

University of Northumbria at Newcastle

MAY 2006

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 Northumbria at Newcastle (the University) from 22 to 26 May 2006, to carry out an audit of the collaborative provision offered by the University. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes of study offered by the University through arrangements with collaborative partners, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standard 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 collaborative provision. As part of the audit process, the team met with four of the University's collaborative partners, where it spoke to students on the University's collaborative programmes and to members of staff of the partner institution.

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 opportunities 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 (Code of practice), Section 2: Collaborative provision and*

flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning), 2004, paragraph 13, published by QAA).

In an audit of collaborative provision both academic standards and academic quality are reviewed.

Outcome of the collaborative provision audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the University 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 being good practice:

- the high-quality guidance given on the development and delivery of collaborative provision, as exemplified by the Collaborative Procedures Handbook and the operations manuals
- the sharing within the University of good practice, in particular through the work of the Learning and Teaching Support Advisers and the Enhancement Groups on International Collaboration and Foundation Degrees
- the careful separation between the development and approval of collaborative partnerships and the subsequent approval of collaborative programmes, informed by the practical application of a user-friendly risk assessment process

- the process of initial review conducted at the end of the first semester of programme delivery for all new collaborative programmes.

Recommendations for action

The audit team also recommends that the University should consider further action to ensure that the academic quality of programmes and standards of the awards it offers through collaborative arrangements are maintained. The team considers it desirable that the University:

- continues to ensure that students for whom English is a second language are fully capable of learning through the medium of English from an early stage in their programme.

National reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team also investigated the use made by the University, in respect of its collaborative arrangements, of the Academic Infrastructure developed by the UK higher education sector through QAA. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that help to define both good practice and academic standards. The audit found that the University was making effective use of the Academic Infrastructure in the context of its collaborative provision and has responded generally appropriately to the national frameworks for higher education qualifications, subject benchmark statements, programme specifications and the *Code of practice* published by QAA.

In due course, the audit process will include a check on the reliability of the Teaching Quality Information published by institutions in the format recommended in the Higher Education Funding Council for England's document 03/51 (*HEFCE 03/51*), *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*. The audit team was satisfied that the University is alert to the requirements of document HEFCE 03/51, and is moving in an appropriate manner to fulfil its responsibilities in this respect.

Main report

Main report

1 An audit of the collaborative provision (CP) offered by the University of Northumbria at Newcastle (the University) was undertaken during the period 22 to 26 May 2006. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes offered by the University through arrangements with collaborative partners, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility, as an awarding body, to assure the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements.

2 CP audit supplements the institutional audit of the University's own provision. The process of CP audit has been developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in partnership with higher education institutions (HEIs) in England. It provides a means for scrutinising the CP of an HEI with degree-awarding powers (the awarding institution) where the CP was too large or complex to have been included in the institutional audit of the awarding institution. 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), 2004, paragraph 13, published by QAA*).

3 The CP audit checked the effectiveness of the University's procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of academic awards through collaborative arrangements; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of the programmes of study offered through the collaborative arrangements that lead to those awards; for publishing reliable information about its CP; and for the discharge of its responsibility as an awarding body. As part of the collaborative audit process the audit team visited four of the University's collaborative partners.

Section 1: Introduction: the awarding institution and its mission as it relates to collaborative provision

4 The University of Northumbria at Newcastle was founded in 1992, having previously been known as Newcastle Polytechnic which was established through the amalgamation of three local colleges of art and design, commerce and technology and subsequently two local colleges of education. In 1995 the Bede, Newcastle and Northumbria College of Health Studies was incorporated within the University.

5 In 2002 the University took the decision to adopt the trading name of 'Northumbria University' and this is the title it uses for day to day purposes, although University of Northumbria at Newcastle remains the official and legal name of the University. The University's letterheads use Northumbria University with a footnote to indicate that 'Northumbria University is the trading name of the University of Northumbria at Newcastle'.

6 The University has approximately 500 study programmes based at the two campuses of Newcastle City and Coach Lane. In addition the University has a significant collaborative provision with partners in the UK and overseas. At the time of the audit, the University has a student population of 29,501 with 21,251 full-time/sandwich and 7,594 part-time; included within these figures are 4,805 students on collaborative programmes which account for 17 per cent of the total student numbers.

7 The total number of students studying on undergraduate programmes is 24,400, and on postgraduate programmes 5,101, which includes those studying on collaborative programmes both within the UK and overseas.

8 The collaborative provision represents 17 per cent of the student population distributed across subject areas as follows:

Applied Sciences	11
Arts & Social Sciences	497
Built Environment	68

Computing Engineering & Information Sciences	845
Design	209
Health, Community & Education Studies	419
Newcastle Business School	2,727
Psychology & Sport Sciences	29
Total	4,805.

9 The type of programmes being pursued by CP students is as follows:

UK undergraduate	52 programmes
UK Postgraduate	4 programmes
Overseas undergraduate	65 programmes
Overseas postgraduate	18 programmes.

10 Newcastle Business School has the largest provision of collaborative activity with 2,727 students, followed by Computing, Engineering and Information Science with 845 students, Arts and Social Sciences with 497, and Health and Community and Education studies with 419. In the UK there are 14 collaborative partners which are predominantly further education colleges, and overseas there are 24 partners consisting of public and private colleges, and universities.

11 The majority of UK based collaborative provision is Foundation Degrees (FDs) with a small number of honours degrees and master's programmes. The overseas programmes are predominantly honours level degrees with a small proportion of master's.

12 Most overseas franchise delivery activity is now concentrated in China (including Hong Kong), India and South East Asia as indicated below in the geographical spread of overseas franchise partners:

China	37 per cent
Singapore	21 per cent
Malaysia	16 per cent
Germany	11 per cent

India	5 per cent
Sweden	5 per cent
Netherlands	5 per cent.

13 The University has a vision to become one of the world's leading teaching and learning Universities, renowned for its innovative and research-based practice and exercising its regional, national and international role through an extensive network of locations and partnerships. Its mission is to meet the diverse needs of an international learning community and to contribute to society and its economic development through research, excellent teaching and high quality student support.

14 A number of mission aims determine the direction of business activity and the delivery of great learning, great experience and a great future for staff and students. Those relating to and underpinning the development of collaborative activity are the promotion of:

- 'the employability, lifelong and continuing professional development of its students and staff
- opportunities and access to students with a variety of ambitions and from different circumstances
- global recruitment and international activity
- a strengthening of the economic environmental and cultural life of the region through opportunities in higher education, creating partnerships, integrating with communities, and generating and disseminating valuable knowledge'.

15 The University believes that collaborative delivery of University programmes can:

- 'enhance the University's international reputation and thereby assist its international recruitment targets and opportunities for academic and research interchange
- help to enrich the University's on-campus curriculum

- provide the University and individual schools with an important source of income generation and diversification'.
- 16 The University's focus is towards:
- 'partnerships with high quality partners who are offering, or have the potential to offer, collaborative programmes in several disciplines, i.e. relatively high volume, high value partners
 - specific specialist markets - where there is a focus on a specific subject discipline or profession'.

Background Information

17 The published information available for this audit included the following recent documentation:

- the report of the institutional audit conducted by QAA, April 2005
- the overseas quality audit report for the University of Northumbria at Newcastle and the Università Degli Studi di Parma conducted by QAA, December 2003
- the FD review of the University of Northumbria at Newcastle and Newcastle College, Business Management, conducted by QAA, dated June 2005
- report of the QAA developmental engagement for Mechanical Engineering, May 2003
- report of the QAA developmental engagement for Chemistry, 2004.

18 The University provided QAA with a series of documents and information including:

- an institutional collaborative provision self-evaluation document (CPSED) with appendices, titled QAA Audit of Collaborative Provision, dated May 2006
- the Collaborative Procedures and Operations handbooks
- documentation relating to the partner institutions visited by the audit team
- documentation, relating to University annual reviews, of a cross-section of

different types of collaborative provision in the UK and overseas

- documentation from the University's Registry and the University Learning and Teaching Committee relating to collaborative provision, including an extensive set of footnotes
- undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses
- access to the University intranet.

The audit team was given access to a wide range of the University's internal documents which greatly assisted the team during the audit.

The collaborative provision audit process

19 Following a preliminary meeting at the University in November 2005 between a QAA officer and representatives of the University, QAA confirmed that four partner visits would be undertaken, including one by video link. The University provided its CPSED in January 2006 and also provided QAA with briefing documentation in March 2006 for each of the selected partner institutions (PIs).

20 The audit team visited the University from 4 April to 6 April 2006 to conduct a briefing visit where there was an opportunity to gather information through discussion with senior staff; representatives from partner institutions and also student representatives. At the close of the briefing visit a list of further information was requested in preparation for the subsequent audit visit. Additionally a programme of meetings for the audit was agreed with the University.

21 The four partner visits occurred during the period 27 April to 15 May 2006, at which the audit team had meetings with senior staff, teaching staff and students.

