

University of Plymouth

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 University of Plymouth (the University) from 8 to 12 May 2006 to carry out a collaborative provision audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes offered by the University through collaborative arrangements with partner organisations, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements.

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

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

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

The term 'collaborative provision' is taken to mean 'educational provision leading to an award, or to specific credit toward an award, of an awarding institution delivered and/or supported and/or assessed through an arrangement with a partner organisation' (*Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and*

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

In a collaborative provision audit 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 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 structures, processes, procedures and initiatives that the University has in place to realise the ambitions of the 'hub and rim' model in delivering higher education in further education colleges within the region. These are exemplified by: the establishment and operation of the University of Plymouth Colleges Faculty (UPC); the joint boards of study; the refinement of standard quality assurance documentation to accommodate the requirements of partner institutions, and associated guidance including the document 'Preparing a foundation degree programme for approval by UPC'
- the deliberate construction of an academic culture supporting 'communities of practice and scholarship' across the collaborative partners, as demonstrated by: subject fora; University fellowship

schemes; the operation of the Higher Education Learning Partnership Centre of Excellence in Learning and Teaching; the funding of scholarly activity and research in some partners; and other targeted investment of resources

- the guidance and support provided to external examiners via: the University website; the UPC annual conference, and the formalisation of mentoring arrangements for external examiners working with UPC
- the partnership between the University and the University of Plymouth Students' Union to improve student representation in its collaborative provision
- the collegiate approach to staff development that provides extensive opportunities to all staff involved in the delivery and support of University programmes across partner institutions.

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- reflect on the arrangements for the allocation of external examiners to Foundation Degree programmes with the same award title delivered at different partner colleges; and the procedures for bringing together the judgements of external examiners regarding the standards of these programmes
- incorporate into the process for dealing with external examiner reports an additional mechanism to check that University-approved responses have been forwarded to the external examiners within the published timescale
- continue developing and strengthening the availability and use of data, at all levels within the University, for the purpose of

better understanding progression, retention and completion, and for the monitoring of strategic objectives.

National reference points

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

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 by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in the document *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance (HEFCE 03/51)*. The audit team was satisfied that the information the University and its partner organisations are currently publishing about the quality of collaborative programmes and the standards of the University's awards was reliable and that the University was making adequate progress towards providing requisite teaching quality information for its collaborative provision.

Main report

Main report

1 An audit of the collaborative provision offered by the University of Plymouth (the University) was undertaken from 8 to 12 May 2006. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes offered by the University through collaborative arrangements with partner organisations, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements.

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

3 In relation to collaborative arrangements, the audit team checked the effectiveness of the University's procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of its academic awards; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of the programmes leading to those awards; for publishing reliable information about its collaborative provision; and for the discharge of its responsibilities as an awarding institution. As part of the process, the team visited three of the University's partner organisations in the UK, where it met with staff and students, and conducted by video or

telephone-conference equivalent meetings with staff and students from a further two overseas organisations.

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

4 The University can trace its origins to the establishment of a Mechanics Institute in 1825 and Plymouth's Nautical School in 1863. By 1932, these institutions had evolved into Plymouth and Devonport Technical College, which became Plymouth Polytechnic in 1970. Amalgamations with Exeter College of Art, Rolle College of Education, and Seale Hayne College led to the formation of the Polytechnic South West in 1989, which became the University of Plymouth in 1992 with the award of university title. In 1995, the Tor and South West College of Health was incorporated and in 2002, the Peninsula Medical School (PMS) was established in collaboration with the University of Exeter. The University has full degree-awarding powers.

5 The University has a substantial portfolio of collaborative provision with 27 partners across Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and Somerset and a larger number of smaller links involving institutions elsewhere in UK, Europe, and in Asia. In 2004-05, the students taught through these arrangements numbered 11,120 (of whom 6,643 were part-time), or 38 per cent of the headcount of students taught by of the University (28,935).

6 The present academic structure consists of seven faculties: Arts, Education, Health and Social Work, Science, Social Science and Business, Technology, and the University of Plymouth Colleges faculty (UPC). There is, in addition, the PMS managed jointly with the University of Exeter. With the exception of the Faculty of Education and the UPC, the faculties are organised into schools, of which there are 15. The University created its Graduate School in autumn 2003 to play a key role in the development of the postgraduate community within the University.

7 The most substantial proportion of the University's collaborative provision is managed through one of its seven faculties, the UPC, which was set up in 2003 in order to bring partnerships within the mainstream organisational, planning and delivery processes, and to emphasise the centrality of regional collaborations to the University's mission. The UPC has 17 associated partner colleges, including four Royal Navy establishments, and in 2004-05 UPC was involved in provision for 6,384 students (of whom 3,054 were part-time), or 22 per cent of the University's total numbers and 57 per cent of its collaborative numbers. A significant proportion of this provision involves Foundation Degrees. The number of students studying within the partnerships contained by UPC has almost doubled over the last decade.

8 The character of the UPC is distinct from the other faculties in that it has no particular disciplinary focus of its own, but there are strong links to other faculties in relation to curricular development, communities and student progression. The University articulates its links with its regional partners in terms of a 'hub and rim' model with the University as the hub and the partner colleges participating in the UPC constituting the rim, which allows students access to locally provided programmes and the possibility of progression to higher levels of study at the University. It is the University's ambition that 40 per cent of students on locally provided programmes will progress in this way.

9 In addition to the UPC, the other six faculties of the University have their own collaborative arrangements, sometimes with the same institutions involved in the UPC, but delivering programmes that for academic and strategic reasons are managed within the discipline-based faculties. The Faculty of Health and Social Work has partnerships with NHS Acute and Primary Care Trusts delivering modules within its Health Studies programmes and a range of professional development courses. The NHS-funded provision has been reviewed separately by QAA through two major

reviews in 2003 and 2004. The Faculty of Education uses partnerships to provide post-compulsory education and training (PCET), a range of master's programmes delivered both in UK and abroad, and professional development programmes developed in collaboration with local education authorities, schools, further education (FE) and higher education (HE) colleges.

10 Collaborative provision in the faculties of Arts, Science, Social Science and Business, Technology involves fewer student numbers, but a wide range of regional, national and international collaborations. These include contracted out provision and articulation agreements with regional private organisations and educational providers in Europe and the Far East.

11 The University also has institutional accreditation arrangements with University College Falmouth (which obtained degree-awarding powers in 2004) and Dartington College of Arts. In addition the University provides joint degrees with the University of Exeter at the Peninsula Medical School, and has recently established an affiliation agreement with a private institution providing undergraduate and masters programmes.

12 The University has a sustained record in gaining external recognition for its teaching quality and innovation, particularly where they involve partnerships with colleges in the region. In 2005 it was awarded four Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) through competitive bidding under the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) initiative. All of these awards contribute to its collaborative provision, particularly the CETL designed to support 'Higher Education Learning Partnerships' (HELP). The University was chosen by HEFCE to pilot the early form of the national programme of Foundation Degrees and its staff were members of the Foundation Degree Benchmarking Group. Staff at the University have also been successful in winning a notable number of National Teaching Fellowships.

13 A new Vice-Chancellor was appointed in September 2002, following which there were significant changes to the University's administrative and academic structures, together with a reduction of the number of sites on which provision was delivered. At the time of the audit, the 'hub' of the University was centred on the Plymouth, Exeter and Exmouth campuses, while medical education was provided at PMS sites in Plymouth, Exeter and Truro. From 2008, the Exmouth campus will be closed and education provision there moved to the main site in Plymouth.

14 The University's mission is to be a University of excellence, which:

- delivers teaching and research to world-class standards
- fosters scholarship and culture
- serves the region
- develops responsible students capable of critical reasoning and practical action;
- is open and accessible
- is an effective community working in partnership with others.

