC (AA) in conjunction with a senior member of the Registry. Where deemed necessary, a member of CLS may also visit. The process for articulation arrangements is slightly different as a visit only takes place where the proposed new partner is overseas. In these instances the team comprises a member of a school not involved in the proposed provision and an external subject specialist. Approval of a new partner is formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding.

52 Partner re-approval involves a visit by a similar team to that involved in initial approval. In preparation the partner produces a document using the standard template for initial approval. The visiting team meets with senior managers, teaching staff and students in the partner, and tours the facilities. Both approval and re-approval may be conditional and are intended to be developmental through the inclusion of recommendations for consideration.

53 The University has formal procedures for disengagement from a partner. The case for termination is considered by SCCP and requires the agreement of the PVC(AA). The partners and

students are informed formally in writing of the decision. Arrangements for supporting students on terminating courses have to be approved by SCCP. The audit team saw examples of the use of these procedures and confirmed that they were carried out in consultation with the partner and with due consideration for the students involved.

54 The CPSED described the process of course validation which is prescribed in the University's Regulations and Guidelines and applies to both on-campus and CP. All collaborative proposals must be accompanied by a business case. The proforma requires information about the partner institution, the proposed course and collaborative arrangements as well as budgetary details. A prospective DALO is identified at this stage who assists the partner throughout the validation process. Once the business case has been approved by SCCP a validation event is arranged by the relevant school in conjunction with the Registry. The event is normally held at the partner organisation. It is chaired by a member of UTLC and the panel includes subject specialists, a representative of CLS and an external member. Where the validation involves overseas provision the subject specialists may act on behalf of CLS using a specially prepared checklist. The CPSED stated that the event should focus on quality and standards, curriculum and student support.

55 The scope and documentation required for the validation event depends upon the type of provision proposed. In the case of Franchised provision the focus is on the institutional setting, the rationale and demand for the course and the resources available locally to manage and support the provision. In the case of Designed and Delivered provision the partner institute is required to present a programme and module specifications as well as supporting documentation including information about resources and course management and delivery. In the case of FDL provision additional checks on materials are required. Foundation Degrees are also scrutinised by the Foundation Degree Committee which facilitates a greater focus on employers.

56 During the course validation event the panel normally meets with senior staff of the partner institution, staff involved in teaching and delivery, support staff and students. The normal agenda for the visit is prescribed in the Handbook for Collaborative Provision.

57 The outcome of the validation event is frequently conditional. The reports seen by the audit team included some with numerous and significant conditions. Final approval of collaborative proposals is given by SCCP after checking that any conditions have been met. Approval must be given before a course commences and students are recruited to it. Validation is normally for three years and is formalised in a Contract of Collaboration (see paragraph 42). The CPSED stated that shorter periods of validation have been used for CP where the University had reservations about the ability of the partner to meet its requirements.

58 The process of course revalidation mirrors that of validation. However, documentation and subsequent discussions are also required regarding student achievement and the response to issues raised by staff, student and external examiners. In addition a critical review of the course's operation over the previous period is undertaken. Minor amendments to courses may be made at school level and are approved by the school's accreditation and validation panel or equivalent.

59 From reading of documentation and discussions with staff of the University and its partner organisations, the audit team was able to confirm that the University's procedures for the validation of its CP were operating as intended and were in alignment with the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*.

### **Annual monitoring and evaluation**

60 The annual monitoring of courses is central to the University's quality assurance and oversight of both on-campus provision and CP. The institutional audit (2004) commended the University on the 'robustness and apparent effectiveness' of the process of annual evaluation. For CP the Annual Evaluation Report (AER) is produced, using a standard template,

by the course leader in the partner institution. This report draws upon statistical data, student feedback, and external examiners' reports. The DALO is required to assist the partner in preparing the report. In ODUPPLUS arrangements, however, the DALO may produce the AER. AERs contain action plans to address issues that have been identified and the CPSED noted that these may be referred to the DALO/ILO or be discussed at Annual Executive Meetings (AEMs) (see paragraph 63).

61 After consideration by the appropriate course committee the AER is sent to the relevant school board within the University together with a record of DALO visits and issues discussed. All the reports for a particular school are considered by the school's annual evaluation subcommittee. An external member nominated by UTLC from another school sits on this subcommittee and produces a report covering the process of considering the AER, points of good practice and issues. The relevant dean also produces a report on the process and the AERs. Reports are further summarised by a UTLC member who writes an overview on all reports emanating from school annual evaluation subcommittees, and by deans who write overview reports of the CP AERs for the SCCP. At the end of the cycle UTLC receives summary reports from an annual evaluation working group and the SCCP on their respective AER work.

62 As reports move through the University's deliberative structures broad trends and issues emerge but there is also a loss of detail. For example, summary reports seen by the audit team were predominantly qualitative and contained little statistical data (see paragraph 106). Furthermore, in some instances, the team noted that issues arising at course level were not discussed explicitly in the AER and were not effectively addressed in action plans. The team was told that it is planned in future to require DALOs to write a commentary on AER reports in order to assure the University that all pertinent issues have been covered.

63 Following the thematic review of CP (2005) the University introduced the concept of AEMs with partners. The AEM, which is chaired by a member of University staff, is normally held at partner institutions between key staff such as the DALOs, ILO and contract manager, and their opposite numbers in the partner. The meeting is intended to cover practical and strategic matters including follow up from reviews carried out during the year and the financial schedule for the forthcoming year. The minutes of AEMs are received by SCCP. The audit team saw minutes from a sample of recent AEMs and confirmed that they were an innovative and effective mechanism for fostering communication and reviewing and developing partnerships. The team considers them to be a feature of good practice. The University confirmed that there are also plans to develop a schedule of meetings between the Vice-Chancellor and the heads of partner institutions in the context of future CP network meetings.

#### **Periodic review**

64 In addition to the periodic review of courses through revalidation, the University's periodic review process considers academic provision, central services and specific themes. The latter two of which were commended as features of good practice in the institutional audit report (2004). The University's handbook on Quality Assurance Procedures for Taught Courses noted that academic provision is considered through the subject reviews. These include an evaluation of the strategic direction and performance of the subject within the University. This is done through a series of mechanisms including reviews by other external bodies and the Annual Planning Round. The audit team saw evidence of the use of periodic reviews to enhance CP, for example through the extension of new software to franchised courses.

65 Where the University identifies a cause for concern about an area of provision, either on-campus or in a partner, an Internal Quality Audit (IQA) may be instituted. The audit team noted an example of the use of this procedure

in relation to CP following the expression of concerns in a recent QAA subject review. The IQA may also be used to scrutinise in-depth areas of rapid change and development.

66 The audit team came to the view that the University has developed an effective system for partner and course validation and revalidation. The annual monitoring system generally allows the University to assure itself of the standards and quality of its CP. However, the team observed instances where annual monitoring did not pick up issues of course quality or compliance with University regulations. The University is advised therefore to review and further develop its processes for oversight of CP to ensure that they operate effectively in all instances.

#### **External participation in internal review processes for collaborative provision**

67 The CPSED noted that the requirements for external participation in validation and approval events for CP are similar to those for on-campus provision. The University's Regulations for Awards state that validation should involve peer review through the inclusion of members of the panel drawn from both inside and outside the field of study, the institution and HE. The detailed requirements for external involvement in panels are set out in the Quality Assurance Procedures for Taught Courses. These requirements were amended in the light of changes introduced following the 2005 thematic review of CP and in response to a desirable recommendation in the 2004 institutional audit report concerning a lack of clarity in the regulations regarding external involvement. As a result, the regulations and guidelines now state clearly that external participation is required for all collaborative validations and revalidations. Prior to April 2006 external involvement was not required for validation processes relating to Franchised and ODUPLUS courses. The audit team saw evidence of external participation having taken place in validations after this date.