22 The QAA audit team made a second visit to the University from 22 May to 26 May 2006; meetings were held with Associate Deans for Learning and Teaching and Development; University academic staff with link responsibility

for a range of collaborative provision; University support and advice staff from Registry and schools and finally the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching), the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Development), the Registrar and the Head of Learning and Teaching Support.

23 The audit team comprised Ms A J Kettle, Dr D Luke, Professor T Moscovitch and Dr H Rattle, auditors, and Mr P Watson, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mr Derek Greenaway, Assistant Director, reviews group.

Developments since the institutional audit of the awarding institution

24 The QAA institutional audit report of April 2005 focused upon a number of points which were relevant to the University collaborative provision audit and the audit team was provided with an update incorporating a response to the report recommendations. The audit team saw evidence that the University is taking steps to address the recommendations and these are referred to in this report.

25 The institutional audit report highlighted a number of features of good practice appropriate to the University's provision as a whole and one of these has also been acknowledged by the collaborative provision audit team as an example of good practice which is the work of the Enhancement Groups (see paragraphs 46 and 49 below).

26 The recommendations for action made by the institutional audit team included the proposal to further embed good practice in the identification of plagiarism. As the University is host to the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) Plagiarism Advisory Service and the Plagiarism Detection Service, both national projects, the audit team would encourage the University to continue 'supporting its collaborative partners in making use of this expertise'.

27 The overseas quality audit report December 2003 concluded that the University had rigorous and comprehensive quality assurance systems and processes. However, it

suggested that the University might consider how it could better support the programme team in terms of staff development at institutional level, given that it regards the course as a 'test-bed for joint awards and distance learning'.

28 The University has since considered the recommendation and the audit team saw evidence of the process of initial review conducted after six months for all new collaborative programmes.

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

The awarding institution's strategic approach to collaborative provision

29 The University has built upon its experience of collaborative provision over the past 10 years, and its International Development strategy anticipates a further 50 per cent increase in overseas franchise student numbers during the next five years. However, the University stated that the emphasis will be upon major strategic partners who can offer scale and quality of delivery. Northumbria has clear ambitions to work with organisations which share similar aims; have a high quality reputation and have a genuine shared vision of both the nature and purpose of collaborative provision. At a local level in the UK, the development of validated FDs with regional partners reflects the University mission aims of widening participation and strengthening the economy of the region and government policy.

30 The University has a well established strategic approach to its management systems and processes, with the focus at all levels upon both learning and teaching and development, with cross school University support and the sharing of good practice through enhancement groups. Although the University encourages

collaborative activity in the spirit of partnership it has now, with experience, adopted a risk-based strategic approach with comprehensive procedures for assessing risk and opportunity.

31 The University's approach to securing the standards of academic awards and assuring and enhancing the quality of the student experience is incorporated in its Quality Framework. The Quality Framework accommodates the requirements of the Academic Infrastructure and the University stated that this 'secures, assures, maintains and enhances the standards of programmes and the learning experience for all students'.

32 The University classifies its collaborative arrangements into the following categories:

- **Articulated advanced entry** - entry of students to an intermediate stage of a Northumbria programme on the basis of Northumbria's accreditation of prior learning of particular programmes operated by other organisations.
- **Franchise** - the delivery of a Northumbria validated programme(s) by a partner organisation. Northumbria retains overall control of the programme's content, regulations, delivery, assessment and quality assurance arrangements.

- **Validated programme** - a programme of study developed, designed, delivered, assessed and managed by another institution and its staff but approved and quality assured by Northumbria as leading to one of its awards.
- **Dual award** - an agreed programme of study undertaken and completed at more than one degree awarding institution. Each institution accredits the study completed at the other as contributing to its award. Students receive a separate award from each institution.
- **Joint award** - a programme designed, delivered, assessed, owned and approved by one or more degree awarding institutions operating jointly with Northumbria. Students receive one award from each participating institution.
- **Support programmes** - a programme provided by a partner institution to support Northumbria enrolled and registered distance learning students in their study.

33 The number and type of partners and programmes at the time of the audit was as follows:

	Overseas	Programmes involved	United Kingdom	Programmes involved
Articulated advanced entry	58	45	5	4
Franchise	17	45	5	5
Validated	2	5	8	49
Joint	2	2		
Support (distance learning)	2	2	1	2

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

34 In its CPSED the University described its approach to collaborative activity as one based 'on a belief that effectiveness is best achieved where a spirit of partnership prevails in the relationship'. Its aim was to work with its partner institutions 'to ensure consistency, comparable experiences for the students, and to sustain the standards of the awards'. In order to achieve this aim all collaborative arrangements are considered in the context of the University's strategies and policies for fulfilling its responsibilities for all its awards, irrespective of where the student studies or through whatever modes. Collaborative procedures, modified where necessary, are part of the University's quality assurance framework, which 'secures, assures, maintains and enhances the standards of programmes and the learning experience for all students'. Operationally the responsibility of Academic Board for standards and the quality assurance framework is delegated to the University Learning and Teaching Committee (ULT), the School Learning and Teaching Committees (SLTs) and Examination Boards.

35 Managerially, the Vice Chancellor delegates key responsibilities with regard to CP to two Deputy Vice Chancellors (DVC). The DVC (Learning and Teaching) has responsibility to ensure that processes are in place to assure and embed the quality and enhancement of learning and teaching activities, including approval of collaborative activity, and the DVC (Development) who has joint responsibility, with the DVC (Learning and Teaching), for the implementation of the recently approved UK and Overseas Collaborative Development Strategy. Academic delivery takes place in, and is managed by, the nine schools. Deans of School have responsibility for leading and directing School activities within the University's overall strategies; some aspects of decanal responsibility are devolved to Associate Deans. The separation of developmental and quality

assurance activities signified in the remits of the DVC (Development) and the DVC (Learning and Teaching) is mirrored at school level by the remits of Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching) or (Development) or their equivalents.

36 The Registrar has overall responsibility for the regulatory framework, and school registrars, jointly managed by the Registrar and deans of school, ensure that the administrative systems and processes are in place to assure the quality of support for academic provision within their schools. The Learning and Teaching Support (LTS) section of the Academic Registry has responsibility for developing and supporting the operation of the regulations and frameworks for approval and delivery of programmes (including those delivered collaboratively) and for managing review activity. Two senior academics are seconded to LTS in an advisory capacity to provide support for collaborative activity.

37 The management and quality assurance of collaborative programmes are the responsibility of schools and some schools have established, or were about to establish at the time of the audit, collaborative ventures offices. For all programmes both the school and the partner appoint a programme leader or coordinator and both provide administrative support. Every programme is required to have, as part of the contractual agreement, an operations manual that defines quality assurance standards and takes account of University policies in respect of admissions, student support, staffing, staff development and assessment. The manual sets out the precise roles of programme directors, link coordinators, module tutors and administrators, which vary as between franchise and validated programmes. Programme committees monitor all aspects of the delivery of the programme; the agenda of twice-yearly meetings is set jointly and actions taken as a result of issues raised are reported to the University's programme director and, through the review process, to SLTs.

38 In view of the expansion in the number of the University's collaborative links and the increasing mix of delivery patterns, and as part

of its regular process for reviewing its procedures, ULT undertook a review of collaborative procedures in 2004-05. The revised procedures take account both of QAA audits and reviews and the Academic Infrastructure, in particular, the revised collaborative section of the *Code of practice*. Programme specifications are required for all collaborative programmes and appropriate subject benchmark statements, including the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*, are referenced in all UK validated programmes and, where appropriate, in overseas validations. The rules, regulations, quality assurance frameworks and operational guidelines for approving, managing and operating collaborative activity are set out clearly and comprehensively in a Collaborative Procedures Handbook (CPH). The Handbook is fully supported by guidance notes, checklists and templates available on the University's website.

39 The CPSED explained that the University was confident that standards are maintained and the quality of the students' experience assured and monitored by the operation of effective, risk-based procedures for the development, approval and review of collaborative activity (see paragraphs 51-70 below). When admitting students, partners are required to comply with the entry standards set at validation and laid down in the programme specification, including requirements for English language; compliance is monitored at annual review and when programmes are re-approved. Collaborative programmes are expected to adopt the University's assessment regulations (ARNA) and the Northumbria Guidelines for Good Practice Assessment are fully aligned with of the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*. University programme teams support staff in partner institutions in the teaching and assessment processes, particularly in the encouragement of independent learning, which can sometimes represent a challenge for some overseas partners. Assessments are moderated by University staff and students are given feedback within four weeks.

40 Evidence was supplied to the audit team to support the statement in the CPSED that any shortcomings identified in the operation of the moderation process are dealt with strictly. Concerns that arise about the authenticity of student work are dealt with by means of academic misconduct hearings, and efforts are made by means of staff development to raise awareness of plagiarism and to encourage the use of the Plagiarism Advisory and Detection Services. In order to ensure consistency and comparability of standards across programmes, results are, wherever possible, considered at the normal cycle of modular examination boards and progression and award boards; partner programme coordinators are encouraged to attend examination board meetings. Partners operating validated programmes carry out the assessment processes and University progression and award boards confirm results and awards. An overview report of all collaborative delivery activity based on school annual reviews (see paragraphs 51-70 below) is prepared by the LTS Advisers and presented annually to ULT, with a summary for the consideration of Academic Board. These reports enable the University to monitor activity, identify trends in the performance of students and take appropriate action.