15 The collaborative provision self-evaluation document (CPSED) explained that the University sees its collaborative provision arrangements as a fundamental part of delivering all six elements of its mission. It stated that 'we do not see our collaborative provision as separate from the rest of the University's activities but as an integral part of our provision, with important synergies across the University'. The intention is that collaborative arrangements will encourage innovation and have positive impacts across all the University's activities, including curricular design, learning and teaching strategies, the development of postgraduate programmes and the meeting of the broader social and economic objectives of the University.

16 Within the University's Corporate Plan 2004 to 2009, the third strategic objective is to: 'strengthen our existing HE/FE partnerships in the region through the formal establishment of

UPC so continuing to serve the needs of the peninsula by offering dispersed HE provision and strengthening opportunities for FE/HE progression'. The University includes in its regional role intentions to develop new and innovative curricula, to create opportunities for knowledge transfer and commercial exploitation, and to strengthen collaboration with employers.

Background information

17 The published information available for this audit included:

- the information on the University's website
- the University's institutional audit report, March 2005
- the Foundation Degree review of Law, July 2005
- the Foundation Degree review of Education (Teaching Assistants), June 2005
- the major review of Healthcare programmes, December 2003, June 2004.

18 The University provided the QAA with the following documents:

- the CPSED
- the student written submission (SWS) prepared by University of Plymouth Students' Union (UPSU)
- the Quality Assurance Handbook: Taught Programmes (QAH), September 2005
- access to the University intranet
- documentation relating to the partner institutions visited by the audit team.

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

The collaborative provision audit process

20 Following a preliminary meeting at the University in May 2005 between a QAA officer and representatives of the University and students, the University provided its CPSED in December 2005. QAA confirmed in January 2006 that five partner visits would be conducted between the briefing and audit visits. The University provided QAA with briefing documentation in February 2006 for each of the selected partner institutions.

21 The students of the University were invited, through UPSU, to contribute to the collaborative provision audit process in a way that reflected the current capacity of the Union to reflect the views of students studying University awards through collaborative partners. Officers from UPSU contributed to the development of the CPSED and in December 2005 provided a SWS on the University's procedures, the accuracy of the information it publishes, and examples of best practice in provision for UPC students. The audit team was able to meet officers of UPSU at the briefing visit and is grateful to them for their engagement with the process.

22 The audit team visited the University from 14 to 16 March 2006 to explore with senior members of staff of the University, senior representatives from partner institutions, and student representatives from UPSU and partner institutions, matters relating to the management of quality and academic standards in collaborative provision raised by the University's CPSED and other documentation, and to assist the team in building a clear understanding of the University's approach to collaborative arrangements. At the close of the briefing visit, a programme of meetings for the audit was agreed with the University. It was also agreed that five partner institutions would be visited.

23 During the visits to partners, members of the team met senior staff, teaching staff and student representatives of partner institutions in UK and abroad. The overseas meetings were

conducted using video and telephone-conferencing. The team is grateful to all the students and staff involved in these meeting for their help in gaining an understanding of the University's arrangements for managing its collaborative arrangements.

24 The audit visit took place from 8 to 12 May 2006, and included further meetings with staff and students of the University. The audit team is grateful to all the staff and students, both of the University and its partners, who participated in meetings.

25 The audit team comprised Professor J Baldock, Professor S Billingham, Dr D Gray, Professor A Jago, Dr M Stowell and Mrs L Walmsley. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mrs E Harries Jenkins, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Developments since the institutional audit of the awarding institution

26 The findings of the institutional audit report (2005) highlighted a number of areas of good practice which the team was able to observe in the context of the University's collaborative provision. The active use and continuous development of student and staff internet portals was confirmed by the collaborative provision audit. The SkillsPlus Strategy, which draws together academic support, skills development and employability was found to exist in practice in partner colleges, although students did not always recognise the name of the strategy itself. The partnership between the University and UPSU to improve student representation, identified as a feature of good practice in the institutional audit, was also reflected in the appointment of an officer of the students' union to liaise with HE students in the partner colleges. This post is funded by the UPC.

27 Since the institutional audit the University has made some changes to its structures and processes which have implications for collaborative provision. New approval processes have been established for UK partnerships and for overseas partners. These now take place in

the context of a more precise typology of collaborative arrangements. At the same time a subcommittee of the Academic Board has been established to review the strategic, financial and legal implications of new or continuing partnerships: the Institutional Partnerships Committee (IPC) set up in January 2006. The institutional review of collaborative partnerships takes place every five years. A revised version of this process was piloted in the institutional review of one of the UPC partner colleges in 2005 and the audit team was able to consider the minutes and action plans that had emerged from this process.

28 The institutional audit report's (2005) only advisory recommendation was 'to give the necessary impetus to ensure full implementation of the University's Assessment Policy at faculty and school levels, with an emphasis on achieving local consistency in arrangements for marking and the provision of feedback to students'. This recommendation was based mainly on evidence of variation in local practices affecting the moderation of and feedback on coursework. At the time of the collaborative audit, the University was awaiting a report from its Learning and Teaching Task Group that will lead to agreed minimum standards for feedback and moderation by September 2007. The inquiries of the audit team indicated that collaborative partners were aware of the University's current policies on assessment and that these were applied appropriately (see paragraphs 35, 44).

29 Two desirable recommendations were included in the institutional audit report (2005). The first asked the University to be proactive in monitoring the effectiveness of associate deans in interpreting institutional quality requirements, promoting consistent operation of quality assurance and enhancement processes, and in working to achieve an equivalence of student experience across faculties. The audit team was able to confirm the key roles that the associate deans (learning and teaching) in each of the faculties and the Associate Dean (Quality) in the UPC perform in relation to quality management. These functions are now further enhanced by

the regular meetings of associate deans and Quality Support.

30 The second desirable recommendation was to publicise module reviews amongst students and to adopt a university-wide approach to utilising module evaluation and communicating resultant actions. As explained in paragraphs 107 and 108, the various partners colleges use both the University's and their own methods of module and programme review, and clear evidence was found that feedback is obtained and used to inform actions taken and that students were aware of these outcomes.

31 Following the institutional audit, QAA conducted two Foundation Degree reviews, in Law and in Education (Teaching Assistants), and the reports were published in June and July 2005. The audit team noted that these reports had been considered at the relevant programme annual review meetings and subsequently at the UPC Faculty Board, and that appropriate actions were initiated in response. The outcomes were reported to the March 2006 meeting of the University's Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC).

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

The awarding institution's strategic approach to collaborative provision

32 The University has identified five institutional typologies for its collaborative provision: accredited, associate, affiliated, joint and dual. Accredited partner institutions are those recognised by the University as able to design, approve, deliver, assess, review and evaluate their own academic taught programmes to a standard that is appropriate for programmes leading to a University award.

Affiliated partners are those which usually deliver mainly HE programmes but are not necessarily designated as HEIs, and have demonstrated to the University their ability to design, review and evaluate its taught academic programmes. Associate partners are normally regional UK HE or FE colleges that cooperate with the University in providing higher education on a 'hub and rim' model. The Colleges may design their own HE programmes within a scope agreed through the University's planning approval process. Joint partners are awarding bodies who have the statutory powers to award a joint degree with another awarding body. The partner usually shares responsibility for the design, credit rating and delivery of particular programmes with the University. Dual partners are those awarding bodies who offer, with the University, the same or overlapping programme involving study at each institution.