68 External advisers are not involved in the process of partner institutional approval except in the case of the development of an articulation agreement with a new overseas partner with no current collaborative links with the University. An external subject specialist may be appointed to accompany a member of staff nominated as a rapporteur to report on a number of areas including the institutional setting, resources, the Academic Infrastructure and arrangements for quality assurance.

69 The University's regulations and procedures set out the processes and criteria for the appointment of external panel members. Validation panels must have a minimum of one member drawn from industry, commerce, public service or the professions. In relation to CP this person is defined as an external subject specialist. Independence is fostered by requiring that such panel members should not have had close involvement with the relevant school in the last five years. External examiners and members of previous validation or review panels are excluded. Schools propose external panel members to the Assistant Registrar (Quality) in consultation with the panel chair. Panel members are formally approved by the PVC(AA) on behalf of UTLC.

70 The CPSED stated that for overseas validations and revalidation the University looks for externals with relevant country experience. Experience of CP is not an explicit requirement although the audit team was able to confirm that both experience and relevance of subject expertise were considered when nominations were made for panel membership. The CPSED also stated that externals involved in the validation of flexible and distance learning must have experience of such provision. The team noted that this had not yet been enshrined in the University's Regulations.

71 School teaching committees, and accreditation and validation panels have delegated powers to approve amendments to courses within certain credit limits (see paragraph 58). This process does not require external involvement. Where appropriate, representatives of professional, statutory and

regulatory bodies (PSRBs) are invited to join validation panels and the audit team saw an example of successful joint validation of CP by the University and a professional body.

72 The University makes use of external inputs in the broader review process which extends to CP. For example, the thematic review of CP conducted in 2005 involved two external members. External subject specialists are involved in periodic subject and service reviews (see paragraph 67) and curriculum planning teams may draw upon a variety of external experts. Special arrangements are in place for CPCET involving tri-annual reviews with external participation. The audit team saw a number of examples of external involvement in reviews of various types.

73 The audit team came to the view that the University was making regular and effective use of external expertise in its processes of course validation and review, and in wider subject and thematic review.

### **External examiners and their reports in collaborative provision**

74 The University, in its CPSED, explained that 'the institutional regulations for external examining are the reference point for all external examining and apply equally to University-based and CP' and that 'all external examiners are approved by UTLC and appointed by the University'. While the audit team formed the view that the CPSED was accurate in both respects, it found that in one case a partner institution claimed that it, rather than the University, had appointed the external examiner. Responsibility for ensuring that partners comply with the University's regulations in respect of external examining lies with the DALO.

75 The University has set criteria for the appointment of external examiners. The audit team regarded these as appropriate and saw evidence that all examiners had been appointed with the relevant expertise. The team learnt that for Franchise and ODUPLUS activity the same external examiner takes

responsibility for the provision at both the University and the partner institution.

76 The CPSED stated that 'external examiners are present at CABs at which awards are made to CP students'. CABs are normally held at the University but may, if necessary, be held at the partner institutions. Where this occurs a member of the University chairs the meeting. The reports of external examiners are responded to within one month of receipt by the course leader at the University who issues an interim action plan on which the external examiner can comment. The interim action plan includes items of good practice identified by the external examiner and the means for their dissemination within the University. The interim action plan is signed off by the external examiner. This action plan and the external examiner's report are considered at the next course committee meeting. At that meeting a final report, consisting of the external examiner's report and a final action plan is produced. This is then approved by the external examiner within six months of receipt of their initial report at the University. The final report then forms part of the AER. The audit team saw many examples of the application of this system, including where action points had been pursued, and considered this action planning process a feature of good practice that enables a swift and effective response by the University to the reports of the external examiners.

77 In its CPSED the University explained that the reports of external examiners are received by the Registry, from where they are reported to the Quality Standards Panel and sent to school and partner staff. The audit team also learnt that external examiner reports are sent to partner institutions for comment prior to the production of the interim action plan, although discussions with staff of some partners revealed no knowledge of this and a general lack of understanding of the processes involved in external examining.

78 The CPSED stated that from 2006 deans of school were required to make specific reference to CP in their overviews of external

examiners' reports, which are considered by the SCCP as part of a summary of annual evaluation. The audit team considered that this mechanism for giving institutional oversight of the perceptions of external examiners in CP was timely and had the potential to realise its intentions.

79 The CPSED states that from '2005-06 external examiners have been specifically required to comment on CP in their reports when they are reporting on a course which is delivered both on- and off-campus'. While the audit team regarded the intention as laudable, it noted that only one question in the report related directly to CP and was answered by the ticking of a box. Although the team noted a few instances where external examiners had made separate comments in respect of CP, in many instances this was not the case. Consequently the team was concerned that issues specific to CP may fail to be raised, especially where the majority of the provision is based on-campus. The team concluded that it would be desirable for the University to revise the reporting form for external examiners to allow the comments relating to individual partner institutions to be identified, and in doing so realise fully the University's intentions for the reporting of external examiners in CP.

### **The use made of external reference points in collaborative provision**

80 In its CPSED the University stated that it 'uses the QAA *Code of Practice*, the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and subject benchmark statements, and PSRB requirements as its Academic Infrastructure' and that 'every award bearing programme required to prepare a programme specification'. During the audit the audit team noted numerous references to the Academic Infrastructure embedded within the University's procedures for the management of its awards.

81 In meetings with staff in the course of the audit, the audit team found variability in awareness of the *Code of practice*, the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements. While some

staff were patently aware of the *Code* as a context for their work, others were unclear about the significance of the *Code* for their activities

82 The audit team concluded that in the context of its CP the University was using the individual elements of the Academic Infrastructure appropriately in its work to manage the quality of its CP and maintain the academic standards of its awards. However, the team also concluded that the University might want to communicate its intentions with respect to the Academic Infrastructure more effectively, so that a shared understanding is achieved by the staff of both the University and its partner institutions.

### **Review and accreditation by external agencies of programmes leading to the awarding institution's awards offered through collaborative provision**

83 Between 2001 and 2005 the University, in collaboration with its partners, participated in two subject reviews, two Foundation Degree reviews, an overseas audit, and a review of healthcare programmes; all were conducted by QAA. In each case the outcomes were positive, noting areas of innovative or good practice. Review and audit teams concluded that the relationship with partner institutions was working effectively for the benefit of students and that the quality assurance processes and procedures were embedded in the school systems within the University. There were no obvious trends in these reports and broad areas attracting positive comments included the quality of learning resources available to students and the well-designed curricula.

84 As an example of how the University responds to the reports of external agencies, the audit team was provided with evidence of how recommendations regarding action planning following a Foundation Degree review were addressed. The material provided demonstrated that the University had responded appropriately and that a number of changes had been made.

85 The audit team learnt that only a small proportion of collaborative courses is accredited by PSRBs, and agreed with the University when it stated in its CPSED that 'all professional body reports involving CP have been favourable'. Accreditation events are often run in parallel with University validations and revalidations, where one or more representatives from the relevant PSRB are members of the University panel. In these cases the University report may be the only report produced and is considered by the University as part of its normal validation and revalidation processes. Where a separate accreditation report is produced, the relevant University subject area provides a written response, including how the subject area is addressing any issues identified. Summaries of PSRB reports and resultant actions are incorporated into AERs.

86 Where there is a formal requirement for a response to reports by external agencies then this is prepared at school or service level, as appropriate, with the intention of being signed off by the UTLC prior to leaving the institution. However, one formal response was not approved by UTLC. In its CPSED, the University explained that it maintains oversight of all external agency activity through the production by the PVC(AA) of an annual report on the 'key outcomes of external evaluation and review'. The audit team were informed that consideration of the report was delayed in 2006-07.

87 The audit team formed the view that the University's procedures for capturing and evaluating the outcomes of reviews of its CP by external agencies were sound and that it interacts appropriately with partner institutions. However, the team concluded that the University should ensure that UTLC are briefed fully on the responses to external reviews so that it maintains full institutional oversight of standards and quality in CP.