41 Statistical information forms part of the annual overview report presented by Academic Registry to ULT and Academic Board, and indicates that student performance varies between partners, especially overseas. A comparative statistical analysis of student marks for the academic year 2004-05 concluded that overall, student achievement for students on UK and overseas franchise programmes is lower than that of students studying in the University itself, while average marks for students on dual award, offsite UK and distance learning programmes are somewhat higher. The audit team are of the view that the current analysis of statistical data is too broad to make the comparison accurate and meaningful. The University will soon be placed to accurately analyse student achievement data by the introduction of Strategy Information Technology Systems (SITS) (see paragraph 99 below).

42 Performance data at levels 5 and 6 of FD students progressing to an honours year are compared to that of the standard degree cohort. Similar data are reported for all CP, and for franchised programmes student performance is compared with that of the University cohort. In almost all cases the differences are small, and the analyses provide the University with assurance of the comparability of student performance across its home and collaborative provision.

43 The CPSED indicated that the University was aware of the need to ensure that partners complied with English language admission requirements in programme specifications and the audit team found in visits to partners and from the evidence supplied to it that lack of competency in English was delaying student progression in some cases. Although the team was aware that, where problems had been identified, extra support was being provided to students on some programmes in order to improve their English language proficiency, it was considered desirable for the University to continue to ensure that students for whom English is a second language are fully capable of learning through the medium of English from an early stage in their programme.

44 The audit team was able to confirm by means of visits to partners and from the documentation supplied to it that communication between the University and its partner institutions was effective and that the University's expectations with regard to the maintenance of standards and the equivalence of the student experience were clearly understood by partners. There was evidence in the annual review reports that student feedback was encouraged and responded to. The team talked to students on a range of collaborative programmes and found that they were, in general, very happy with their experience and appreciative of the attention paid to their needs.

45 Overall, the audit team came to the conclusion that the University's framework for managing the quality of the students' experience and the academic standards in CP was appropriate and that effective oversight of

the delivery of collaborative programmes by schools was maintained and remedial action taken when necessary. Procedures are fully documented and guidance is given to staff on their implementation at every stage. In the view of the team the high quality of the guidance given on the development and delivery of CP, as exemplified by the Collaborative Procedures Handbook and the operations manuals, is a feature of good practice.

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

46 It was argued in the CPSED that the way in which the University's collaborative procedures themselves had evolved provided a key to its intentions for enhancing the quality of its CP. Some processes, such as operations manuals, FD steering groups or buddy schemes, had originated as good practice in a particular school and could be built upon in the interests of continuous improvement. The recent adoption of a risk-based approach in developing partnerships and the strategic focus on high quality partners who offer, or have the potential to offer, collaborative programmes in several disciplines, are further evidence of continuous improvement in collaborative activity.

47 Good practice is identified and disseminated in various ways. By means of the annual review process issues are identified and actions are taken both to assure and enhance quality by identifying themes for further development. The LTS Advisers, identified in the CPSED as playing a key role in enhancement, draw up the annual reports to ULT and Academic Board on CP which are based on programme reviews and present evidence of quality enhancement such as:

- continuing improvement in communication between partners
- increased effectiveness of staff development for academic, administrative and learning support staff
- the increasing use of learning platforms.

48 A Collaborative Provision Practitioners' Group is coordinated by LTS to enable administrative staff to share good practice in the application of procedures at operational level. Quality is improved and good practice shared in specific staff development events on collaborative activity held in particular schools with the support of the Library and Learning Services Department or organised by LTS. Joint bids with collaborative partners are welcomed within the Applauding and Promoting Teaching (APT) Awards Scheme established to support innovation and the dissemination of good practice in all forms of teaching, learning and assessment activity.

49 ULT's recently established Enhancement Groups are, according to the CPSED, 'emerging as a valuable opportunity for identifying and disseminating good practice' and increasing liaison between schools. The International Collaboration Enhancement Group was involved in the review of collaborative procedures and intends to produce a guide for developers involved in collaborative activity. The Foundation Degrees Group has brought together experienced and inexperienced staff to share expertise in the development of FDs and in improving procedures. The eLearning and Distance Learning Group has steered the use of the eLearning platform to support blended and distance learning and will lead to a more proactive approach to developing the pedagogical framework for the better support of collaborative activity.

50 The audit team came to the conclusion that the University's intentions for the enhancement of quality in its CP are appropriate to the stage of development of that provision and timely in view of its new UK and Overseas Collaborative Development Strategy. The team considered that the sharing within the University of good practice, in particular through the work of the Learning and Teaching Support Advisers and the Enhancement Groups on International Development and FDs, was a feature of good practice.

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

Approval

51 The University makes a clear distinction between the consideration and verification of collaborative links at the institutional and strategic level, and the subsequent approval of collaborative programmes offered by or with a partner institution. The CPSED explained that considerable importance is attached in the revised procedures to the development phase of partnerships. A risk-based approach to collaborative initiatives signified the importance attached by the University to promoting prudent financial management and cost effective operation. Initial contact between the University and a potential partner can emanate from a range of sources but it is the responsibility of the relevant school to explore the potential for furthering an initiative and to undertake a risk assessment. Proposals, articulated in a Collaborative Proposal Form (CVP) and accompanied by a business plan, are considered by the School's Senior Management Group; those that are approved at this stage as consistent with the Academic Development Plan of the School are then developed fully, sometimes drawing on the support of the LTS Advisers, and considered under ULT's quality assurance framework. The CVP is scrutinised by ULT's Programme Approvals Scrutiny Sub-Committee (LTPAS) to ensure that the proposal is consistent with the University's mission, policies and strategies and that the underlying basis for the collaboration is sound.

52 If the proposed link is with a new partner then a partnership review precedes any consideration of a proposal for a new programme. Two senior members of staff with experience of quality processes, and who are independent of the proposing School, conduct the review which focuses on the ability of the proposed partner to deliver a high quality learning experience for students of a comparable standard to that provided by the University on its own campuses; financial and legal aspects are considered separately by

appropriate University officers. Until recently all reviews involved a visit to the proposed partner to explore issues identified from a scrutiny of the documentation but the review process now reflects the degree of risk associated with the proposed partnership. Visits are reserved for proposals assessed by LTPAS as high risk. The report of the review is considered by ULT and, if the outcome is satisfactory, approval of the partnership, usually for a six-year period will be recommended to Academic Board. All collaborative partnerships are underwritten by a contract whose elements conform to the *Code of practice*, with no negotiation permitted on clauses that relate to compliance with quality assurance processes.

53 Partnership re-approval takes place on a six-yearly basis and is intended as a periodic check to satisfy Academic Board on the key features of the partnership's operation. Under the revised procedures re-approval of partners is expected to be primarily a document-based process undertaken in the context of University strategy and involving consideration of:

- the initial objectives of the partnership
- the outcome of annual programme reviews
- a commentary on the operation of the partnership to which the partner contributes
- an assessment of the risk involved in re-approval.

A visit is required if any major concerns are identified. The CPSED explained that the effectiveness of the document based approval and re-approval process will be assessed as more reviews are completed.

54 When Academic Board has approved a delivery partnership, any school may submit proposals for programme delivery in collaboration with that partner. The CVP forms the basis for consideration of the proposal and LTPAS determines the precise form of the approval event. Approval panels include a member external to the University and partner with experience of collaborative programmes

and, for overseas proposals, some knowledge of the local environment. The documentation considered by panels includes:

- the partnership review report which may identify specific issues
- the programme specification
- a student handbook
- an operations manual
- staff curricula vitae
- a staff development plan and a statement on the facilities and resources identified as necessary for the operation of the programme.

55 In addition, panels are provided with a checklist of criteria covering such matters as:

- the security of the learning experience
- the ability of staff to deliver the programme
- the operation of the quality assurance framework as incorporated in the operations manual
- the nature of administrative and technical support.

56 The University described how the approval event normally takes place on the premises of the partner and panel members have the opportunity to meet staff from both the University and the partner and, where possible, students studying on similar programmes.

57 Approval is time limited, normally to three years for a full-time programme, in order to minimise risk and maintain standards. The University explained that it is unusual for programmes to be given unconditional approval and conditions cover such matters as resource issues, quality management or staff development. Conditions are either time limited and must be met before programme delivery can begin, or are ongoing and must be monitored either through the annual review process or directly by ULT, with the involvement of SLTs to ensure full ownership of the process at the point of delivery. There are new procedures in place for revisions and

modifications to programmes identified through the annual review process. LTPAS decides whether revisions can be approved by the SLT or whether a major change involving full re-approval is required (For re-approval see below, periodic review, paragraphs 63-65).