33 The University has also identified seven collaborative provision typologies for arrangements at the programme level:

- validation - programmes are designed and offered by a partner organisation
- contracted out - the University contracts out all or part of an approved University programme to a partner organisation to deliver
- research - a written agreement is established with the collaborating institution ensuring compliance with the University's Minimum Benchmarks for postgraduate research students; agreed joint supervisory arrangements, and clearly articulated fees and payments arrangements
- credit rating - the University grants specific credit to modules offered and sometimes designed by a partner organisation
- outreach - programmes are delivered by the University's own staff off-campus, using another organisation's premises and/or learning resources; these are sometimes delivered as part of a consortium with other HEIs and/or employers

- school experience and clinical placements - which form part of an approved University programme
- articulation - the University grants specific credit and advanced standing to students completing a named programme of study pursued in a partner organisation, usually overseas.

34 The University's approach to assuring academic standards is to apply its academic regulations and assessment policy equally to all collaborative provision, with the exception of accredited or affiliated partner colleges whose own internal procedures are subject to approval. Affiliated partners are normally required to operate within the University's quality assurance system and procedures, but may function under different regulations with prior approval from the University. Memoranda of agreement set out the responsibilities of each partner and the University, and reflects the level of autonomy and responsibility appropriate to the experience/maturity of the institution.

35 Programmes delivered through collaborative arrangements are subject to the University's common processes of approval, programme and module modification, and annual programme monitoring (APM) and periodic review. The arrangements for assessment, for the appointment and induction of external examiners and for responses to their reports are also similar across all partnerships.

36 The University's strategic approach to managing the quality of its collaborative provision has been designed to allow significant flexibility appropriate to the range and variety of that provision. The CPSED described this as 'a sufficient approach', consistent with the external academic framework, but allowing local interpretation and a devolved quality management structure. The principles and procedures involved are set out in the University's QAH and in its Research Degree Regulations and Procedures. These provide detailed guidance on their application to collaborative provision and in particular how they operate within the UPC.

37 While the Vice-Chancellor has ultimate accountability for quality and standards, formal responsibility and oversight across collaborative arrangements lies with the Academic Board, assisted by a number of subcommittees, notably the LTC, and by the office of Quality Support. The University's quality assurance processes are underpinned by a number of principles including that quality assurance is a shared responsibility of the whole University and its staff, and that implementation and enhancement are entrusted, where possible, to the faculties, with quality assurance for external institutional arrangements being managed at University level. The CPSED described, and the audit team observed, numerous channels, both vertical and horizontal, particularly within UPC and between it and the other faculties, through which matters related to quality and enhancement were discussed and acted upon. This institutional-wide approach to quality assurance permits autonomy and local differences amongst partners whilst maintaining an effective and efficient balance between the risks and benefits of flexibility within the range of collaborative arrangements.

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

38 The University's framework for managing the quality of the students' experience and academic standards in its collaborative provision is embedded in the Institutional Quality and Standards Framework approved by LTC in 2004, with minor amendments made in November 2005. The Framework places responsibility for institutional oversight of quality and standards of taught programmes with LTC and while LTC terms of reference do not include specific reference to collaborative provision, the audit team heard that the University sees this committee as critical in bringing consideration of UPC and non-UPC collaborative provision together at institutional level. The new IPC will report jointly to the Academic Board and Chancellery on proposals for new or extended partnership arrangements.

It will also monitor the register of collaborative agreements and international partnership arrangements annually through summary reports from faculties (see paragraph 58). At the time of the audit visit, the University was still considering the ways in which this committee and the LTC could best work together in the future in relation to maintaining oversight of all collaborative provision, but it was anticipated that the work of the IPC would further enhance the role of the LTC in this regard.

39 The processes and procedures for quality assurance of collaborative provision are described in the institutional QAH available in hardcopy and electronically. The final sections of the QAH describe quality assurance processes relating to collaborative provision in the UPC (Section 6), Accredited Colleges (Section 7); Faculty of Health (Section 8), and processes for approval of new UK and overseas partners (Section 9). The general procedures for taught programmes described in the rest of the QAH apply to collaborative provision outside the UPC, accredited colleges, and the Faculty of Health and Social Work.

40 Associate deans (learning and teaching), or their equivalent, manage quality assurance processes through a broadly common structure of programme committees, faculty learning and teaching committees (FLTCs), and faculty boards. The latter being, according to the QAH 'the ultimate Faculty authority in matters of quality and standards'. In addition to these committees and boards, the UPC has established two additional structures concerned with managing the quality of the student experience and academic standards in its collaborative arrangements: joint boards of studies (JBS) and subject fora.

41 The JBS are formal subcommittees of the UPC Faculty Board. Among other functions, they receive and discuss APM reports from relevant programme committees, discuss and recommend proposals for new programmes, changes to existing ones, and withdrawal of programmes, and implement action on quality issues relating to UPC programmes at a partner. Their membership includes senior staff of the

partner college including programme managers, representatives from learning resources, subject fora chairs (SFC) and student representatives. The audit team formed the view that the JBS evidenced the good practice relating to the structures, processes, procedures and initiatives that the University has in place to realise the ambitions of the 'hub and rim' model in delivering HE in FE colleges in the region.

42 Subject fora are a mechanism for bringing together staff in cognate disciplines/subjects, sometimes across faculty boundaries, and in partner colleges to discuss quality enhancement, curricula, staff development, and facilitating the progression of students from partner colleges to the University. The SFC normally hold fractional appointments in their home faculty and are seconded to the UPC to fulfil these duties.

43 Faculty boards are required to submit an annual summary report to the LTC regarding changes to modules, programmes and new programme approvals agreed during the year. They are also responsible for submitting a summary report on APM to the LTC.

44 The University monitors the achievement of students on programmes within its collaborative provision through its two-tier system of subject assessment panels, which review and agree standards of assessment and agree final marks, and award assessment boards that consider overall student performance, and make decisions on progression and awards. The University monitors overall trends in student achievement through the annual monitoring process (see paragraph 110).

45 The University's response to the revised Section 2 of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, had, at the time of the audit visit, included construction of an institutional typology of collaborative provision outlining the broad quality assurance responsibilities at institutional, faculty and programme level for each type of arrangement, and new guidance on processes for the approval of articulation arrangements. The University has a register of

collaborative provision updated by Quality Support as necessary. The University sees the Register as having been invaluable in raising awareness of Section 2 of the *Code* (see paragraph 89).

46 Evidence seen and heard by the audit team led it to conclude that the development and refinement of structures for managing collaborative provision since 2004 has created an effective and appropriate framework for managing the quality and standards of the University's collaborative provision. The team further concluded that subject fora were making a particularly positive contribution to enhancing the quality of student learning opportunities within the collaborative provision of UPC and considered them to be good practice.

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

47 The CPSED clearly outlined the University's intentions to further enhance collaborative provision both in terms of managing quality and standards and the student experience. In relation to managing quality and standards, the University is pursuing a number of initiatives, including the development of more effective mechanisms for considering new partnerships through the recently established IPC and the development and operation of new procedures for giving institutional approval (see paragraph 57). The audit team saw evidence of the effective use of this procedure in establishing the first affiliated partner at the end of 2005; the improvement in the use of statistical data in the annual monitoring process, in order to identify collaborative provision explicitly within that data (see paragraph 113) and the full implementation of the University's Minimum Benchmarks for postgraduate research students, to ensure the equivalence in relation to the entitlement of students in distant international locations. All such students have at least one supervisor who is a member of University staff, while supervisors in partner institutions undergo a supervisor training course provided by the University's Graduate School.