### **Student representation in collaborative provision**

88 The University has threshold expectations for the student representation system in its partner institutions. These are set out in the

Handbook for Collaborative Provision and operational arrangements are codified in the annex to the Contract of Collaboration. Accordingly, partner institutions are required to have student panels or equivalent arrangements in place as a means of ensuring both student representation and gathering feedback from students in the partner institutions.

89 DALOs are expected to confirm that student panels are in operation and are encouraged to attend meetings whenever possible. The audit team saw evidence that this is the case. There are no requirements for the minimum frequency of meetings, most take place twice a year. Minutes are made available to the course committee in the partner institution, of which the DALO is a member. In some partners minutes are also circulated to all students, in others student representatives are expected to report back to the student body on the discussions. The team saw evidence that course committees regularly receive student panel minutes but found that the quality of the discussion in them was variable. However, the team noted that actions were normally taken forward by DALO and/or the course leader.

90 The University requires that the continued adequacy of student representation arrangements in partner institutions is verified at revalidation, primarily through meetings with students. However, from the revalidation reports the audit team looked at in relation to ODUPPLUS provision it was unable to confirm if such verification took place. In one instance, there was no meeting with students at all. The University subsequently informed the team that previously ODUPPLUS revalidations did not have to follow these requirements but that this had now been rectified and ODUPPLUS was now in line with the other types of CP.

91 Overall, the audit team concluded that student panels are working well. Students who met the team confirmed that their views were listened to and there was evidence of responsiveness by partner institutions to issues raised. However, the team saw some evidence that student meetings did not always take place; that issues raised by students were not always reported on fully; and met with students

who were not aware of the student representation system.

92 The CPSED stated that students are represented on partner course committees but noted that representation on these committees is not as strong as it should be. The audit team would concur with this view and encourages the University to continue to support the SU in its efforts to address this. Minutes of course committees in the partner institutions are made available to the University Course Committee where there is a parent course at the University, otherwise they are normally considered by school boards.

93 At institutional level, with the exception of CPCET students, CP students are represented on University committees, such as Senate or UTLC by the SU Executive at the University. Recently, a Student Council has been established that discusses student issues with senior managers in the University, including issues of collaborative students. CP students are not directly represented and the University is exploring ways in which the views of these students can be more effectively gathered and represented at University committees more effectively.

94 There is no explicit requirement for partner institutions to provide training for student representatives and the audit team found that practice in the collaborative partners was variable. DALOs are expected to ensure that student representatives are briefed about their roles and responsibilities. Although the University's SU provides training for student representatives this does not include CP representatives. Training materials, however, are on the SU website and therefore accessible to student representatives in partner institutions.

95 The audit team formed the view that the University is committed to student representation in its quality management of CP and has sound and effective procedures for this. The system of student representation at partner institutions serves its purpose of identifying and reporting students' views in an appropriate manner. Both partner organisations and the University have responded to concerns raised by CP students. The University has recognised the



challenges of representation at University level and is taking steps to enhance this. Overall, the team concluded that students can make a positive contribution to quality management.

## **Feedback from students, graduates and employers**

### **Feedback from students**

96 CP students have the opportunity to provide feedback through a variety of mechanisms such as student panels (see paragraph 89), course questionnaires and directly to teaching staff. Course questionnaires are analysed either by the partner institution or by the University and form part of the AER. The AER also includes a summary of issues raised by students during the year but the quality of reporting is variable. The CPSED stated that the University, in light of its decision to move away from module questionnaires, was still working towards capturing feedback at module level. In practice the audit team found that many partner institutions already use module questionnaires. Where variations occur and no survey is undertaken, verbal feedback is sought from students and summarised in the AER. Other forms of gathering feedback such as focus groups are also used occasionally. Students who met the team confirmed that feedback arrangements were satisfactory. The team also saw evidence of partners and the University responding appropriately to student concerns.

97 Institutional approval and course validation considers the appropriateness of student feedback mechanisms, and revalidation panels are expected to meet with students to obtain their views on the ways in which feedback is sought and the degree to which their views are heard. While the audit team found evidence that feedback arrangements are discussed during institutional approval, the revalidation events do not appear to consider consistently the suitability of student feedback arrangements.

98 The CPSED noted that in addition to the formal feedback mechanisms there are a number of less formal feedback channels such as personal tutors or meetings with the

DALO/ILO. The audit team heard that the DALO plays a key role in relaying student feedback to the University although issues are usually followed up by the DALO as soon as they arise. DALOs prepare visit reports after each formal visit to the partner which are sent to SCCP. The team concluded that DALOs were a key conduit for CP students and the University and exemplified why the role can be considered to be a feature of good practice in supporting the management of standards and the quality in CP.

99 In the view of the audit team the University has sound procedures for the collection and use of student feedback in CP. Through DALOs and annual evaluation it is making efforts to ensure that student feedback is obtained and used consistently and effectively for the management and enhancement of the quality of its CP. The system appears to be less strong for FDL provision (see paragraph 117).

### **Feedback from graduates and employers**

100 The University does not require partner institutions to collect feedback from graduates and employers. Due to the nature of their provision, some partners gather employer feedback as part of course development, for example, in Foundation Degrees, or in relation to placement provision.

101 With regard to feedback from graduates the University has only recently begun to collect feedback from graduates on a more systematic basis through its alumni association. In some cases informal feedback from graduates is sought when University staff attend partner graduation ceremonies. The audit team would encourage the University to consider how to extend and formalise the collection of further feedback from employers and graduates regarding CP.

## **Student admission, progression, completion and assessment information for collaborative provision**

102 The University's admission policy specifies the minimum entry requirements for all

students including those on courses delivered through collaborative arrangements. CP students are registered as students of the University and therefore their admissions, assessment, achievement and completion data is logged on the University's record system ASIS. Currently, most partner institutions do not have direct access to the system, however, the University intends to grant read-only access to more partners and is considering ways of allowing nominated trained staff in the partner institutions to enrol students via the internet. CPCET has access to the University's ASIS records system.

103 The CPSED stated that the University monitors the relationship between entry levels and student achievement, which enables it to benchmark progression and retention rates of CP students. Such monitoring occurs as part of annual course evaluation through the application of a 'value added' system that compares a student's entry qualification with the final award. The system is not always suitable for overseas institutions and therefore is not used by all partners. Where it is used it has provided useful management information.

104 AERs are the main vehicles for the consideration of student achievement, progression and retention data and award profiles. As most partners do not have access to the ASIS system, the DALO is expected to provide the required data set to the partner institution. If partners use their own data this has to be reconciled with the information held on ASIS. AERs also consider application, enrolment, employment and destination statistics. Data for the former is usually provided from the University although application data may be held by partners alone. Employment and destination statistics may come from the University's Careers Office; however, courses, including those delivered through partner arrangements, are encouraged to have their own tracking system in place. From the AERs available to the audit team, it was clear that many partners provide meaningful evaluation of student data. Others were less detailed and tended to include little analysis or explanation.

The team also saw evidence that matters arising from the data had been addressed and that feedback from the University on the AER could include specific reference to student data.

105 Commentaries on admission, progression, achievement and employment statistics are also required at course revalidation. The audit team found explicit consideration of these matters at the revalidation events to be variable.

106 The audit team learnt currently that there is no specific system in place for the consideration of CP data on admission, progression and completion at the University level, other than through the annual evaluation process. The University may therefore be missing an opportunity to have central oversight of its CP and identify trends across the spectrum of its CP. Although the team was informed that SCCP will consider retention and progression data from October 2007, it considered it desirable for the University to strengthen further its oversight and analysis of statistical information.