58 According to the CPSED the University is confident that the approval process is 'rigorous and effective', while focussing on the student experience being delivered by the partner institution. The University has begun to seek systematic feedback on the process from panel members. While feedback received on approval events held in 2004-05 commended the effectiveness of the processes and the clarity of the guidance provided, comments indicated that the quality of the documentation provided by schools was variable. The CPSED also indicated that there is occasionally tension involved in balancing business imperatives and proposed developments with quality requirements and appropriate scrutiny of proposals. ULT requires a three-month interval between the approval event and the proposed start of the programme to ensure that any conditions can be satisfied and pressures to ensure that programmes are approved for the start of the session has led to bunching in the summer months. As a result the approval schedule has been strengthened to avoid deferred start dates for new programmes.

59 Through its visits to partners and by reading a selection of partnership review reports and programme approval reports, the audit team was able to confirm that procedures were accurately described in the CPSED and that the process of approval of collaborative partners and programmes was robust and fit for purpose and took full account of the *Code of practice*. The team considered that the careful separation between the development and approval of collaborative partnerships and the subsequent approval of collaborative programme, informed by the practical application of a user-friendly risk assessment process, was a feature of good practice.

Annual review

60 The University's Annual Review process, which is intended to provide a check on the quality of provision and to ensure enhancement, applies to all collaborative programmes. The standard template, requiring analysis of a range of programme data, student feedback, student progression, graduate employment and the reports of external examiners, has been modified for franchise and validated programmes with the intention of encouraging more engagement by partners. For franchise programmes it is expected that the annual review of their delivery will be incorporated with the review of their counterpart programme at the University campuses in order to enable the identification of common issues and the dissemination of good practice. For validated programmes at partner institutions annual reviews can be incorporated with other programmes in the same discipline area or presented in a separate submission. In recognition of the need to capture specific requirements, such as work based learning, a separate template has been developed for FDs. In addition there is an initial review for CP at the end of the first semester of the delivery of new programmes; this is designed to provide early feedback and identify any early, unforeseen issues that may require addressing in advance of annual review and an opportunity to revise the curriculum before the recruitment of a second cohort of students. In view of the rapid expansion of FDs the School of Health, Community and Education Studies conducted an Interim Review of the provision in September 2005 to support the embedding of the activity in the School. The standard module review template has been modified for the Newcastle Business School to enable the earlier partner completion of module review and to emphasise joint ownership of the process.

61 Annual review reports are designed to identify good practice, as well as setting out action plans and are considered by SLTs. All annual review reports involving CP are submitted to LTS and from them the LTS

Advisers produce annual overview reports for ULT and Academic Board. The overview reports draw attention to key features of the provision, including good practice and issues requiring further attention and an indication of what action was to be taken. In addition the LTS Advisers may be asked to produce reports on particular partnership issues.

62 Meetings with partners and University staff and reading of documentation, which included initial and annual review reports on individual programmes and annual reports on CP, gave the audit team broad confidence that the University had an appropriate overview of the quality of its collaborative programmes and the academic standards of its awards. It was the view of the team that the process of initial review conducted at the end of the first semester of programme delivery for all new collaborative programmes constituted a feature of good practice.

Periodic review and re-approval

63 The University reviews disciplines on a six-year cycle and the process gives equal consideration to all programmes. When periodic review of a subject discipline takes place, CP is considered in terms of its place in the overall discipline portfolio, its implications for standard provision and the application of collaborative procedures. In 2004 an evaluation of the periodic review process by ULT identified problems caused by incorporating CP, where the approval of programmes is for a limited period of time, into the review cycle. Subsequently the group reviewing collaborative procedures clarified the relationship between periodic review and the re-approval of programmes delivered by or with partners. When periodic review of a subject discipline takes place, CP is considered in terms of its place in the overall discipline portfolio, its implications for standard provision and the application of collaborative procedures.

64 In its CPSED the University described how the detailed examination of the operation of the collaborative programmes is reserved for the re-approval event that usually takes place three years after initial approval (see paragraph 57 above). Where the period of approval is for

more than three years, the CPH states that the relevant SLT should conduct a three-year check. Following the revision of the collaborative procedures a re-approval panel event has been replaced by an in-depth review of the operation of the programme, supported by the use of a template derived from the periodic review template and approval guidelines. It has been recognised that, although a document-based process of re-approval might be preferred, it is not always desirable or possible. In each case of re-approval the format to be followed will be decided by LTPAS, taking into accounts such factors as:

- the length of time since the last quality assurance visit
- the extent of revisions to the programme; student feedback
- a risk assessment.

65 In the view of the audit team the University's procedures for the re-approval of collaborative programmes are robust and take appropriate account of the *Code of practice*.

Withdrawal from partnership or programme delivery

66 The CPSED explained that the revised collaborative procedures and the partnership contract set out a clear process for the termination of partnerships on business or strategic grounds or where standards are judged unsatisfactory. Close contact with partners and the review process provides feedback both on operational issues and on the University's responsibilities for standards and the quality of the student learning experience. Where feedback gives cause for concern, schools are expected to address the operational issues in conjunction with the partner but where concerns relate to standards or the students' learning experience they must be drawn to ULT's attention. If the issues are not resolved to the University's satisfaction and following confirmation by Academic Board, formal withdrawal notices are issued. The CPSED went on to state that where withdrawal arises through strategic or regulatory changes in either the University or the partner, steps will

be taken to phase out the links in a manner that protects students' interests. In all instances of withdrawal schools are required to produce action plans for withdrawal designed to protect students. When a programme delivery approval is due to expire during withdrawal, ULT may grant an extension to the existing approval.

67 From discussions with staff and from reading the documentation supplied to it, the audit team came to the conclusion that the University had appropriate procedures for withdrawing from partnerships where the standard of provision was found to be unsatisfactory. In cases where partnerships were terminated on business or strategic grounds, appropriate measures are taken to safeguard the interests of students.

Articulation partnerships

68 The University was advised in the 2001 QAA audit report to improve the monitoring of the Articulation Agreements that provide for advanced entry, at an intermediate stage, onto a University of Northumbria at Newcastle award. Central oversight of the processes for the approval, monitoring and record keeping of the arrangements for articulated advanced entry was strengthened as part of the revision of collaborative procedures. The CPSED explained that the revised procedures ensured more rigorous, systematic and effective management of the Articulation Agreements that formalise advanced entry arrangements with a partner institution. The arrangements for approving and monitoring Articulation Agreements, when the need for an Articulation partnership is identified, are laid out in the CPH and all proposals require approval by LTPAS in order to maintain oversight at University level. The University explained that a partnership review is not required as articulations are an entry-based activity controlled by the University. A link tutor is appointed by the School to liaise with the partners and offer advice on staff development. The arrangements are monitored by means of the annual review process on the basis of which SLT confirms the continuation of the agreement each year. Where the advanced entry arrangement is to a

franchise programme run by a partner, the panel approving the franchise programme also scrutinises the proposed articulation arrangements and verifies the approval process. The performance of students on the qualifying programme is monitored by means of the annual review and re-approval processes. On the basis of the evidence available to it the audit team came to the conclusion that the University was justified in its confidence that the revised procedures would ensure more effective management of Articulation Agreements.

Support partnerships

69 It was explained in the CPSED that support partnerships were beginning to emerge as schools extended their distance learning activities and explored the potential for working with other organisations in a variety of distance and blended delivery modes. As schools seek to provide a range of study support facilities for students enrolled on distance learning programmes over and beyond those provided by the University itself, they identify institutions or organisations that can provide those facilities. If a partnership arrangement is not already in place with the identified provider, the standard procedures for development and approval are followed and LTPAS determines the appropriate form of partnership review and process for the approval of the support programme. Approval is normally for three years and LTPAS determines the form to be taken by re-approval on the basis of a CVP and a report reviewing the arrangements over the period of operation. The CPSED explained that although the use of an operations manual is not mandatory for distance learning programmes, they are strongly recommended and, where support programmes are being provided, an annex to the manual, or a similar document for inclusion in the contract, is required, setting out the arrangements for the delivery of the programme. The quality and standards of the provision are reviewed in the annual programme review.

70 The audit team noted the University's careful approach to the development and approval of support partnerships and shared

the University's confidence that it had in place procedures to safeguard the interests of students in the event of the anticipated increase in support partnerships.

External participation in internal review processes for collaborative provision

71 The University stated that 'the involvement of external panel members is a central principle of the University's processes for approval and re-approval (and periodic review) of collaborative programmes'. The process for approval of new collaborative programmes is set out in the University's CPH. The CPH defines 'external' in two ways. Firstly, at least one member of the group should be a member of staff external to the school who has experience of internal quality assurance processes. Secondly, the group should also involve a member of the panel who is external to the University and the partner, who is a subject specialist for non-franchised proposals, who has experience of collaborative programmes and, for overseas proposals, has some knowledge of the local (overseas) environment and culture.

72 Membership of validation and periodic review panels must include external members, the suitability of whom is judged against published criteria and is approved by ULT. The documentation provided to support validation and review stresses the importance of ensuring the independence of external advisers. It provides clear guidance related to the passage of time before external examiners or former members of staff can be involved in future review or validation events.

73 The audit team learned from meetings with staff, and from minutes of periodic review panels, that programme level review often incorporates substantial elements of externality, including the use of external examiner reports, recommendation from school industry advisory groups and, where relevant, Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) reports.