48 The University is continuing to use internal quality audits, commended in the institutional audit report (2004), to investigate the effectiveness of policy and process implementation. The audit team noted that the LTC would be developing proposals for the next round of internal quality audits later this academic year, and these would include an audit of some processes devolved to faculties, including a scrutiny of partnership provision. The University was continuing to strengthen external representation in the approval processes for Foundation Degrees and for overseas developments. The team found that the University had been active in encouraging employer engagement in the development of Foundation Degrees and had begun to produce a database of external advisers for developments with European partners. The support for the development of collaborative agreements was also being strengthened through the use of a set of standard templates for agreements in relation to all types of collaborative provision.

49 The management of collaborative provision was being further enhanced through the work of Quality Support, in conjunction with the faculties, to: develop and embed the institutional typology for collaborative provision; improve the quality of documentation provided in support of periodic and institutional review; maintain the currency of the collaborative provision register; increase awareness of recently developed guidance on a number of relevant issues, and to continue to improve the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures by producing an annual report for the LTC on quality assurance, including collaborative provision. The audit team saw evidence of how this was being implemented effectively in practice. The Quality Network is organised by Quality Support in conjunction with UPC, although it has a wider application by providing opportunities for discussions between quality administrators and associate deans from faculties outside the UPC.

50 In relation to further developing and improving the student experience, the University is intending to enhance provision by

a number of actions including: continuing to improve student representation, particularly in relation to postgraduate students and the audit team heard evidence of the way in which the Graduate School had been instrumental in developing stronger links with students; and by strengthening UPSU representation through constitutional changes including creating a deputy president role with special responsibility for distributed students.

51 The work of the HELP CETL which provides significant support for expanding activities in UPC partner staff development; the awarding of fellowships to partner college staff and the enhancement of facilities in those colleges, were also considered as examples of how the University is aiming to enhance the management of its collaborative provision. Although the CETL had only been in existence for one year, it was clear to the audit team that it represented a significant enhancement to the activities of the UPC partner colleges in support of the University's collaborative strategy and was an example of the structures, processes, procedures and initiative that the University has in place to realise the ambitions of the 'hub and rim' model in delivering HE in FE colleges in the region.

52 It was apparent to the audit team that the University had put in place policies, procedures and structures to ensure that quality enhancement was a significant factor in developing its academic strategy. This is demonstrated by its success in securing four CETLs, and the innovative creation of the UPC partnership which is considered as an example of good practice.

53 The audit team concluded that the University's intentions for the enhancement of quality in its collaborative provision are appropriate within the context of its strategy and mission. They are also timely in view of its developing portfolio of activity.

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

54 The University's quality assurance processes distinguish between the approval of potential partner institutions and the approval of programmes to be delivered through collaborative arrangements.

Partner approval

55 The processes for the institutional approval/partnership approval of UK and overseas partners respectively were revised in 2004-05 and are outlined clearly in the 2005-06 Edition of the QAH. The processes seek to establish the suitability of a partnership between the University and the proposed institution. In relation to UK partners, the recommendation to approve a particular new UK partner is considered by the Academic Board and will include the recommended partner status as either accredited, affiliate or associate. On approval, an institutional collaborative agreement is drawn up which outlines the partner's status, the standard and specific conditions of the approval, and when the agreement is to be renewed, up to a maximum of six years. In the case of overseas partners, the recommendation must be approved by the Academic Board before a Memorandum of Agreement is signed. The Academic Cooperation Agreement used for collaborations within the UPC includes a clear statement that the partner (College) 'shall not sub-contract the delivery of any programme to another College'. The University is producing similar standard templates for all collaborative provision.

56 In relation to overseas partners, the University procedures specify that any new arrangements must seek partnership approval. Separate processes apply for articulation arrangements and guidance on the approval of these arrangements includes a clear distinction between recognising an award of an overseas partner for entry of students with advanced standing to a University programme, and recognising an overseas partner's programme as leading to a University award.

57 Approval of a UK partner is a two-stage process: the first involves scrutiny of a wide range of documentation; the second includes a briefing visit, including meetings with students, by a small panel to the partner followed, as appropriate, by an institutional approval meeting. Approval of an overseas partner also includes scrutiny of a wide range of documentation by an approval panel, an initial visit and report by a senior member of staff from the University, and may involve a subsequent visit by a subgroup of the approval panel if this is considered necessary.

58 The University has recently created the IPC which will report, and recommend, jointly to the Academic Board and Chancellery proposals for new or extended partnership arrangements. It will also monitor the register of collaborative agreements and will monitor international partnership arrangements annually through summary reports from faculties. The IPC debated, at its inaugural meeting, issues relating to the extension of existing partnership agreements beyond their original scope, which appeared to fall outside the new processes for partner approval (see above) and recommended a new process for this to the LTC. It also considered proposed guidelines for international agreements regarding postgraduate research programmes from the Graduate School.

59 At the time of the audit visit, the University had only recently formally introduced revised procedures and processes for partner approval and had set up the IPC. The audit team considered these developments to be appropriate. The University has two partners with accredited status. The responsibilities of the accredited institution and the University are set out in a memorandum of agreement. The delegation of authority which comes with this status is subject to review after a maximum of seven years. Either the accredited institution or the University may initiate a review of the accreditation at any time. A review involves submission, by the accredited partner, of a self-evaluation document, with guidance on what must be included provided by the University. This document is scrutinised by

a University review panel who subsequently visit the partner institution to meet senior management, the Academic Board, students and others as requested by the Panel. The University has clear processes for dealing with matters of concern arising from this review process, culminating with the right to withdraw accreditation. On the basis of the evidence seen and heard, the team concluded that the University has in place mechanisms for partner approval which are suitably aligned with the *Code of practice*.

Programme approval

60 The approval of programmes to be delivered through collaborative arrangements in faculties other than the UPC follows standard University procedures as outlined in the QAH. The report of the programme approval event is submitted to the Faculty Board for final approval of the new programme. All new awards are reported to the LTC by the faculty. A detailed and helpful guide developed by Educational Development and Learning Technologies (EDaLT), entitled 'Designing your programmes and modules', explains the criteria to be met in taking a programme from design to delivery. From 2005-06, the required documentation for such approval includes a programme specification for each award which refers to relevant subject benchmark statements, and the aims and learning outcomes mapped against *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). In addition, an approval document must make reference to external and internal regulations/policies including relevant sections of the *Code of practice*. The QAH lists a separate checklist for approval panels relating to distance-learning programmes, and there are particular requirements for the approval of programmes in health-related disciplines where there are partnership arrangements with NHS trusts and other healthcare providers. The documentation required for programme approval in the UPC is broadly that required for programme approvals in other faculties, but specific reference is also made in the guidance to the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* statement.

61 The University's review of the programme approval process in the UPC, conducted jointly by Quality Support and the UPC in 2004-05, noted some areas for further development, including the desirability of moving to the three stage process which has been implemented for 2005-06 (see above). The revised process starts with consideration of the outline proposal by the JBS, which forwards the proposal to the UPC Faculty Board. The UPC Board refers the proposal on to the cognate subject faculty for approval of planned progression routes (where relevant) by the Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching) and the relevant head of school. Once approved to proceed, the proposal must be approved by the University's Director of Academic Planning and Development (for undergraduate programmes), or the Head of the Graduate School (for postgraduate programmes), before proceeding into the three phases of formal programme approval. These are: a preliminary meeting between the UPC Associate Dean and senior staff of the partner college concerned, followed by a Stage One approval event, with a panel comprising an Associate Dean in the UPC, SFC and/or Academic Link Person (ALP) meeting the proposing programme team. The Stage One process may not necessarily proceed to Stage Two. The stage two approval event is chaired by a senior member of University staff not from UPC or the cognate subject faculty, and the panel includes two external advisers.