### **Assurance of the quality of teaching staff in collaborative provision; appointment, appraisal, support and development**

107 Staffing is a key element in the validation process for both new partner institutions and CP. The University checks the staffing resource base and educational ethos of a partner to ascertain their suitability to deliver courses leading to its awards. Initially this is done at the validation event by a scrutiny of staff curricula vitae. Responsibility for the notification of subsequent changes of staffing lies with the partner institution, and is monitored through the dialogue with the DALO who forwards details of new staff to the appropriate school board for approval. The role descriptors for DALOs do not specifically refer to their role in monitoring staffing changes in partner institutions but the audit team found instances of where the process had occurred. On one occasion the team found that partner institutions had engaged staff to teach without approval being given by the University.

108 While staff in partner institutions are approved to deliver courses of the University they remain subject to the local arrangements for managing staff. Teaching staff employed by partners are normally involved in an appraisal system which can include feedback on their teaching activities through peer observation and student evaluation, although this has not been universally enacted. The University recognises that for cultural and other reasons peer observation of teaching should be implemented across the partner institutions with a degree of flexibility. In this way the University seeks to maintain a balance between recognising the autonomy of the partner to run its own employee systems with the need to safeguard the standards and quality of delivery by partner staff.

109 The University recognises the role that staff development can play in supporting its partner institutions. An important way in which this is provided is by the DALOs who, when visiting partners, routinely offer support to their staff. The importance of this role is recognised by the University in that a series of briefing and development sessions have been held for DALOs and a DALO/ILO forum has been initiated to disseminate good practice and support staff in these roles. Staff from partner institutions are also invited into the University to attend staff development events. The audit team found evidence of extensive staff development work undertaken by DALOs but it was not universal across all partners. Similarly, attendance by collaborative partner staff at University staff development events is more practicable for staff working in close proximity to the University.

110 To further cement staff development activities between the University and partner institutions, a Collaborative Partner Network Conference was held in November 2006, and an international conference for overseas partners is being planned for 2007 (see paragraph 22). The audit team considered that the strong supportive relationship provided by the majority of DALOs to partner institutions was an example of good practice.

111 Staff development activities are more firmly established within the CPCET. This long-standing relationship between the University and its network of partners in post-compulsory education and training has enabled the Consortium to regularly run a series of staff development activities including an annual teaching and learning conference. CPCET supports such activities through an annual budget overseen by the CPCET Steering Committee which includes current sponsorship of 30 members within the Consortium for higher degrees.

112 Overall, the audit team concluded that effective measures existed to review the proficiency of staff involved in collaborative partnerships. The team acknowledged the vigour and scope of CPCET's support for staff development and found it to be a feature of good practice. It would encourage the University to draw on the structured approach CPCET has taken to staff development to further enhance the student learning experience.

### **Assurance of the quality of distributed and distance methods delivered through an arrangement with a partner**

113 In its CPSED the University explained that for the validation of FDL courses, the external member of the University panel 'must also have experience of this type of delivery'. However, the audit team noted that this is not a requirement of the University's formal procedures (see paragraph 70). Although the University made no other comment in its CPSED on the quality assurance of courses involving distributed or distance delivery, the team learned that a small proportion of the University's CP courses involves some element of distance learning, usually paper-based, delivered to more than 1500 students, the majority of whom are part-time. The University, in its CPSED, defined the FDL mode of CP as where 'part or whole of a course is delivered off campus through distance learning or other distributed methods' (see paragraph 28). Some

distance-learning provision is delivered in conjunction with a partner institution in a Designed and Delivered mode. However, an appendix to the Handbook for Collaborative Provision lists models for CP, one of which is 'Flexible and Distance Learning where whole or part of course is available on the web'. In this context the team found the University's classification of CP somewhat confusing and the University may wish to review this classification, in part to ensure that the intended checks for distance learning as described in its handbook, Quality Assurance Procedures for Taught Courses, are applied consistently.

114 The University's handbook Quality Assurance Procedures for Taught Courses outlines the procedures for the validation of distance-learning proposals. A number of additional checks are applied in relation to the distance-learning materials themselves, access to learning resources and the arrangements for gathering feedback from students. The audit team formed the view that these additional checks were appropriate.

115 The 2004 institutional audit report indicated that it would be desirable for the University to '...build on the observations it offered in its self-evaluation document and develop its quality assurance arrangements for e-learning'. In response the University reported that it had 'established an E-Learning Strategy Group, Chaired by the PVC(AA)', to guide the further development of e-learning across the institution. At the time of the CP audit the University reported that the E-Learning Strategy Group had engaged in an information gathering exercise for the purpose of informing the development of a new strategy; that the Group will use these data to develop a framework for e-learning which will guide the development of a full strategy; and presented to the audit team a number of intentions. The team encourages the University to complete the development of the strategy in a timely manner in the context of the desirable recommendation to give a stronger central direction to the University's emerging teaching and learning and e-learning strategies in relation to CP.

116 Feedback from students studying courses with a significant distributed and distance component is achieved in a number of ways: module and course questionnaires; informally; and via student panels or equivalent. The reports of student panels feed into both course committees and AER (see paragraph 89). While the existence of student panels was acknowledged in the minutes or reports of these structures, the audit team considered that the opportunity to discuss recurring issues raised by students had been missed. For example, in one partner students from a number of panels were consistently concerned about the accuracy of, and number of typographical errors in, distance-learning materials, but these concerns were not considered further.

117 Overall, the audit team was satisfied that the University exercises appropriate oversight in managing partnerships involving distributed and distance learning and applies the same procedures and processes as apply to the University's other CP. The team considered that there is scope for improvement in the way feedback from students on FDL courses is dealt with systematically, thus contributing to the team's advisable recommendation that the University reviews and develops further its oversight of standards and quality across its CP.

### **Learning support resources for students in collaborative provision**

118 The CPSED stated that the University regards learning support as essential for all its students including those on CP. Although the University provides a variety of services that is accessible by all students, partner institutions are expected to be the main provider of learning support.

119 All CP students have access, directly or indirectly, to the University's library including electronic information resources. Information about student's eligibility is transferred from the ASIS system to the library system and automatic access is created. The University does not systematically check, however, if students can indeed access this resource. The range of

services offered by the University to CP students varies according to the type of provision. For example, borrowing rights are only available to students on UK franchised courses. Similarly, access to the University's electronic information resources is available to Franchise and ODUPLUS students and to some students on designed and delivered courses. Access for overseas CP students to electronic resources may be restricted due to copyright issues. CLS staff and student IT help-desks provide email and telephone support to partner staff and students. Subject librarians and Client Consultancy, a resource within CLS, provide support on information sources and IT queries. Partner library staff have access to training provided by the University and the audit team learnt that CPCET college librarians have a yearly training day.

120 The CPSED stated that computing facilities are provided by the collaborative partner but CP students have University email accounts and, where appropriate, access to teaching infrastructures such as the VLE. The University expressed the view that the VLE, where available, is generally working well and where internet connections are unstable, learning materials are loaded onto CDs. The CPSED also noted that there are plans to extend VLE access to all CP students. The audit team formed the view that the VLE is currently largely used as a repository for information, although the team heard that some staff were piloting its use in a more interactive way. The University confirmed the team's observation that such activities should feed into the University's e-learning strategy in a coherent way.

121 The Contract of Collaboration includes an outline of the learning resources to be supplied by the University and in what format, and the access rights of students to the University's online resources. The Student Handbook of Regulations, which all CP students receive, outlines the regulations governing the use of the University's computing facilities and library including access and membership.

122 Student handbooks usually provide information about local resources and some

also include information on University learning resources. However, in discussions with students the audit team learnt that not all students were aware of their access rights to University learning support resources. The team also learnt that CP students are made aware of their access rights to University resources by teaching staff; however, it is left to the judgement of these staff as to which resources are most appropriate, and thus students may not always be informed about University resources. The University has recognised that CP students are not always fully aware of its Computing and Library Services (CLS) and has recently created library handbooks for UK and overseas students which are also available online. These handbooks provide an overview of the services available to CP students and how to access them. The audit team found the information booklets for partners useful and believes that they might improve information for students but would encourage the University to evaluate the effectiveness of these in due course.