74 The audit team viewed CP validation and review reports and these confirm that appropriate use was made of external assessors. Overall the audit team considered that this emphasis on externality is a key part of the University's quality assurance procedures and is a valuable source of external advice in curriculum development, monitoring and review.

External examiners and their reports in collaborative provision

75 The University CPSED stated that external examiners are involved in all work delivered at intermediate level and above and this includes all CP. The University through its ULT's external examiners subcommittee appoints external examiners for all awards and where a programme is taught both at the University and a partner institution it appoints the same external examiner. However, the CPSED also stated that 'due to the increased volume of activity and associated workloads, the appointment of examiners solely for franchised CP is being piloted by the school of Computing, Engineering & Information Sciences (CEIS)'. The University stated that this pilot will consider how best to ensure fitness for purpose and how to maintain comparability of standards if dedicated examiners were to become the norm. The audit team was told that to ensure comparability of standards that all coursework and examinations were reviewed by the 'home' external examiner before the assessments were taken by students. Students studying on franchised programmes sit the same assessments and examinations as home students. The audit team considered that this approach was appropriate. The team agreed with the representative they met from CEIS, who commented that wider use across the University would require some substantial planning with issues such as different time zones, different term dates and the extra commitment needed from the 'home' external examiner.

76 The University stated that the external examining system is crucial to maintaining, sustaining and enhancing standards, and has

confidence in its operation. The University considers that the appointment process is transparent and rigorous, and the processes for inducting and up-dating of external examiners (through the annual conference) and responding to their reports are effective.

77 On appointment, schools provide external examiners with an induction pack which includes the Examiners' Handbook. Newly appointed external examiners are invited, along with existing examiners, to the University's annual conference for external examiners. External examiners submit reports using a well-structured standard template. The report enables the examiner to comment on a range of issues including assessment process, modules examined and student performance. The University operates a two-tier system of examination boards for all taught programmes. At modular examination boards (MEBs) the focus is on moderating the standards of student achievement of the modules belonging to a particular subject group or division. The progression and awards boards (PABs) focus on 'ensuring consistent and fair application of the University's regulations to determine ability to progress within and to attain the award'.

78 The external examiners' reports for CP are treated in the same way as programmes offered at the University. The reports are received by school registrars, and distributed to relevant subject and link staff in the school; a copy is provided for the DVC (Learning and Teaching). The chair of the School Learning and Teaching committee (SLT) is responsible for ensuring that reports are responded to, and that action taken is fed back to the relevant examiner. External examiners' reports are formally considered as part of the annual review process (ARP) and actions are reported to ULT through the school's summary ARR report. Following the annual reviews by schools, a Learning and Teaching Support Adviser from Academic Registry presents an overview report of all collaborative delivery to the University Learning and Teaching Committee (ULT) each year. The CPSED stated that this report, and the summary report which goes forward to Academic Board,

draw out issues which are generic across all ventures as well as those specific to particular areas, partnerships and programmes. The University uses this report to compare the situation with the previous year and enables them to monitor activity, identify trends and take appropriate action. The CPSED stated that at this point they are able to highlight any good practice identified in annual review reports, other Northumbria initiatives and reports from Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and QAA.

79 During the audit it was possible for the audit team to review a wide sample of external examiners' reports and to observe how the University received, considered, analysed, responded to, and made use of their contents. The reports are confirmed when all misunderstandings and clarifications are resolved with the examiner and when any institutional response required in the TQI section of the report is approved. The school is then responsible for uploading the reports to the public folder where they can be accessed by the DVC (Learning and Teaching) and the part A reports can be published in accordance with TQI requirements. The DVC Learning and Teaching chairs ULT where the institutional summary and school annual review summaries are considered.

80 On the evidence available to it the audit team formed the view that the University makes effective use of its external examiner system and this is a key element of its process for assuring the standards of its awards. Through meetings with staff, and scrutiny of external examiner reports, inspecting the TQI site and minutes of meetings relating to CP across the schools and University, the team was able to confirm that procedures were followed, that external examiners were valued and that they played an important part, both in the assurance of quality and standards, and in the development of CP.

The use made of external reference points in collaborative provision

81 The institutional audit report of 2005 stated that the University had engaged constructively with the Academic Infrastructure and 'regarded it as a useful resource'. The University considers that its Quality Framework 'aligns with all elements' of the Academic Infrastructure 'and ensures that standards are set appropriately'.

82 The University stated 'the new CP handbook has recognised the previous procedures' strengths and hence sought to retain those whilst aligning with the changed internal and external environment'. In doing so they took note of the Academic Infrastructure including the revised collaborative section of the *Code of practice*.

83 The Annual Programme Review (APR) and Periodic Review (PR) require that programme specifications make explicit reference to subject benchmark statements published by QAA and, where appropriate, to those produced by PSRBs. The programme approvals process also checks for alignment with subject benchmark statements. The CPSED stated that 'programme specifications are required for all collaborative programmes: a delivery supplement to the Northumbria specification may be used to detail any specific features of the collaboration'. Appropriate benchmark statements, including the Foundation Degree qualification benchmark (FDQB), are referenced in all UK validated programmes and, when appropriate, for overseas validated programmes. Guidance notes for programme developers and approval panel members highlight the need to take into account and confirm the existence of programme specifications and engagement with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, published by QAA.

84 The audit team found the *Code of practice* well embedded, with evidence existing of its use, as well as that of relevant subject benchmark statements, in course development and approval. Staff who met the team, all of

whom were regularly briefed on regulatory changes, demonstrated a general familiarity with the regulatory framework and were confident of their ability to access relevant information through documentation, printed and electronically, from the University and in consultations with senior staff.

85 The CPSED stated that the University 'acknowledges that partners' knowledge of the existence and purpose of the Academic Infrastructure is variable' and is addressing this by using link staff with responsibility for partner institutions introducing the concept to partner staff and reinforcing this with staff development sessions focusing on module delivery, assessment setting and marking protocols. Meetings with partner institutions by the audit team confirmed that the University provides significant support and guidance to them on the importance and use of the Academic Infrastructure.

86 The audit team concluded that the University made extensive use of external reference points in its design, development, delivery and review of programmes and the involvement of industry and professional organisations were sound. This point was noted as a feature of good practice in the FD review of 2005.

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

87 As noted in the institutional audit of 2005 the University has a commitment to vocational education, with great importance attached to programmes gaining professional accreditation wherever this is deemed appropriate. Documentation available to the team stated that the University has active engagement with 50 PSRBs. The University has experienced one review since the institutional audit of 2005; this was the QAA FD review of Business Management, validated by the University and delivered at Newcastle College. In common with its processes for responding to all QAA

and PSRB reports involving the University and its partner colleges, the outcomes of this report was initially considered by the appropriate SLT. An action plan was produced with the collaborative partner and along with the original report, it was sent to ULT. An overview of good practice and recommendations was produced by LTS on behalf of ULT.

88 In respect of its CP, where PSRBs have required a separate application for accreditation, partner institutions have been encouraged to seek professional recognition of the collaborative programmes. Outcomes of external reviews at the subject level are initially considered by the appropriate SLT. An action plan is produced and sent to ULT along with the original report.

89 The audit team was able to read a number of reports and saw evidence that they were considered through school and University committees. The team concluded that the University had engaged positively with reports from external agencies, and that findings were used to good effect.

Student representation in collaborative provision

90 The University stated in the CPSED that provision of mechanisms for student representation is explored at both partnership review and programme approval. Student representatives are included in the membership of all programme committees, and staff at the partner institution are briefed on the requirements and are expected to brief student representatives in turn. There is also an expectation that staff-student liaison committees (SSLCs) will be set up at partner institutions, and the CPSED stated that these 'work well in some areas'. The CPSED described the effectiveness of formal student representation as 'variable' and partly culture-dependent (see paragraph 93 below).

91 The University provided the audit team with evidence from staff and students in a number of partner institutions to demonstrate the effectiveness of its mechanisms for student representation. Both the CP handbook and

operations manuals clearly set out the University's contractual requirements of its partners in this area.

92 Students met by the audit team confirmed that their views were heard through representation on programme committees, although they stated that informal contacts with partner institution staff were regarded as equally important, especially for smaller class groups. This impression was supported by link staff from partner institutions and by link staff at the University who normally attend programme committee meetings at the partner institution. The team found evidence that SSLCs had been set up in some partner institutions. In general, students felt that representation was mainly effected through their local institution, with little direct interaction with the awarding institution, but they were emphatic that they were listened to, and were able to provide examples of change produced in response to their views. The team saw examples of programme committee minutes which attested to active engagement by student representatives.