62 Increasingly, the UPC is placing emphasis on the development of Foundation Degrees and a set of guidance notes 'Preparing a foundation degree programme for approval by UPC' have been produced. This is a comprehensive guide to planning, designing, and developing such a programme, including a clear exposition of the importance of (and way to use) key external reference points. The audit team considered this document to be an example of good practice in the context of the structures, processes and procedures and initiative that the University has in place to realise the ambitions of the 'hub and rim' model.

63 During the course of the audit visit, it became clear to the audit team that the Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching), the Associate Dean (Quality), ALPs, and SFCs play key roles in the process of programme approval. The ALPs have a remit to act as 'critical friends' to college programme teams through being members of programme committees and developing the subject academic community in the partner college(s). They also have a role in discussing proposed new programmes at an early stage with the team and liaise with the SFC (though sometimes this may be one and same person) about the proposal. The SFCs liaise with relevant associate deans (teaching and learning) and sit on the UPC Faculty Board, which will ultimately approve the proposal.

64 Evidence heard during partner visits confirmed that the changes to the approval process for the UPC had been important, was welcomed, and was working well. The audit team concluded that the revised programme approval processes in the UPC were appropriate and aligned well with the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. The team also concurs with the University's view regarding the importance of the SFCs, ALPs, Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching) and the Associate Dean (Quality) in the UPC in ensuring these processes work effectively.

Annual monitoring

65 The CPSED noted that the annual monitoring process was redesigned by the University in 2003-04 with the intention that APM should provide an annual 'health check' on the quality, standards and relevance of its taught programmes, and the redesign was aimed to ensure that appropriate and consistent information was considered.

66 The process requires programme committees to consider a common evidence base including, student entry profiles; attainment; progression and retention rates; results of the University Student Perception Questionnaire (SPQ); external examiner reports

and responses to them; the comments made at assessment panels and boards, and outcomes from any reviews held during the year. Programme committees produce an action plan from their considerations of this dataset and report on progress made with the previous year's actions. Each year the faculties' Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching) samples programmes for review. After consideration by the FLTC of action plans and minutes of meetings, the Associate Dean produces a summary report for the Faculty Board. This, together with the Board minutes is submitted to the LTC for consideration at its January meeting for undergraduate programmes, and the June meeting for postgraduate programmes. The audit team noted that the Annual Quality Report (June 2005) reported only two faculties submitted Faculty Board minutes with its summary report. The team was assured, however, from more recent minutes and papers of the LTC, that faculties were now following the procedure fully and Faculty Board minutes were presented to the LTC with the summary report.

67 This standard APM process applies to all collaborative provision. In the case of the UPC, however, the Associate Dean (Quality) performs the role of Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching) in the other faculties, and the JBS fulfil the role of the FLTCs in the process. In addition, the Director of Quality Assurance (or equivalent) in the UPC partner colleges receives four key documents from the relevant APM and produces from them a College action plan for consideration and approval at the JBS. These four documents are the minutes of the programme committee, the programme action plan, the external examiner report and the written response to it. The UPC requires that these documents always progress together through partner and UPC deliberative structures, as this facilitates informed discussion, ensures actions loops are closed, and that responses to external examiner reports are timely. The audit team saw it is an example of practice worthy of implementation across the University.

68 The University's strategy for the quality assurance of collaborative provision, according to the CPSED, rests on a 'sufficient' approach to the specification of quality requirements, recognising that arrangements will vary according to the type of relationship with the partner and the types of programmes involved. This strategy was evident in relation to APM in some overseas provision where University staff visits and reports play a key role. The audit team was able to confirm that this was an appropriate variation to core processes in line with the strategy.

69 From the evidence available, the audit team was able to confirm that the revised APM procedures implemented for 2005-06 provide the basis for appropriate and effective annual institutional oversight of quality and standards in collaborative provision. The procedures are working well in practice, with appropriate refinements, where necessary, to accommodate particular collaborative arrangements. There are clear reporting lines to the University LTC and back to partners through faculties, and staff in partner institutions are effectively engaged by the University in these processes.

Periodic review

70 The University revised its process for periodic review in 2004, and created a schedule to ensure all programmes will be reviewed during a five/six year cycle henceforth. The schedule indicates where collaborative provision is included in the planned review. Under the revised process, collaborative provision is included in the relevant faculty periodic review or in the new institutional review process for partners within the UPC.

71 The new process for institutional review within the UPC was piloted in 2004-05 and is made up of two stages: stage one periodic subject review and stage two strategic review. Periodic subject review concerns itself with the coherence and relevance of the taught programmes; the academic standards and student achievement across the provision; the quality of the student learning experience and opportunities for enhancement. These reviews are conducted at the partner college and

chaired by a senior member of University staff not from a cognate subject faculty. There is a common template for recording the outcomes of the review including, the evidence base used; the external peer advisers involved; the main characteristics of the programme(s) reviewed and conclusions reached on quality and standards; innovations and good practice, currency and validity, with recommendations for action incorporating timelines for completion and by whom.

72 The Strategic Review of the partner institution is chaired by a University Deputy VC (or nominee) and examines the reports of the periodic subject reviews in the context of the partner's strategic plan for HE. The outcomes of the periodic subject reviews and the strategic review are drawn together in an Institutional Review Overview Action Plan which is reported to the LTC and to the relevant JBS and the UPC Faculty Board. The CPSED noted that in the light of the pilot a number of refinements to the Institutional Review process were being considered, including the need to enhance the quality of documentation to support UPC periodic reviews.

73 There has been some discussion about how to align institutional review of partners with the periodic review of cognate subject group in faculties other than the UPC.

74 The audit team concluded that the processes for periodic review relating to collaborative provision were sufficiently rigorous and robust to enable the University to maintain control of the academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities within its collaborative arrangements, including the ability to monitor actions and respond in a timely manner to them.

External participation in internal review processes for collaborative provision

75 The CPSED stated that the University's procedures for approval of a new institutional partner for taught programmes (UK and overseas) includes the involvement of a

University nominated/invited external adviser 'with significant experience' of partnership provision. In the case of approval of an overseas partner the external adviser must have significant experience of overseas partnership provision. The University also acknowledged the role played by government agencies/statutory accreditation services and the British Council in offering independent advice to schools or faculties considering overseas articulation arrangements with unfamiliar institutions.

76 The approval process for programmes leading to University awards delivered through a collaborative arrangement within the UPC, involves two external advisers, one academic and one industrial/professional, at the Stage Two Approval Event. The QAH offered brief guidance on finding appropriate external advisers to programme teams proposing a new collaborative programme within the UPC. This guidance to programme teams does not clarify whether current or recent external examiners or others with recent relationships with the University and/or partner institution are acceptable nominees. The University subsequently informed the audit team that such guidance is provided on the back of the adviser nomination forms. Nominations of external advisers from programme teams must be approved by the Director of Academic Planning and Development, after screening by Quality Support. According to the CPSED, the procedures for approval of a new programme outside the UPC must have a minimum of two independent external peers, 'other than the external examiners for the programme', with appropriate academic, industrial or other expertise, on the approval panel established by the FLTC.

77 External advisers, usually two or three, are required for all periodic review procedures and are approved by the Chair of the University LTC. The CPSED stressed the importance of such externality and identified it as a strength in the University's quality assurance procedures. It also noted, however, that some UPC partner institutions had experienced difficulty in finding

appropriate external advisers for Foundation Degree panels and for developments with overseas partners, especially where bilingual expertise was necessary.

78 On the basis of evidence seen, the audit team concluded that notwithstanding these areas for further work already identified by the University, a strong and scrupulous approach was in place regarding the use of external peers and advisers in approval and review processes relating to collaborative provision. This said, the University may wish to consider using a consistent statement in all relevant sections of its QAH that external examiners may not be members of approval and review panels.