123 The appropriateness of partner learning resources is initially confirmed at institutional approval and validation, and then reconfirmed at revalidations. The audit team was able to confirm this at the partner visits. Computing and library staff are either present at these events or a member of the (re)validation panel carries out an assessment of learning resources after being briefed and debriefed by CLS staff. The team also learnt that any inadequacy in resources identified at validation would have to be rectified prior to the start of the course. To make scrutiny of overseas partner resources more cost-effective the University is moving towards checks covering institutions in the same region at one event. To assist staff in assessing the adequacy of partner learning resources, the University has recently developed a comprehensive checklist, 'Standards for library and computing provision in institutions delivering University of Huddersfield Courses' which is used as a basis to assess the quality of computing and library provision. The team considered that the introduction of this Standards document has strengthened the

system of checking the appropriateness of learning resources.

124 Continued appropriateness of learning resources is also monitored through annual evaluation (see paragraph 60). The AER template requires a comment on resources. In addition, ongoing monitoring of learning resources also occurs through DALOs, and ILOs where they exist, who are tasked with ensuring that the quality of the learning environment is adequate and report their findings to the contract manager or dean. The audit team saw evidence that this was being carried out systematically and issues identified were being followed up. The document 'Standards for Library and Computing Provision in Institutions Delivering University of Huddersfield Courses' states that the University also requires that a member of the library or learning resource centre is a member of the student panel to ensure direct feedback on learning resources to the University. From the evidence seen and heard by the audit team this does not appear to happen in practice outside of the CPCET. The team learnt that the University has only recently begun to monitor the use of its learning support resources by CP students. Inevitably, the use of facilities by students varies depending on the distance from the University, with CPCET students using the facilities on a regular basis.

125 Overall, the audit team formed the view that there were appropriate mechanisms in place to ensure that learning resources in partner institutions are appropriate prior to the start of courses. However, in one instance this did not seem to be the case. Students in partner institutions are generally satisfied with the learning resources available to them locally and with the access to electronic learning resources, where they exist. However, not all CP students whom the team met were aware that they could use the University library. The team therefore considered it desirable that the University takes steps to ensure that all students have appropriate learning resources available to them through the partner institutions, and ensure that all students are made aware of their entitlements

to the learning resources provided by the University, and how these can be accessed.

### **Academic guidance and personal support for students in collaborative provision**

126 Collaborative partners are responsible for the provision of student induction, academic guidance and personal support. The University approves and monitors the arrangements in place. It also provides access for CP students to its University student support systems. The majority of the students with whom the audit team met were not clear about their entitlements to these services. However, those that had accessed them spoke highly of the support they received.

127 The nature of academic support provided by the University varies depending on the type of CP arrangement. Students on Franchised or Designed and Delivered courses are supported directly by partner staff; ODUPLUS students are supported by University staff and also have some local support. The key academic adviser is the personal tutor. The University expects all partners to operate a personal tutor system or equivalent which is approved initially at validation, monitored by the DALO and periodically re-approved. The same applies to skills support arrangements. The team heard from the students met that they were satisfied with the academic guidance received.

128 Partner institutions are also responsible for ensuring appropriate pastoral support and career guidance for students. The University assures itself of the appropriateness of these at validation and revalidation and monitors them via the annual course evaluation process. In meetings with the audit team students stated that were satisfied with the pastoral support arrangements available to them locally.

129 Partners are expected to have processes in place for appeals and complaints which are compliant with University regulations. Responsibilities and modus operandi for each partnership regarding complaints and pastoral support are outlined in the Contract of

Collaboration. Collaborative partners deal with complaints and appeals in the first instance. If the matter cannot be resolved CP students have the right to appeal to the University. The University's complaints procedures are outlined in the Students' Handbook of Regulations which is given to all CP students.

130 The CPSED noted that the University was taking a more comprehensive approach to identifying student support needs through the Student Support Strategy. The audit team learnt that as a result of this a Guide to Student Services for staff in collaborative partners has been developed. The guide provides information on services and facilities that are available at the University as well as recommendations to partners on standards of service and types of support that should be available to students locally. The team considered this to be a useful development. The team looked at a range of student handbooks from partner institutions and considered that the information provided to students about support arrangements was variable.

131 Access for CP students to University support services is normally through the collaborative partner, however, CP students may access University services directly. Those students that had were very satisfied with the support they received. Students were also satisfied with the academic and pastoral support arrangements available to them locally.

132 Overall, the audit team formed the view that the University's CP students receive appropriate academic support and personal guidance, both of which are appropriately approved and monitored. The University has strengthened its information for staff but there was less knowledge of University services available among CP students. Therefore, the team considers it desirable for the University to ensure that all CP students are informed about their entitlements to the academic and personal support services provided by the University and how to access them.

### **Section 3: The collaborative provision audit investigations: published information**

133 The main sources of information for students regarding the University's CP are provided in the publicity materials aimed at prospective students, the course and module handbooks made available to students once they have begun their courses and the Student's Handbook of Regulations. The latter is provided to students on CD-ROM, and increasingly students access required information via the VLE.

134 The original text for publicity materials, including the prospectus published by the University, normally originates from course teams and schools with editorial control resting with the University's External Relations Group. Partner institutions also produce their own publicity material and handbooks for students. Among the information contained in student handbooks are the regulations pertaining to the course and University including the procedures for academic appeals and misconduct. At validation events a copy of the prospectus and course leaflets are to be available if required. All such materials must acknowledge that the award is that of the University, although the audit team found that this was not specified on every occasion.

135 The University process for monitoring information produced by its collaborative partners places a major responsibility on DALOs. The University requires any publicity or marketing material using the University name or logo to be approved by the specified DALO. Information provided to students is checked on an annual basis by the DALO. This responsibility of the DALO is clearly laid out in the role descriptor provided in the Handbook for Collaborative Provision. The University supports the DALOs in this role by providing briefing and development sessions. DALOs met by the audit team indicated they were aware of their responsibilities in respect of published materials used by collaborative partners. From meetings with DALOs and with staff from partner institutions, the team was assured that the

University was monitoring the information provided by its partners effectively. However, the team found a few occasions where inaccurate information was contained in the partner institution prospectus, and partner staff were not always fully aware of the process to be followed in this respect. On the few occasions where the University has found that publicity produced by the partner institution misrepresents its position, urgent action has been taken. One example has been the issuing of a legal 'cease and desist' letter when an institution with no formal association with the University claimed to be offering awards of the University. The team was able to see such a letter and the University was able to confirm that its issue was effective in ending the practice.

136 Students met by the audit team spoke highly of the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the information provided to them. They were fully aware of the status of the University as the awarding institution and saw this as an advantage of their course. They indicated the usefulness of information relating to assessment regulations provided in course handbooks. The students confirmed that they had been provided with the University Handbook of Regulations and knew where to seek out information on matters such as plagiarism, complaints and appeals.

137 The University takes responsibility for the printing of both certificates and transcripts. These are printed directly from the student's records system and posted to student home addresses. In some instances where ceremonies are held overseas the DALO/ILO will attend taking the certificates and transcripts for presentation at the ceremonies. Information regarding the location of study is included on the transcript only.

138 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University generally had sound procedures for ensuring the accuracy and reliability of published material on its CP, but could strengthen the arrangements for seeing these were implemented on all occasions and across all partners. The team found that in the case of

one partner institution it had issued its own award certificate incorporating the name of the University. The University was aware of this occurrence which, although not in accordance with its own procedures, was allowed as an exceptional case. Due to the potential for misrepresentation arising from the granting of such exceptions, and other examples of inaccuracies in published material seen during the audit, including progression to courses at the University and the recognition of credit, the team considered that it was advisable that the University adheres to its own procedures for publicity materials produced by its collaborative partners, and in the issuing of certificates and transcripts.