93 The positive statements made in the CPSED were supported by documentary evidence and by staff and students at meetings. The audit team formed the opinion that student representation is taken seriously by University and partner institution staff and by students and is working effectively and to the satisfaction of students. From the evidence seen, the team are of the opinion that the University is being over-critical in CPSED 92. Formal student representation as described in paragraphs 91-92 above is secure.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

94 The University stated in its CPSED that programme approval committees are asked to check on arrangements for collecting feedback from students. Module and programme questionnaires feed into the annual review process. The University provides partners with questionnaires and requires that these 'or

equivalent' are used. The Operations manual requires a printout of the outcomes to be provided for the purpose of annual monitoring. The University also described how feedback is also obtained by the University staff during their visits to partner institutions, both formally through student representatives on programme committees and informally through meetings with groups of students. Programme coordinators from the University visit partner institutions at least twice a year. Feedback arising from questionnaires or programme committees is required to receive specific attention at school level through the annual review, with action tables generated and where necessary flagged for attention at institutional level. The University believes this process to be effective. The audit team saw evidence of the monitoring by schools and the gathering and use of student feedback in CP, and of the reports of this monitoring through school Annual Reviews (ARs). This process appeared to be consistent across schools.

95 The CPSED stated that there are relatively few systematic mechanisms for obtaining feedback from graduates and employers about overseas collaborative programmes, although some overseas partners seek advice from employers during the initial course development process. A number of programmes delivered overseas have employer involvement by means of work placements, steering groups or employer forums. In the UK, the CPSED stated that all FDs have formal employer links, and the extensive use of employer links in the design of an FD programme was identified as a feature of good practice in the QAA FD Review of Business Management held in June 2005. The team concluded that the University made extensive use of external reference points in its design, delivery and review of programmes and the involvement of industry and professional organisations was sound.

96 Feedback from graduates is mostly obtained through alumni contacts, where the CPSED acknowledged that more could be done. Action is being taken by Northumbria

Business School (NBS) to contact graduates as a first step in improving alumni links, and an alumni association is supported by the University website where many UK and CP graduates have posted brief career histories.

97 In the view of the audit team the University has sound procedures for the collection and use of student feedback in CP. Through its schools, and especially through the efforts of programme coordinators, SLTs and ULT, it is generally successful in ensuring that student feedback is obtained and used consistently and effectively for the management and enhancement of quality in its CP.

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

98 The University stated in its CPSED that the annual review process is the key vehicle for checking quality and stimulating enhancement of collaborative programmes. It went on to describe how annual reviews take into account full statistical information about cohorts, including admission, progression and completion statistics, and that adherence to admissions requirements is verified during annual review by programme coordinators. The audit team saw a number of instances of statistical data being analysed and used in programme evaluation. For FDs, ULT annually considers admission and progression data.

99 The University expressed the expectation that the full implementation of the Strategic Information Technology Systems Ltd student record system (SITS) at the end of 2006 will permit a more comprehensive analysis of statistical data for all deliveries at entry and output stages. However, the CPSED further stated that schools have experienced difficulty in securing full and effective inputs from partner institutions, and that further effort is needed to ensure that partners understand the process and have the necessary statistical data. The audit team saw evidence that the University was active in ensuring that any shortcomings were followed up swiftly.

100 In addition to the annual analyses, major studies of student performance were undertaken for the academic years 2001-02 and 2004-05, permitting general comparisons between average assignment marks obtained by students studying through collaborative arrangements and those of University students. The University sees scope for further research into the effect of different modes of assessment and delivery on these variations, but is satisfied that they can be accounted for by factors such as the degree of selectivity of different programmes and the culture prevailing in different disciplines. External examiners continue to affirm the maintenance of standards. The current analysis is a far too broad-brush and the University is clear that it will extend the statistical analysis to a more useful level of detail as SITS becomes fully operational.

101 The audit team regarded this analysis as providing valuable insight into student performance across the provision and would encourage the University in its aim of making full use of the capacities of SITS to provide a detailed annual statistical analysis.

102 The audit team was satisfied that the University makes good use of statistical data on admission, progression, completion and assessment in its monitoring of standards within and between programmes.

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

103 The University clearly recognises the importance and value of securing high-quality staff in the delivery of all of its provision and in order to enhance this investment there are well established systems of staff support and development emanating from Learning and Teaching Support. In addition the Human Resources Department supports staff appraisal and provides training and development and, in partnership with the Library, funds MARCET (the University Staff Development Resource Centre).

104 The University scrutinises the quality and appointment of staff at its collaborative partners at every stage of programme development. At the programme approval stage, approval panels have to ensure that all staff involved in delivery have the appropriate qualifications and experience. At post-approval each School is responsible for maintaining the same scrutiny for new appointments which must be provided to the University programme coordinator who subsequently presents them for approval at the SLT committee. Also at partnership review the process for appointing partner staff, both academic and administrative, is examined along with their development and appraisal.

105 While the University acknowledges that it 'cannot insist on appraisal at its partner institutions' a staff development plan is required as part of the approval process and the partner is expected to maintain this continuing process for both academic and support staff. Encouragement is also given for partner staff to study for PhDs and postgraduate qualifications and in some cases this occurs under the aegis of the University.

106 The two largest collaborative providers at the University have now established staff induction programmes for the academic and administrative staff of their partners so that they are 'fully inducted' into the teaching requirements, the quality assurance (QA) procedures and administration. In addition other schools have also taken the opportunity to provide workshop presentations to overseas partners on a range of issues including:

- annual review and student feedback
- library and learning resources
- marking and academic misconduct
- web application projects
- master's dissertations.

The Learning and Teaching Support section have provided specific sessions in Newcastle for University and partner staff on collaborative activity. Many of these have focused upon FD provision with, in some cases, contributions from the collaborative institution. This supports

the notion of a spirit of partnership and shared vision indicated in the University UK and overseas Collaborative Development Strategy and the CPH.

107 Confirmation and assurances that these systems were being adhered to and were proving to be very worthwhile came from meetings the audit team had with the University's academic, support and administrative staff and also during visits to partners.

Learning support resources for students in collaborative provision

108 In its CPSED the University stated that the learning resources provided locally by its PIs are tested at programme approval and annual review 'to ensure that all students have a comparable learning experience'. In addition, all students, including those studying remotely from the University are able to access a wide range of resources electronically through its eLearning Portal and its eLibrary and Desktop Anywhere services. Together these provide email, file storage, a virtual learning environment with access to programme and module materials and extensive library services, including, where licences allow, electronic journals, specialist databases and a range of materials for skills development. CP students in the UK have library borrowing rights. The University reported some difficulties in access to the eLearning Portal and in legally appropriate remote delivery of module materials following some system changes at the start of the 2005-06 academic year, but stated that work on redressing problems and restoring confidence in the system is progressing under the ULT eLearning Enhancement Group.

109 A resource statement forms part of the documentation required for programme approval events, and partners are contractually obliged to adhere to university requirements for resource provision through the operations manual. The audit team saw reports from partner reviews, from programme approval and re-approval events and from initial reviews which showed evidence of careful consideration

of the learning resources to be provided by the partner. Initial and annual review report pro forma each contain a section for reporting on resource provision, and the audit team saw examples of actions generated in response to annual reports. The team concluded that the formal procedures for ensuring establishment and maintenance of adequate resources at partner institutions are robust and effective.

110 Students who met the audit team commented on the resources available to them both locally at the PI and electronically from the University. All of them regarded local resources as being at least adequate, and in some cases good or excellent. Students living within travelling distance of the University were able to use the main library, and stated that they did so. Staff and students at partner institutions in the UK have borrowing rights from the University library, and partner staff commented favourably that the library was prepared to post books to them, and did so promptly on request. All the students were aware of their electronic access to resources, but varied widely in the use they made of them. Some work-based students found that their access was limited by their employer's firewalls, and others felt that the resources available to them locally were good and removed the need to use the on-line service.

111 The audit team concluded that the University's approach to learning resources for CP is sound, and that students are reliably provided with appropriate resources to support their learning.

Academic guidance and personal support for students in collaborative provision

112 The University relies on its partner institutions (PIs) to provide personal and direct services such as pastoral and welfare support and academic guidance. Provision is scrutinised at initial approval, and monitored through regular visits by University staff to PIs. Operations manuals clearly set out the expectation that the PI provides a support system which can equate to that provided by the University's personal tutorial

system. The responsibility for making sure that students are given an appropriate induction and that there is an adequate system in place for personal tutoring and counselling is explicitly placed on the PI programme coordinator, and the operations manual sets out the topics to be covered during the induction programme. The role of the eLearning portal and of peer support are described as being of help in providing guidance and overcoming feelings of isolation for all students, particularly those studying remotely.

113 In its CPSED the University points out some variation between partner institutions. Provision of personal support can vary depending on culture and academic guidance is said to vary between partners and countries in line with cultural norms and customs. In discussing the enhancement of quality of its CP provision through the annual review, the University highlights the role of the guidance tutor as an area for development. Part of the support and guidance structure is the Personal Development Plan (PDP), and the University expects its PIs to implement a PDP system as part of the taught programme or through a tutorial scheme. However, embedding of PDP varies with different PIs and this is being monitored.

114 The University's view is that academic guidance and support for students in its PIs are generally satisfactory. Students who met the audit team supported this view, expressing satisfaction with the level of guidance and support provided; in some cases they were very complimentary. Link staff from the University and from PIs also commented on the efforts made by University staff to develop PI staff in good student support practice. An example described to the audit team was the production of a video guide to dissertation writing, made specifically to train both supervising staff and students in an overseas PI where UK dissertation practices are unfamiliar.