External examiners and their reports in collaborative provision

79 External examiners are appointed for all programmes leading to a University award delivered through collaborative provision, using essentially the same procedure as for programmes delivered at the University. The difficulties in finding external examiners with experience of Foundation Degrees has been debated by the External Examiners Subcommittee and a number of measures put in place to improve support for external examiners who may be inexperienced. These include the development of the external examiners' website which provides extensive guidance on standards and the formalisation of the arrangements for mentoring, including publication by the UPC of guidelines on mentoring. In addition, the UPC has organised a conference for its external examiners in each of the last two years, focusing on issues relating to assessment and work-based learning in Foundation Degrees. The audit team formed the view that the range of support and guidance provided for external examiners is an example of good practice.

80 The University introduced new arrangements for the management of the external examiner system following a review of implementation of the *Code of practice*, which made Quality Support responsible for the appointment and institutional level briefing of

external examiners, and faculties responsible for nomination, reporting and payment. The LTC continues to review progress and address issues relating to the timeliness of nominations, briefing arrangements and chasing of late reports. Most recently it has agreed that criteria for the selection and appointment of external examiners should be revised to clarify that nominees should have knowledge of the standards of academic assessment in the UK sufficient to make judgements regarding comparability of standards.

81 The CPSED stated that the establishment of the UPC Faculty has further strengthened external examining arrangements for partner colleges. A review of external examining arrangements in associate partner colleges was carried out in 2002-03, resulting in an increasing number of appointments being made to a programme/scheme within a college rather than within a subject discipline across the partnership. The audit team accepted that this facilitates greater engagement with programme teams and the identification of college-specific issues. However, currently some Foundation Degree programmes with the same award title delivered in different partner colleges have a common external examiner, while others have a different external examiner for each partner college delivering the programme. The team noted that this means the extent to which the University can maintain an overview on the comparability of standards for similar programmes with the same award title delivered at different sites, varies. The team recommends as desirable that the University reflect on the arrangements for the allocation of external examiners to Foundation Degree programmes in the context of its future policies for the development of programmes with the same award title, and its arrangements for bringing together the judgements of external examiners regarding the standards of these programmes.

82 External examiners are required to submit annual reports based on a University-wide template. Reports are received by faculty quality administrators who alert relevant heads

of school and associate deans to matters requiring an immediate response, before forwarding reports to programme managers. External examiner reports and draft responses to these reports become an input to the APM process, with programme teams required to draw up an action plan to address any issues raised and inform the examiners of the action taken. As noted in paragraph 66, the UPC requires the four key documents (which includes the external examiner report and the response to it) to progress together through the partner and UPC deliberative structures, including the JBS. The audit team saw evidence of the JBS being reconvened when it was not possible to complete business due to missing reports or responses. The team also noted that in the case of some non-UPC collaborative provision draft responses to external examiner reports had not been presented at programme monitoring committees and it was possible for a considerable time period to elapse before a response was sent to an external examiner. The University was confident that such cases were very small in number, and indicated to the team that it intended to apply the good practice of the UPC in managing responses to external examiner report to all collaborative provision. In doing so, the team would recommend as desirable that the University consider incorporating, into the process for dealing with external examiner reports, an additional mechanism to check that approved responses have been forwarded to the external examiner within the published timescale.

83 The CPSED stated that the University is proactive in identifying patterns across different reports, and encourages external examiners to comment on progress in implementation of the Assessment Policy. In the UPC, the assessments manager collates all external examiners' reports and produces a summary of issues. In addition, Quality Support prepares an annual summary of institutional issues and good practice arising from external examiners' reports, including matters relating to collaborative provision, for the Academic Regulations Sub-committee. A copy of the report is sent to external examiners as part of the annual briefing pack.

Additionally, the University Secretary and Academic Registrar (USAR) now sends an individual response where an external examiner raises specific institutional issues. The audit team concurred with the view of the University that the report produced by Quality Support is both comprehensive and helpful.

84 The University bases its view about the effectiveness of the procedures for external examiners and consideration of their reports on the continuous evaluation and review undertaken by the LTC through the External Examiner and Academic Regulations Subcommittees. Notwithstanding the instance of a late response to external examiner reports identified above, and the variations in appointment of externals to programmes with the same award title, the audit team concluded, on the basis of its review of committee minutes and extensive documentation for external examiners, that recent changes to the arrangements for managing the external examiner systems and the consideration of their reports, were clearly documented and generally working effectively for collaborative provision. Overall, it found the external examiner system to be robust, with strong and scrupulous use of reports for collaborative provision, supporting the judgement of broad confidence in the University's management of quality and standards.

The use made of external reference points in collaborative provision

Subject and qualification benchmarks

85 The CPSED explained that the University's approach to mapping programme outcomes against subject benchmark statements and qualification descriptors was developed initially as a support for associate partner colleges that were identified as experiencing difficulties with the national quality and standards framework in the context of new programme approvals. The guidance has been regularly revised, and is outlined in the EDaLT booklet 'Designing your programmes and modules' and in the UPC guide to 'preparing a foundation degree programme for approval'. Subject Fora and Quality Network meetings have also helped to develop understandings of the significance of

subject benchmarks, the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*, as underpinning for programme specifications and alignment with the FHEQ. The audit team saw much evidence of staff development and dissemination of good practice in relation to consideration of the implications of the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark*, particularly in relation to employer engagement and work-based learning through conferences, publications and the initiation by UPC of small-scale internal faculty mini-audits.

The FHEQ and programme specifications

86 The USAR and the Academic Regulations Sub-committee were initially charged with ensuring compliance with the FHEQ, and the University considers that its academic regulations are now aligned with the FHEQ.

87 Programme specifications are required to be produced for programme approval based on a University template and guidance, now incorporated into the EDaLT booklet 'Designing your programmes and modules' (see paragraph 60). In June 2004 a revised template was agreed by Academic Committee which sought to ensure that programme specifications were more student-orientated. Faculties were asked to review existing programme documentation with a view to publishing revised programme specifications for the start of 2005-06, either on the Student Portal or in student handbooks. The majority of programmes now have a programme specification, although not all follow the new template.

Code of practice

88 In its institutional audit SED, the University acknowledged that the initial implementation plan for some parts of the *Code of practice* had lost momentum, following the significant academic and administrative restructuring. In January 2005, the LTC took the opportunity to revisit the *Code*, by receiving a report from key individuals with oversight of particular sections, reporting on progress with alignment and identifying any gaps or inconsistencies. The LTC has maintained overall oversight of implementation of the revised sections of the

Code, particularly in relation to the implementation of Section 6 of the *Code* on assessment which was the subject of a recommendation in the institutional audit report, and also Sections 2 and 5 on collaborative provision and academic appeals and student complaints. Evidence of the work of the Learning and Teaching Task Group and the Assessment Policy Working Group confirmed to the audit team that the University was making progress in the development of minimum requirements and guidance for the moderation of marking and provision of feedback to students (see paragraph 28).

89 As a consequence of its reflection on Section 2 of the *Code of practice*, the University has put in place a number of developments intended to strengthen and codify its quality assurance arrangements for collaborative provision. This includes the establishment of the collaborative provision register, and the development of a typology of collaborative provision arrangements, together with procedures for the approval of new international and UK partners, and guidance notes on the development and approval of articulation arrangements.