139 The audit team learnt that the University had uploaded all required documentation in respect of Teaching Quality Information (TQI) prior to the suspension of the website at the end of December 2006. The University was cognisant with current developments and plans for the future disclosure of information. The team concluded that the University satisfied TQI arrangements in place at the time of the audit and that it was taking appropriate steps to ensure accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that it published about the quality of courses offered through CP that lead to its awards and the academic standards of these awards.



# Findings

## Findings

140 A collaborative provision (CP) audit of the University of Huddersfield (the University) was undertaken by a team of auditors from QAA during the week 26 to 30 March 2007. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the courses offered by the University through collaborative arrangements with partner organisations, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged from the audit, and by making recommendations to the University for improving on current practice.

141 The University was founded in 1992 although it has existed for the last 160 years in various forms such the Mechanics Institution, the College of Technology and Huddersfield Polytechnic. Its mission, which extends to CP, is to 'enable students to achieve their utmost by raising their aspirations and providing an excellent student experience in a high quality learning environment'. The University describes itself as a teaching-led institution and a major provider of sandwich education. It is committed to providing opportunities for under represented groups and those with non-standard entry qualifications.

### **The effectiveness of the implementation of the awarding institution's approach to managing its collaborative provision**

142 The University uses the structures, processes and regulations developed to manage the quality and standards of its on-campus provision as the core of its management of its CP. However, in recognition of the different character of CP and the greater risks attached to it, this framework has been augmented by the addition of designated roles, committees and process adaptations. The aim of the framework is to ensure compliance, equivalence of learning experiences, and

bridging and narrowing of gaps between the University and its partners. Four key handbooks underpin the framework: Quality Assurance Procedures for Taught Courses; Regulations for Awards; Students' Handbook of Regulations; and a Handbook for Collaborative Provision.

143 The overall system for managing CP was reviewed in 2005 as the University was concerned that it was no longer fully fit for purpose. The review endorsed the underlying approach but resulted in the strengthening of the system, particularly at the central level, in the light of the growing scale and complexity of the University's CP. Many aspects of the framework for managing CP that the audit team saw were therefore relatively new and some were still in the process of implementation and embedding.

144 The current system appeared broadly to be robust and effective but its effectiveness varies across different types of provision. Nearly half of the students in CP are on courses managed by the Consortium for Post-Compulsory Education and Training (CPCET) which is a long established structure, linked with the University's School of Education and Professional Development, and manages provision in 29 colleges. The University is an active part of the Consortium. The audit team noted that the detailed operational management of this provision and the effective oversight provided by the School and CPCET Board provide an example of good practice within the overall framework. The team also noted the effective contribution made to the management of quality and standards by features of the CP framework designed to augment the University's framework for managing on-campus provision. In particular it commended the role of the designated academic liaison officer (DALOs) and institutional liaison officer (ILOs) who perform a pivotal role linking the University and its partners at institutional and course level; and the newly developed Annual Executive Meetings (AEMs) which facilitate regular communication between the University and its partners at a strategic level.

145 The framework requires the partner institutions to exercise quality control over its provision and for the relevant school of the University to undertake detailed oversight of the operations. The framework provides for oversight across the University to be undertaken by Standing Committee on Collaborative Provision (SCCP) on behalf of the University Teaching and Learning Committee (UTLC) and Senate, which both take an active interest in CP. The processes of oversight are generally effective. However, the audit team noted instances where schools were not fully appraised of issues within their CP, and where the filtering of detail at higher levels in the deliberative structures provided central decision-makers with limited information about CP as a whole. The team therefore considered that the University would benefit from a further review and strengthening of the system for institutional oversight so that it can be sure that its policies and procedures operate effectively and are implemented consistently in all cases.

146 The University is still developing its strategy for CP but has stated that its aim is consolidation through focus on fewer but larger collaborations in targeted geographical areas. The audit team saw evidence of the pursuit of this strategy through the use of periodic review, the new AEM, and withdrawal from collaborative arrangements that did not match this strategy. However, the University is still actively developing its CP.

147 In the CPSED the University made reference to five models of its collaborative provision, depending largely on mode of delivery, but which also distinguished different patterns of relationship between the University and the partner organisation. The main text of the Handbook for CP defines four types of collaborative arrangement, while an appendix provides details about five models. From the documentation available to it the audit team identified five approaches to collaborative provision: Franchised provision, the largest category in terms of the number of students; ODUPPLUS (Off-Campus Delivery of University Provision Led by University Staff); Designed and

Delivered; Articulation (the audit team heard at the time of the audit there was no provision of this type); and Flexible and Distributed Learning (see paragraph 28). Foundation Degrees are recognised separately and a small number are offered through CP. The University does not have any dual or joint awards but has set up a working group to consider this form of collaboration.

148 Within each category there is a variety of provision reflecting the varied partners and subject areas involved. The Designed and Delivered category contains a particularly broad range of provision from full degrees to single 20 credit modules. The categorisation of provision determines the details of validation, monitoring and quality assurance arrangements. The audit team noted that the processes in place for a particular category were more effective in relation to some provision than others. For example, the Designed and Delivered processes assume management structures and quality assurance processes that may not be present in partners delivering single modules. While the existing classification captures effectively most of the variation in CP, it does not take account of differences in scale, such as single modules or whole degrees, or the ease with which the partner can undertake related management and support roles according to the nature of the partner organisation involved. Some types of CP do not fit comfortably within the current framework, such as distance learning which overlaps with other types and articulation agreements which exist only in name; no provision of this type exists at present. Given the impact of classification on management structures and oversight, the team recommended that there might be benefit in reviewing the typology to ensure that it fits the University's increasingly diverse portfolio of CP.

149 The University plans to give greater emphasis to quality enhancement in its management of its CP (see paragraph 47). At present there is only limited cross-membership between University and partner committees, focused largely at school level. In order to

facilitate enhancement the University has established networking opportunities through partner conferences and other initiatives. This approach has been actively welcomed by the collaborative partners and the audit team saw examples of its positive impact.

### **The effectiveness of the awarding institution's procedures for assuring the quality of educational provision in its collaborative provision**

#### **Approval, monitoring and review**

150 The University has adapted its normal processes of validation, monitoring and review to address the requirements of CP. The approval and re-approval of partners is separated from the validation and revalidation of courses; and the consideration of commercial matters has been separated from the consideration of academic issues. The University has recently strengthened central involvement in these processes while continuing to promote local initiative and responsibility for CP at school level.

151 Validation and revalidation, which occurs every three years, address issues relating to the quality of educational provision involving collaboration through the composition of panels and the scope of the events themselves. Panels involve independent expertise and also a broad representation from within the University and the parent school. Service providers such as Computing and Library Services (CLS) are also involved. The scope of validation and revalidation covers a broad range of factors that impinge upon the quality of student learning, including the institutional setting, staffing, physical resources, learning resources, and support services. These are checked at the partner, and responsibility for their provision to agreed standards is set down formally in the Contract of Collaboration that accompanies the validation of each collaborative course.

152 The audit team came to the view that University has developed an effective system for partner and course validation and revalidation. The annual monitoring system generally allows the University to assure itself of the standards and

quality of its CP. However, the team observed instances where annual monitoring did not pick up issues of course quality or compliance with University regulations. The University is advised to review and further develop its processes for oversight of CP to ensure that they operate effectively in all instances.

#### **Annual monitoring**

153 CP is subject to the same processes of annual monitoring as on-campus provision. Reports are generated within partner institutions and feed into the University via the appropriate school. The audit team formed the view that, in general, annual monitoring works well as a process for analysis and addressing concerns raised by staff, students and external examiners. However, it works less well with non-standard provision such as distance learning and provision located in commercial partners. The University is proposing to strengthen the process by requiring DALOs to produce a commentary on the annual evaluation report (AER) for the provision they have responsibility for to ensure that all issues have been addressed. The team welcomes this development.