115 The audit team concluded that students in the University's CP receive appropriate guidance and support, and considered that in some cases this guidance and support is excellent. The University's management and

monitoring of this aspect of CP is broadly sound and effective. Its procedures for validation of programmes at PIs carefully consider the provision of academic guidance and personal support for students, including those on distance-learning programmes.

Section 3: The collaborative provision audit investigations: published information

The experience of students in collaborative provision of the published information available to them

116 The contractual agreement between the University and its partners includes a requirement that the partner obtains pre-approval for all published material, including press releases, any advertisements on television, radio or in the press, posters, signs or notices, letterheads or business cards, use of the University logo, web pages, or other materials used to promote the programmes, and student handbooks. Publicity material which is not in English must be translated for checking. Schools are responsible for monitoring publicity material, and student handbooks form part of the documentation for programme approval or re-approval where their accuracy is scrutinized.

117 In its CPSED the University commented that despite these strict requirements, there are still instances where material is published by PIs without prior approval. It noted that this is particularly likely to happen with web pages. The University recognises this risk and is seeking to sustain a high level of vigilance and to improve the consistency of adherence to its procedures, particularly where more than one school works with the same partner.

118 University staff who met the audit team were very clear on their responsibilities for checking publicity materials for accuracy, and on the general effectiveness of this process. They were particularly aware of the risks entailed in translation of material into other languages for local publication by overseas PIs, although some University programme

coordinators are fluent in relevant languages and are able to check material directly.

119 The audit team reviewed a range of programme handbooks. Programme handbooks are submitted at programme approval and re-approval, and reports seen by the team confirmed that this requirement was being met. Students who met the audit team expressed satisfaction with the quality and accuracy of information provided both prior to entry and in programme handbooks, and said that they knew what was expected of them. Information about the specific issues of academic offences and complaints was clear and, while students preferred to make any complaints informally in the first instance, they were confident that they knew where to look or whom to ask for information. Students with access to the University's Desktop Anywhere and eLearning portal regarded these as a valuable source of information and guidance.

120 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University had sound procedures for ensuring the appropriateness and accuracy of published information on its CP, and that students were satisfied with the reliability of information to which they had access.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information on collaborative provision leading to the awarding institution's awards

121 The CPSED stated that the University meets TQI, Data protection and Freedom of Information requirements. Development of SITS and management information tools will permit the maintenance of a single system of interlinked databases to meet all information needs, including those for collaborative provision. Until the completion of this project, a separate CP database will be maintained.

122 The University was one of six institutions to pilot TQI in January 2003. The external examiners' report template was revised in 2002 to include the TQI report, and SLTs have responsibility for ensuring the accuracy of the reports. At the time of the audit, summary

reports for 2004-05 from a number of external examiners engaged with CP had been placed on the TQI website. Programme specifications for a number of CP programmes are available on the University's website but not yet on the TQI website. The audit team felt that the University had engaged extensively with the TQI agenda and that it meets current requirements in the publication of information.

123 On the basis of the available evidence, the audit team found that the University was alert to the requirements of HEFCE's document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*, and was moving in an appropriate manner to fulfil its responsibilities in this respect.

Findings

Findings

124 An audit of the collaborative provision (CP) offered by the University of Northumbria at Newcastle (the University) was undertaken during the period 22 to 26 May 2006. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes of study offered by the University through arrangements with collaborative partners, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standard of its awards made through collaborative arrangements. As part of the collaborative audit process, the audit team visited four of the University's collaborative partners. This section of the report summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged during the audit, and making recommendations to the University for action to enhance current practice in its collaborative arrangements.

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

125 Northumbria, like many other UK universities, found that their collaborative provision had evolved to such an extent, with different involvement throughout their schools, that there was a genuine need to 'rationalise delivery partnerships to concentrate on major strategic players who can offer scale and quality of delivery'.

126 The approach taken where 'a spirit of partnership prevails in the relationship' and there is a 'shared vision' genuinely emphasises the collaborative nature of the University's strategic approach. The University recognises that CP enhances the reputation of the institution and enriches the quality of its provision. It seeks to embed this through various means including its International Collaboration and Foundation Degree (FD) Enhancement Groups.

127 The University has also acknowledged the fact that all collaborative activity 'involves some of the highest risk activities in higher education'. It was the view of the audit team that the University had taken a very realistic and practical approach to collaboration by establishing a transparent risk based strategic approach to such ventures which focused upon high quality partners where high value and volume could be generated.

128 The audit team saw many examples of University procedures and systems which gave them confidence that the University had well established processes for managing standards in CP. In the view of the team, the holistic management structure that the University adopts is a strong mechanism for ensuring that communication and information occurs at all levels both vertically and horizontally with the roles of learning and teaching and development used at deputy vice chancellor (DVC) level and also at associate dean level in all schools.

129 While each school is responsible for managing the quality assurance of its own CP, some schools have already developed or had already established dedicated collaborative venture activities. The University's Academic Registry also has a specific unit relating to collaborative activity within its Learning and Teaching Support section. This includes two seconded academics to provide support for collaborative activity. In addition there is an extensive collaborative procedures handbook which clearly articulates the rules, regulations and quality assurance frameworks for managing and operating collaborative arrangements. The annual cycle of quality assurance systems which the University uses in its home provision is also replicated within CP to ensure that there is equity of academic standards throughout all of the University's awards.

130 The audit team found great consistency in their discussions with students about the quality of their learning experience and the efficient comprehensive management processes which were used. The overarching strategies and policies of the University's quality assurance provide the context of CP and every effort is

made to ensure inclusiveness for students on collaborative programmes so that, as far as possible, they benefit from the same learning experience as their student colleagues on the University sites in Newcastle.

131 The audit team has confidence in the consistency of the systems and procedures being used at all centres for CP. The Collaborative Procedures Handbook plays a key role in this process as it ensures that there is a rigorous framework for the delivery of collaborative programmes by schools and all aspects are addressed.

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

132 The University makes a clear distinction between the consideration and verification of collaborative partnerships and the subsequent approval of collaborative programmes offered by or with a partner institution. Considerable importance is attached to the development phase of collaborative links. Although contact with a potential partner can arise in a variety of ways, it is the responsibility of the relevant school to develop a proposal and undertake a risk assessment. Proposals, which include a business plan, have to be approved by the school's senior management group as consistent with the school's academic development plan before scrutiny by a university level committee in order to ensure that they are consistent with institutional policies and strategies and that the underlying basis for a proposed collaboration is sound. Two senior members of staff carry out a partnership review focusing on the ability of the proposed partner to provide a high-quality learning experience; visits are confined to proposals assessed as high risk. If the review is satisfactory, Academic Board will approve the partnership, usually for a period of six years. All collaborative partnerships are underwritten by a formal contract and are subject to a re-approval process (see paragraphs 63 and 67 above) designed to satisfy Academic Board of the key features of the partnership's operation.

133 Any school may submit proposals for programme delivery in collaboration with a partner approved by Academic Board. Approval panels include a member external to the University and the partner with experience of CP and, for overseas proposals, some knowledge of the local environment. Approval is normally limited to three years for a full-time programme in order to minimise risk and maintain standards and any conditions attached to approval are carefully monitored. Every programme is required to have, as part of the contractual agreement, an operations manual that defines quality assurance standards and takes account of University policies in matters such as assessment, staff development and student support. The manual also sets out the roles and responsibilities of the staff involved in the delivery of the programme. Collaborative programmes are included in the University's periodic review of disciplines but a detailed, document-based examination of the operation of such programmes takes place when the programme is due for re-approval, normally three years after initial approval. By means of its investigations the audit team was able to confirm that the process of approval and re-approval of both collaborative partners and programmes was robust, effective and informed at every stage by risk assessment.

134 All collaborative programmes are subject to the University's annual review process, which is intended to provide a check on the quality of provision and to ensure enhancement. In addition, an Initial Review of all new collaborative programmes is conducted at the end of the first semester to provide early feedback and identify any operational issues that may require attention in advance of annual review. The standard template for annual review, requiring analysis of statistical data, student feedback and reports of external examiners, has been modified for franchise and validated programmes, and to encourage more engagement by partners. Annual review reports, which identify good practice and set out action plans, are considered by school learning and teaching committees. They also form the basis for annual overview of CP

compiled by the learning and teaching support advisers for the University Learning and Teaching Committee and Academic Board. The audit team found that the University had appropriate procedures for securing an overview of the quality of its collaborative programmes.

135 Arrangements for student representation are considered as part of the procedures for the approval of collaborative programmes. There is student representation on all programme committees and an expectation that student-staff liaison committees will be set up at partner institutions. The audit team found evidence that student representation was effective and valued by students as a means to effect change. Feedback from students is collected and acted upon in a variety of ways: by module and programme questionnaires which feed into the annual review process; by student representation on programme committees and by meetings between students and University staff on visits to partner institutions. There are, however, relatively few systematic mechanisms for collecting feedback from graduates and employers, especially about overseas collaborative programmes. All FDs have formal employer links, which are used in the design and development of programmes, and a number of programmes have employer involvement by means of work placements or employer forums.