90 The development of a typology of collaborative provision was intended to provide guidance on the particular risks and benefits involved in the different partnership arrangements across the University and the quality assurance response that may be required. This guidance was agreed by the Academic Board in November 2005. The CPSED stated that it has already proved useful in informing discussions between the Director of Quality Support and each faculty about the nature of their quality assurance arrangements for partnership provision, and their entries in the register. The audit team saw a number of examples of how the typology, with associated guidance and procedures documents, are informing the future development and quality management of approval processes at both faculty and institutional level. It was clear to the team that the development of the typology has been significant in raising awareness across the

University of the *Code of practice* on collaborative provision, and in promoting transparency and consistency across faculties.

91 The audit team formed the view that the University has made appropriate and timely use of the external reference points in relation to collaborative provision. In requiring a report on residual inconsistencies between internal practice and the *Code of practice*, it has a systematic mechanism for dealing with revisions to the *Code*, as well as updating the overall record of alignment. In addition, reflection on Section 2 of the *Code* on collaborative provision has seen significant development of the University's processes for managing collaborative provision.

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

92 Consideration of external reviews in relation to all collaborative provision is integrated into the University's normal procedures for APM and periodic review. The guidance on interactions with professional bodies places responsibility on associate deans (learning and teaching) to ensure outcomes from all engagements with professional, accrediting and statutory bodies are reported to the responsible FLTC and to the Faculty Board, through the APM process. For collaborative provision within the UPC, the Associate Dean (Quality), the JBS and the Faculty Board takes these responsibilities. Reports from professional, statutory, accrediting bodies, and other external bodies such as QAA are considered at periodic (internal) review, APM, and the first stage of the approval process for new partners institutions in the UK. The information required from prospective overseas partners as part of the University's initial consideration of the proposed collaborative arrangements includes reports, within the previous five years, from external quality assurance/accrediting/statutory or government bodies.

93 The University had undergone two QAA Foundation Degree reviews involving collaborative provision between publication of its institutional audit report (February 2005) and the collaborative audit visit. Both reviews expressed confidence in the emerging academic standards, the achievements of students, and in the quality of the learning opportunities provided for students. As well as good practice and areas for development, specific to each Foundation Degree, the CPSED acknowledged that both draft reports highlighted aspects of programme design and delivery relating to work-based learning as areas for development. The reports were considered at the LTC in March 2006.

94 A developmental engagement in Social Policy and Administration and Social Work, which involved delivery by a partner institution, was carried out in February 2004. The CPSED noted that the institutional review (July 2005) of the partner institution involved in the developmental engagement would address the matters raised. The subsequent Institutional Review Overview Action Plan for the partner included several key actions to be undertaken in 2005-06, which specifically reflected recommendations of this developmental engagement.

95 The CPSED noted that the two major reviews of (NHS funded) healthcare provision (2002, 2004) which involved partnerships with Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs), Trusts and other healthcare providers, had very positive outcomes and the detailed action plans were currently being implemented as part of the contract management with the SHA.

96 Evidence gathered by the audit team confirmed that consideration of external reviews is integrated appropriately into APM and institutional review processes, and these were working effectively to ensure that the University was able to exercise an appropriate institutional oversight of the outcomes of, and responses to, external review. Although there could be a significant amount of time elapsed before a University-level overview was taken due to the devolved nature of the processes.

The team also saw evidence that the outcomes of external reviews were not only considered through the formal monitoring and review mechanisms of the University but had been a feature of various formal developmental events involving partners; for example, matters relating to the integration of work-based learning in Foundation Degrees. The team formed the view that consideration of key outcomes from external review, through developmental forums as well as the University's deliberative structures, demonstrate how it makes full use of external review to enhance the quality and standards of its collaborative provision.

Student representation in collaborative provision

97 Students are represented on decision-making and consultative bodies at University, faculty and programme level. The Framework for Quality and Standards states that the primary role of student representation is to 'provide the University with a balanced view of the perceptions of the student body of the quality and standards of the education and services provided'.

98 The University stated in its CPSED that there were challenges for the UPSU in representing the full range of students in a diverse and distributed University, but that it was important that student representation at University level is one of real partnership that is able to understand and encompass such diversity. The UPSU has worked with the UPC to enhance representation. In particular UPSU has appointed a Partner College Coordinator, funded by the UPC, whose job it is to liaise with partner colleges' students and staff to raise the quality of the HE experience of UPC students, and to improve provision of student union facilities and student representation.

99 The CPSED acknowledged that non-UPC collaborative provision students are less well represented at University level. The University believes that the newly-created Graduate School may provide an alternative representational route for post-experience and postgraduate

students. The audit team saw some evidence that this was beginning to happen.

100 Students are represented on faculty boards, including the UPC. However the CPSED stated that the main mechanism for effective student representation in the partner colleges is the JBS. Attendance at such boards, which are college-wide, has been variable, but examples of effective action and solution of problems were seen by the audit team. The SWS welcomed the opportunity from September 2005 for representatives from UPSU to be in attendance at JBS meetings to support student representatives from the partner colleges.

101 At the programme level, the main mechanism for representation is the Programme Committee, or its equivalent. In some cases, programmes are grouped into college 'clusters' and share a programme committee; this is especially the case when the programmes are both cognate and small. Some colleges have established HE student/staff liaison committees which have a broader membership and less formality in constitutional terms. Students in the partner colleges commented favourably about these committees, although most students that the audit team met said that informal meetings with staff in the colleges were very important. The SWS noted that the system of student representation for UPC students was accessible and effective but would benefit from ensuring that all student representatives were adequately briefed prior to attending meetings, in order to represent the view of their peers fully, and that adequate notice was given of programme level meetings.

102 The SWS and student representatives that the audit team met, confirmed that they were made to feel welcome at meetings and that their views were listened to. UPSU has been engaged in delivering training for student representatives by running a well-established and valued in-house programme. This programme is also available to students in collaborative partners. In addition UPSU has published a guide for UPC representatives.

103 The audit team was impressed by the initiative of appointing a Partner College Coordinator, and have identified as a feature of good practice the partnership between the University and UPSU to improve student representation in its collaborative provision.

104 Overall, the audit team formed the view that the University is strongly committed to student representation in its quality management of collaborative provision, and has put in place sound and effective procedures. The University acknowledges that there are particular challenges in securing representation of distant postgraduate and research students, but has shown that it is working towards improving representation for them.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

105 In its CPSED, the University stated that while formal student representation is valuable, regular dialogue with students is the core of the commitment to continual improvement of the student experience. This dialogue forms a key part of institutional and programme approval, APM and periodic review. The SWS noted that the UPC has effective systems of programme review and student feedback.

106 Systematic feedback from students is sought annually in two ways. At the level of the University and the programme, it is sought by means of the SPQ, and at the level of the subject it is obtained through module evaluation. The SPQ has been running for undergraduate programmes for the last 10 years, and the last six years for taught postgraduate programmes. More recently, tailored versions of the questionnaire have been introduced for all research students and for undergraduate students in partner colleges. The results are available to programme teams for annual monitoring and within the UPC, college-specific actions are agreed by the relevant JBS. A comprehensive annual report is produced which contains an action plan consequent on the results. Data are available for each partner college, which allow comparisons of experience to be seen.

The response rates varies between the collaborative partners, as indeed it does between programmes within the University overall. Response rates in partner colleges vary between 26 per cent and 70 per cent although the average rate for UPC is comparable with other faculties. In 2005, the most consistent negative responses in the partner colleges related to access to the student portal, an issue which the University identified and has taken steps to rectify.

107 The CPSED stated that all faculties make use of module evaluation within APM, with student feedback being an important part of that process. Practice varies between programmes, and students who met the audit team were unclear about how the comments they made were used. It was clear that on many courses within the University's collaborative provision, student concerns were addressed on a regular and informal basis, which was greatly valued by the students. This was possible because of their relatively small size and what was described as the ethos operating across the provision.