154 The University relies heavily on the annual monitoring process to maintain oversight of its provision and to assure itself that issues are being addressed. By the time that the outcomes of annual monitoring reach central University committees such as UTLC most of the detail has been filtered out in order to identify broad trends. The University is encouraged to review the balance between detail and summary in the upward reporting of annual evaluation.

155 The University has a three-year cycle of review of all courses, including those within CP, based on revalidation. In addition there are regular reviews of subject areas, central services and themes which touch upon CP. Where there is a cause for concern about a course, an exception procedure can be used to initiate a rapid review. The thematic review process was used recently to initiate a wide-ranging review of the management of CP and led to a number of changes to structures and procedures designed to enhance the management process.

### **Feedback from students and other stakeholders**

156 The University requires its collaborative partners to adopt systems for student representation through student panels which feed into course committees and school boards. This system is an effective means of identifying and reporting student views, although it is less effective for non-traditional provision such as distance learning. The means by which the student voice is heard in CP are checked at course validation and revalidation. The extent of student representation at institutional level with respect to CP is limited. The University is developing a joint initiative with the University's Students' Union to address this.

157 DALOs play an important role in facilitating feedback from students. They are expected to ensure that student representatives are properly briefed. DALOs also act as a conduit for student views: they are required to meet with students at least annually, to attend student panels and to act as a key point of contact for students regarding University processes. The audit team concluded that this demonstrated how the DALOs are effective in supporting the management of standards and quality in CP and, as such, are a feature of good practice.

158 Partner institutions are required to collect formal feedback on teaching through questionnaires which feed into the AER. There is no similar requirement for partners to collect feedback from graduates or employers, although some is collected. The University is encouraged to consider the benefits of further collection of these stakeholder views. Where appropriate the views of professional bodies are sought in the process of validation and revalidation through panel membership.

### **Student support**

159 The University stated that it aims to ensure that students studying on CP enjoy an equivalent learning experience to students studying on-campus. The means by which it achieves this include specifying and checking partner provision of learning resources, academic and pastoral support, and staffing

through partner and course validation and revalidation.

160 Partners are required to provide adequate learning resources for students to study successfully on CP. Information communication technology and library provision is checked by CLS staff during validation or, where their attendance is not feasible, by a panel member who has been briefed by CLS prior to the event. The adequacy of resources is monitored through the annual evaluation process and by DALOs. In addition, students have access to services provided by the University including direct and electronic access to the library, email and the virtual learning environment (VLE). The extent of access depends on the type of CP involved. The University is planning to provide further support for teaching and learning in partner institutions through increasing the availability of the VLE. However, the use that students in CP make of University learning resources appears to be limited by lack of knowledge of their entitlements and how to access them. The system for informing students about their access to University learning resources and support for their use could be strengthened.

161 Partner institutions are the main providers of academic and pastoral support and are required to have systems in place for the provision of induction, tutorial support, pastoral care, careers advice, appeals and complaints. A more comprehensive guidance from the University on student support is provided in the Student Support Strategy and the Guide to Student Services. CP students also have defined access to University support services, although many are not well informed about their entitlement or access. The audit team would recommend as desirable that the University takes steps to ensure that all students are made aware of their entitlements to the learning resources, academic and pastoral support services provided by the University, and how these can be accessed.

### **Staff development**

162 The University is proactive in supporting staff development in its partner institutions.

Staff from the partners are invited into the University to attend staff development events although the numbers attending are relatively low. Of wider benefit to partners was the first Collaborative Partner Network Conference held in November 2006. Further conferences are planned along with an international conference for overseas partners. Staff development activities are more firmly established within the CPCET. The intention of the Consortium is to continue to develop these activities further including the annual learning and teaching conference. The CPCET will continue to actively support events through a dedicated staff development fund. The audit team formed the view that this ongoing support for staff development was a feature of good practice. The role of the DALO in providing staff development activities for partner institutions was considered by the team to demonstrate how DALOs contributed significantly to the management of standards and quality in CP.

### **Conclusion**

163 The audit team concluded that while the University's systems for assuring the quality of its CP are sound, they work less effectively in relation to certain types of provision such as distance learning. Furthermore, the quality of some students' learning experience may be compromised, not by lack of resources or support, but by lack of knowledge about their availability. As a result, while students are generally satisfied with the quality of CP, the University does not always achieve its aim of providing an equivalent learning experience. Overall, the team concluded that broad confidence can be placed in the University's current and proposed procedures for assuring the quality of its CP.

### **The effectiveness of the awarding institution's procedures for safeguarding the standards of its awards gained through collaborative provision**

164 The standard of awards offered by collaborative partners of the University is initially considered during the course validation process and is revisited as part of periodic review. Both these procedures involve external subject specialists.

165 The University's admissions policy specifies minimum entry requirements which are applied to CP. Information on student admissions, assessment and achievement is held on the University's database and there are plans to allow some partners read-only access to these data (see paragraph 181). The DALO has the responsibility of providing data to partner institutions for use by course committees and assessment boards, although at the time of the audit some partners kept their own data sets, which were then reconciled with the University's system.

166 Data on students are summarised and analysed as part of the annual evaluation process, although the audit team noted considerable variability in the extent of both summary and analysis. The team noted likewise variation in the data presented as part of course revalidation.

167 The audit team learnt that apart from the monitoring of issues arising through annual evaluation, there was no systematic consideration of CP data on student performance at University level that would give oversight and allow the identification of trends across CP. Although the team was informed that SCCP will consider retention and progression data from October 2007, it considered it desirable for the University to strengthen its oversight and analysis of statistical information in relation to CP.

168 The University's regulations for external examining apply equally to University-based courses and CP. External examiners are appointed by the University to all award

bearing programmes and the audit team noted that appointments for courses offered by collaborative partners were made from a wide range of institutions both within and outside the higher education sector. The evidence available also demonstrated that care was taken to ensure that external examiners possessed sufficient breadth of knowledge.

169 The University has developed a sophisticated procedure for responding in a timely and effective manner to the reports of external examiners. The procedure involves interim and final action planning elements, each of which is approved by the relevant external examiner and forms part of the AER. Although the audit team identified the action planning process as a feature of good practice in enabling swift and effective response by the University to the reports of external examiners, it nevertheless noted that this procedure was not always understood by staff at partner institutions. Therefore this contributes to the team's advisable recommendation that the University review and develop further institutional oversight of standards and quality in CP, in the context of the University assuring itself that its policies and procedures operate effectively, and are implemented consistently across all partners.

170 For Franchise and ODUPLUS activity the same external examiner takes responsibility for the provision both at the University and at the partner institutions. The University has recently required such examiners to indicate in their reports whether standards are satisfactory where delivery is at a partner institution, but this is done by ticking a box with no requirement for comment specific to CP or to any individual partner institution. The audit team came to the conclusion that it would be desirable for the University to revise the reporting form for external examiners to allow the comments relating to individual partner institutions to be identified, and in doing so fully realise the University's intentions for the reporting of external examiners in CP, and thus enhance the quality of its provision.

171 Overall, the audit team considered that although there could be greater consistency in

the application of the University's procedures for safeguarding the standards of its awards gained through CP, those procedures are effective and fit for purpose.

### **The awarding institution's use of the Academic Infrastructure in the context of its collaborative provision**

172 Responsibility for overseeing the consistency of the University's regulations and quality management arrangements and the use of the Academic Infrastructure rests with UTLC. The University was fully aware of the Academic Infrastructure and the audit team noted its widespread use throughout the University and its collaborative partners. For example, programme specifications have been produced for all courses, *The framework of higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* has been used in the development of new courses, and external examiners' reports confirm that the University employs the Academic Infrastructure to inform and maintain standards.

173 The audit team also formed the view that the University has made appropriate use of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (e-learning)* in the development of its framework for CP. The CPSED included some useful examples of how the University had aligned itself in this respect and the team was able to satisfy itself that the University's arrangements are broadly in alignment with the advice offered by the precepts of the *Code of practice*.