136 The University recognises the importance for the quality of the student experience of ensuring a high level of staffing support in its CP, both in the partner institution staff and in the University teaching and administrative staff who are responsible for the quality assurance and effective operation of the collaborative link at programme level. The systems in partner institutions for staff appointment, appraisal and development is scrutinised at the stage of partnership review. Approval panels for collaborative programmes are required to ensure that staff involved in the delivery of programmes have appropriate qualifications and experience. Following approval, schools are responsible for maintaining the scrutiny of new

appointments which are reported by programme coordinators to school learning and teaching committees. The operations manual sets out the precise roles and responsibilities of programme directors, link coordinators, module tutors and administrators, which vary as between franchise and validated programmes. A staff development plan is required from the partner as part of the approval process and is included in the operations manual. It is also recognised that initial staff development, particularly in the case of programmes delivered overseas, may be required to ensure a full understanding by partner staff of the University processes for quality assurance and the maintenance of standards. On the basis of the available evidence, the audit team found that effective procedures existed to ensure the suitability of staff engaged with CP.

137 It was the view of the audit team that the University had established well developed and comprehensive systems and procedures for managing its CP. The findings of the team though its extensive research and investigation indicated quite clearly that its management systems were working effectively and that there was equity between collaborative and home-based provision.

138 Overall, the audit team considered that broad confidence can be placed in the University's procedures for assuring and maintaining the quality of its collaborative programmes.

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

139 In its CPSED, the University described its approach to collaborative activity as one based 'on belief that effectiveness is best achieved where a spirit of partnership prevails in the relationship'. Its aim was to work with its partner institution 'to ensure consistency, comparable experiences for the students, and to sustain the standards of the awards'.

In order to achieve this aim all collaborative arrangements are scrutinised for consistency with the University's strategies and policies for fulfilling its responsibilities, for all its awards, irrespective of where the student studies or through whatever mode.

140 In securing the standards and quality of its awards in collaborative partnerships, the University relies upon external peer evaluation. This takes two forms: firstly, peers from outside the University who are either academics or those with a relevant industrial or professional background; secondly, peers from within the University, drawn from schools independent of the proposers, who are themselves programme leaders/directors and module tutors and who have quality assurance and enhancements roles.

141 On appointment, schools provide external examiners with an induction pack, including the Examiners' Handbook, and, together with existing examiners, are invited to the University's annual conference for external examiners.

142 External examiners submit reports using a well-structured standard template. The report enables the examiner to comment on a range of issues, including the assessment process, modules examined and student performance. Reports from programme assessment boards focus on 'ensuring consistent and fair application of the University's regulations to determine ability to progress within and to attain the award' and ask for comment on operation of the examination board.

143 The external examiners' reports for CP are treated in the same way as programmes offered at the University. The reports are received by school registrars, and are distributed to relevant subject and link staff in the school and a copy is provided for the DVC (Learning and Teaching). Following the annual reviews by schools, a learning and teaching support adviser from Academic Registry presents an overview report of all collaborative delivery to the University Learning and Teaching Committee (ULT) each year.

144 Overall, the audit team was able to confirm that the University's framework for managing the quality of the students' experience and the academic standards in CP was appropriate and that effective oversight of the delivery of collaborative programmes by schools was maintained and remedial action taken when necessary. Procedures are fully documented and guidance is given to staff on their implementation at every stage.

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

145 The University stated that it regarded the Academic Infrastructure as 'a useful resource' and the University considered that its quality framework 'aligns with all elements' of the infrastructure.

146 The CPSED stated that the University was confident that the quality and standards of the students' experience was assured and monitored by the operation of effective risk-based procedures for the development, approval and review of collaborative activity. Collaborative partners are expected to adopt the University's assessment procedures and guidelines for good practice. All assessment is aligned with the relevant sections of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)* published by QAA. The CPSED stated that the 'Academic Registry presents an overview report of all collaborative delivery activity to ULT each year'.

147 The University's APR and PR require that programme specifications make explicit reference to subject benchmark statements published by QAA and, where appropriate, to those produced by PSRBs. The CPSED stated that 'programme specifications are required for all collaborative programmes: a delivery supplement to the Northumbria specification may be used to detail any specific features of the collaboration'. Appropriate benchmark statements, including the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*, are referenced in all UK validated programmes and where appropriate for overseas validated programmes.

148 Having reviewed the information provided by the University in the CPSED and its annexes along with material provided for the audit visit, the audit team believes that the University's approach to aligning its own arrangements to the advice offered by the Academic Infrastructure had been critical, evaluative, timely and effective, and the account offered in the CPSED was accurate and reliable.

The utility of the CPSED 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

149 The CPSED prepared for this audit was exemplary in providing a clear, accurate and comprehensive outline of the University's framework for quality assurance, maintenance of standards, and support of student learning. The document presented an honest and balanced view of the University's procedures and was self-reflective in assessing strengths and limitations. The audit team concluded that it had clearly been written to assist their work and the level of self-reflection in the document and proposed actions to address limitations gave confidence in the University's ability to enhance quality and standards.

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

150 The University provided convincing evidence to support its claim that the way in which its collaborative procedures had evolved by building on good practice originating in a particular school provided a key to its intentions for enhancing the quality of its CP. Continuous improvement in collaborative activity is achieved in a variety of ways, including the identification of themes for further development by means of the annual review process and the reports of the learning and teaching support advisers on CP to the

University Learning and Teaching Committee and Academic Board. The Enhancement Groups established by the University Learning and Teaching Committee play an important role in identifying and disseminating good practice and in the area of CP the work of the International Collaboration Enhancement Group and the Foundation Degrees Group has enabled the sharing of expertise and the further improvement of procedures.

151 Further evidence of the enhancement of collaborative activity was provided by the University's intention in a new UK and Overseas Collaborative Development Strategy to focus on high quality partners with the potential to offer collaborative programmes in several disciplines. The embedding of a risk-based approach to the development of collaborative partnerships and programmes provides further confidence that the University has the capacity to enhance its CP while continuing to exercise its responsibilities for the standards and quality of that provision. The findings of this audit are made in the light of evidence that the University has both the intention and the ability further to enhance its CP.

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

152 The University is careful to monitor materials published by its partner institutions for publicity and student information. Partner institutions are contractually required to submit all publicity materials to the University for pre-approval before publication, and material that is not in English must either be translated or scrutinised by University staff who are fluent in the language used.

153 Student handbooks are scrutinised during programme approval and review. Handbooks seen by the audit team were comprehensive and clear to students, who expressed their satisfaction with the information provided to them both before enrolment and during their studies.

154 The University was one of six institutions to pilot TQI in January 2003. External

examiners' report templates include a section for the TQI report, and schools are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of published reports. At the time of the audit, summary reports for 2004-05 from a number of external examiners engaged with CP were available on the TQI website. The audit team felt that the University had engaged extensively with the TQI agenda and that it meets current requirements in the publication of information.

155 On the basis of the available evidence, the audit team found that the University was alert to the requirements of the Higher Education Funding Council for England's document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*, and was moving in an appropriate manner to fulfil its responsibilities in this respect.

Features of good practice

156 Of the features of good practice noted in the course of the CP audit, the audit team noted in particular:

- i the high quality guidance given on the development and delivery of CP, as exemplified by the Collaborative Procedures Handbook and the operations manuals (paragraphs 34, 37, 38)
- ii the sharing within the University of good practice, in particular through the work of the Learning and Teaching Support Advisers and the Enhancement Groups on International Collaboration and FDs (paragraphs 46, 49)
- iii the careful separation between the development and approval of collaborative partnerships and the subsequent approval of collaborative programmes, informed by the practical application of a user-friendly risk assessment process (paragraphs 51, 52, 57)

- iv the process of initial review conducted

at the end of the first semester of programme delivery for all new collaborative programmes (paragraph 60).

Recommendations for action

- 157 It would be desirable for the University:
- i to continue to ensure that students for whom English is a second language are fully capable of learning through the medium of English from an early stage in their programme (paragraph 43).

Appendix

The University of Northumbria at Newcastle's response to the collaborative provision audit report

The University welcomes the report on its collaborative provision as providing a valuable external evaluation of its management of its collaborative provision. It was pleased to receive the judgements of broad confidence in its management of academic standards and of student learning opportunities on programmes. The identified features of good practice reflect the importance that the University has placed of developing clear and effective collaborative procedures and on sharing good practice both internally and with partners.

The University is committed to continual improvement of learning and teaching and takes very seriously all recommendations for action received from external sources. The University Learning and Teaching (ULT) Committee will monitor the action to be taken in response to the audit report and has already approved an action plan. In relation to the recommendation that is desirable that the University 'continues to ensure that students for whom English is a second language are fully capable of learning through the medium of English', ULT has established a task group to ensure that existing good practice in this area is fully shared and further enhanced.

The University would like to thank all who participated in the audit process, in particular the students and staff of the partner institutions who contributed, through input to the self-evaluation and through participation in audit meetings and partner visits.