174 Although University management was clearly aware of and making use of the Academic Infrastructure, there was considerable variability in the awareness demonstrated by both University and partner staff.

175 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University makes good use of external reference points in its management and enhancement of quality and standards in CP. The team also concluded that the University might want to

communicate its intentions more effectively with respect to the Academic Infrastructure so that a shared understanding is achieved by the staff of both the University and its partner institutions

**The utility of the collaborative provision self-evaluation document as an illustration of the awarding institution's capacity to reflect upon its own strengths and limitations in collaborative provision, and to act on these to enhance quality and safeguard academic standards**

176 The audit team saw evidence that the collaborative provision self-evaluation document (CPSED) had been prepared by the University in collaboration with staff in partner institutions. Partner staff with whom the team met considered the CPSED to be an accurate account.

177 The audit team found the CPSED to be a largely descriptive document that contributed to the team's understanding of the arrangements that the University has put in place for the maintenance and enhancement of quality and standards of its CP. It also provided some useful illustration of operational matters. On occasion, there were discrepancies between the CPSED and the University's procedures, regulations and how these were implemented (see paragraphs 28, 85, 113). Overall, the team found the CPSED demonstrated the University's capacity to reflect on its own strengths and limitations in its approach to CP.

**Commentary on the institution's intentions for the enhancement of its management of quality and academic standards in its collaborative provision**

178 In the CPSED the University stated its commitment to moving towards enhancement-led quality assurance and for this process to be the focus of the interaction between the University and its partner institutions. This will be facilitated by regular partner conferences at which presentations will reflect both the

partner and University experiences. A crucial role is played by the DALOs in taking forward the enhancement agenda with the partner institutions. The importance of this role is recognised by the University in that a series of briefing sessions are held for DALOs and a DALO/ILO forum has been established to disseminate good practice and support staff in these roles.

179 The audit team saw a number of different ways in which the University was taking forward its enhancement agenda, including the development of its Teaching and Learning Strategy which draws on and informs its aspirations and expectations for its students. The University also sees e-learning as forming a valuable part of the quality of student learning. It has established an E-Learning Strategy Group to support curriculum development, technical infrastructure and enhance quality assurance processes. A small amount of CP is delivered entirely online through email and a VLE, and provides direct communication with students and staff in partner institutions. A new University e-zine 'teaching and learning Matters' is to be published three times a year with a forthcoming edition specifically focusing on CP. A more substantial open access journal in Teaching and Learning with a dedicated section for articles relating to CP is also planned. Although many of these measures were in their infancy at the CP audit they, nevertheless, demonstrate a potential to enhance the University's CP. However, the team formed the conclusion that both the Teaching and Learning and the E-Learning Strategies would benefit from a stronger central direction so as to ensure a further dissemination of enhancement measures across the University and its partner institutions. As such, the team considered it was desirable for the University to build this into its emerging quality enhancement strategies.

180 The University is intending to develop mechanisms to enable the views of students in partner institutions to be more effectively represented on University committees. A new University Student Council has been established in which students can play a more active role to



forward enhancement within the University. The University recognises that it will be challenging to enlist such contributions from students in the collaborative partners and to this end is developing a joint action plan with the Students' Union to address this.

181 The University is seeking to enable partner institutions to have greater responsibility in respect of the student record system. CPCET already manages its own student records, albeit monitored by the University. Such self-management has improved the quality of student record-keeping. Consequently, the University is considering ways to develop the student record system to allow nominated trained staff in the partners to enrol students via the internet.

182 The audit team concluded that the University's intentions for enhancing the management of its CP are timely and appropriate within the context of its evolving strategy.

### **Reliability of information provided by the awarding institution on its collaborative provision**

183 Students receive information regarding their courses predominantly through their course and module handbooks and the Student's Handbook of Regulations. The latter is provided to students on CD-ROM and increasingly students access required information online. Publicity material including the prospectus is checked for accuracy by the University's External Relations Group. The documents required for validation events include a copy of the prospectus and course leaflets to be made available for the panel. All such materials must acknowledge that the award is that of the University, although the audit team found this did not happen on every occasion.

184 The University process for monitoring information produced by its collaborative partners places a major responsibility on DALOs and ILOs (where in place). They check any publicity material using the University name or logo as well as information provided to students. From meetings with the DALOs and

partner institutions, the audit team was assured that the processes adopted by the University were generally effective in monitoring the information provided by its partners.

185 Students met by the audit team expressed satisfaction with the quality and accuracy of the information provided for them. They were fully aware of the status of the University as the awarding institution and saw this as an advantage of their course. Course and module handbooks were considered to provide comprehensive information to support their studies while the University Handbook of Regulations provided them with all the necessary knowledge pertaining to regulatory matters such as plagiarism, complaints and appeals.

186 The University had sound procedures for ensuring the accuracy and security of its award certificates and transcripts. The University takes responsibility for the printing of all certificates and transcripts directly from the student records system. On one occasion, however, the audit team found that the University had allowed an exception to the procedure in that a partner institution had issued its own award certificate incorporating the name of the University. Due to the potential for misrepresentation arising from the granting of such exceptions, and other examples of inaccuracies in published material seen during the audit, including progression to courses at the University and the recognition of credit, the team considered that it was advisable that the University adheres to its own procedures for publicity materials produced by its collaborative partners and in the issuing of certificates and transcripts.

187 The audit team heard that the University had uploaded all required documentation in respect of Teaching Quality Information (TQI) prior to the suspension of the website at the end of December 2006. It was cognisant with current developments and plans for the future disclosure of information. The team concluded that the University satisfied TQI arrangements in place at the time of the audit and that it was taking appropriate steps to ensure accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information published about the quality of its

courses. The students met by the team confirmed that they were satisfied with the usefulness and access they had to all such information.

### **Features of good practice**

188 The following features of good practice were noted:

- i the role of the Designated Academic Liaison Officer in supporting the management of standards and the quality in collaborative provision, as exemplified by the development of staff at partner institutions (paragraphs 39, 98, 110)
- ii the Consortium for Post-Compulsory Education and Training, which allows for the effective management of standards and quality, in particular, the staff development networks and the research activities that underpin course delivery (paragraphs 45, 112)
- iii the Annual Executive meeting as a mechanism for enhancing communication between the University and partner institutions, and providing a strategic overview of the partnerships that ensures that all developments are in line with the University's intentions for collaborative provision (paragraph 63)
- iv the action planning process which enables a swift and effective response by the University to the reports of external examiners (paragraph 76).

### **Recommendations for action**

189 The audit team also recommends that the University should consider further action in a number of areas to ensure that the academic quality of courses and the standards of awards it offers through collaborative collaborative arrangements are maintained.

190 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- i to review and develop further institutional oversight of standards and quality in collaborative provision, so that the

University can assure itself that its policies and procedures operate effectively and are implemented consistently across all partners (paragraphs 45, 62, 66, 82, 87 117)

- ii adhere to, and ensure consistent implementation of, its procedures in relation to publicity materials and certificates across all partners (paragraph 138).

191 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- i to give a stronger central direction to its emerging Teaching and Learning and E-Learning Strategies in relation to collaborative provision (paragraphs 23, 115)
- ii review the current classification of collaborative provision to ensure continuing fit with the increasingly diverse nature of collaborative arrangements being established (paragraph 31)
- iii revise the reporting form for external examiners to allow the comments relating to individual partner institutions to be better identified (paragraphs 79)
- iv strengthen its oversight and analysis of statistical information in relation to collaborative provision (paragraphs 106)
- v take steps to ensure that all students have appropriate learning resources available to them through partner institutions, and to ensure that all students are made aware of their entitlements to the learning resources, academic and pastoral support services provided by the University, and how these can be accessed (paragraphs 125 132).