108 In the view of the audit team, the University has sound procedures in place for the collection and use of student feedback at faculty and institutional level. There is some variation in how student feedback is obtained at the programme level, but there is considerable effort made to ensure that student feedback is obtained and used effectively in the management and enhancement of quality in its collaborative provision

109 Feedback from employers and graduates is also collected and used in a number of ways. The CPSED referred to their involvement in approvals and periodic reviews, and the audit team saw evidence of this occurring in both recent course approvals and periodic reviews. However the level of involvement of employers and graduates varies between the disciplines. The CPSED acknowledged that there is often a closer relationship in professional areas, especially in education and health disciplines. The University has involved employers in the development and delivery of its Foundation

Degrees and evidence was provided to show that this was occurring. It was unclear how the views of the employers on such programmes were used in their quality management, for example in relation to work-based learning. The team considered that the University has strong employer links, in both vocational and non-vocational subjects, but would encourage it to make more explicit how the views of employers are used in the ongoing development of programmes.

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

110 The University produces a range of summary data centrally that is available on the Corporate Information intranet site, at programme, school, faculty, and in the case of UPC, the partner college level. Data sets are intended to inform discussion at APM committee meetings, and increasingly in periodic reviews. The standard data set for annual monitoring include entry profiles (qualifications at entry, age, gender balance, geographical area of origin, socioeconomic background, ethnicity and disability); application to acceptance ratios; progression and retention (numbers enrolled, failures, withdrawals with reasons, numbers progressing from one year to the next); module pass rates (at the first attempt); student attainment (completion rates, percentage gaining each award class) and graduate-destination data.

111 The CPSED noted certain limitations in the data relating to collaborative provision; for example, difficulties in disaggregating data for student subsets within the same programme, such as identifying students who have progressed into the final stage of an honours degree programme from a University Foundation Degree, or those studying for the same award at different sites. In addition for UPC APM, some data (for example, on module pass rates and student attainment) are provided by the partner college, although the UPC is seeking to use more University-derived data.

The University expects significant development in its ability to provide data over the next few years as it progressively implements a new student record system. This will provide enhanced tracking and reporting capability and permit better analysis of application data against performance.

112 The audit team was able to verify that statistical data were being used in APM across the range of collaborative provision, but noted that the presentation and formatting of data in APM reports varied. Some UPC partners relied heavily on locally generated college-based data, while others supplemented those provided by the University. The team noted that this use of data from different sources could give rise to difficulties with data integrity, but was assured that the JBS and ALPs were proactive in identifying anomalies. The University acknowledged the need for further work in refining definitions for the data set and ensuring structured access to data for comparative purposes.

113 The audit team noted that the University is working towards monitoring the performance of Partner Colleges in the UPC, based on measures of student admissions and retention. To this end, it has been piloting a data set for use in periodic review based on time-series data, which will help provide a comparative perspective on enrolment, progression and achievement across different programmes in a subject area or partner college. In addition, the University is also seeking to make more use of student profile information available at school/partner level and module pass rates. The LTC has commissioned the Director of Academic Planning and Development to review how such data could be used to identify internal comparators and benchmarks against which, the progress of the University in meeting its strategic objectives could be measured.

114 In general, the audit team concluded that the University was making appropriate use of statistical data in the management of quality and standards for collaborative provision within the constraints of its current student record

system (ahead of the full phasing in of the new system). The team would recommend as desirable that the University continue to develop and strengthen the availability and use of data at all levels for the purposes of better understanding progression, retention and completion, and for monitoring the achievement of strategic objectives.

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

115 Staffing for collaborative provision is approved by the University through the programme approval process, with staff curricula vitae (CVs) being submitted as part of the approval documentation. Staffing changes are monitored through the UPC by a standard template which is required to be filled in and submitted along with a detailed CV to the relevant JBS for approval. Provision outside the UPC requires the partner institution to inform the University programme leader or designated liaison tutor of any changes to approved staffing. The audit team found that staffing is monitored appropriately through the annual monitoring process and informally through the ALPs.

116 The University ensures that staff development requirements are identified through both formal and informal channels; formally through APM action plans at both programme and partner institution level and more informally through ALPs (in the UPC) and programme managers. The Human Resources Strategy of the University clearly identifies funds for partner institutions to be utilised to develop scholarly activity and staff research profiles whilst ensuring that quality and standards in the Partner College Network are enhanced in line with those of the University. The provision of such funds was considered by the audit team as an example of good practice.

117 The University's comprehensive programme of staff development events is published biannually through the Staff Portal and is available to staff working in partner

colleges and other collaborative provision. Furthermore, the UPC has a Staff Development Strategy, outlined in the UPC Strategic Plan (2004), which clearly identifies the desire to develop cognate academic communities across the region through subject fora, to sustain and develop generic staff development events and college-based HE development events and to implement and embed a culture of assuring academic staff time devoted to appropriate levels of scholarly activity.

118 The UPC professional development programme report for 2004-05 clearly shows evidence of a broad range of staff development activities at an appropriate level, based both at the University and within collaborative partners. Attendance by staff from partner institutions is good, and events often appear to be held in more than one location and at differing times to ensure maximum access. Within the UPC, the ALPs have a primary role to help the college teams enhance their programmes and to act as a link with the subject forum chair. According to college staff they are important in facilitating the two-way link between the University and partner institution and have a substantial role in supporting staff within the partner and in delivering staff development activities at a local level. The audit team concluded that the approach to staff development provides extensive opportunities to all staff involved in the delivery and support of University programmes across partner institutions, and is an example of good practice.

119 The CPSED stated that all staff teaching on or supporting a University programme within a partner institution can apply to become Registered University Teachers (RUTs). This status provides staff with access to University facilities and learning resources, including the Staff Portal, the University library, and subject forum participation. Furthermore, staff development materials, in relation to assessment, programme and module development and plagiarism are made available via the Staff Portal through the significant development work of the EDaLT.

120 The CPSED stated that 'the CETL in HELP has a strong emphasis on creating peninsula-wide academic communities of practice across the University and its associate partners. [and]...will provide major support for the expansion of opportunities for staff development over the period 2005-2010'. In 2005, 21 staff from seven of the UPC colleges were presented with HELP CETL Fellowship awards. Award holders are funded to develop research and teaching and learning development projects over the academic year across a range of subject areas. The audit team noted that these fellowships are highly regarded by partners, and there is an open and transparent application process.

121 The development of the seven subject fora across the UPC has been key in initiating and enhancing communication between partner institutions and University faculties and have developed 'academic communities' within which staff can discuss issues relating to academic development and enhancement, programme design and delivery, and to identify and share good practice. The SFC initially came from UoP Faculty staff, but more recently the chair has been rotated to include staff from partner institutions.

122 The CPSED noted that the University has a long-standing teaching observation scheme linked to staff appraisal and professional development. In September 2005, a revised set of guidelines was implemented for teaching observation based on the principle of peer review and enhancement. Although partner institutions do not need to adopt the University's process there is an expectation that partners' internal review is at least as robust as University processes.

123 The audit team concluded that the University was ensuring that effective measures existed to review the proficiency of staff engaged with collaborative programmes, in alignment with the *Code of practice*. In particular, the team noted the substantial support and development activity facilitated by the University and the development of 'communities of scholars' through the allocation of fellowship awards as good practice.

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

124 At present, the University has only one taught programme delivered entirely by distance learning by a partner college. The programme is also delivered in conventional part-time mode by a different partner. The course began in its part-time mode in 1997, and the distance-learning version was approved in 2000. The programme was reviewed following three years of operation, and a number of changes introduced that took full account of the Section 2 of the *Code of practice*. This led to the commissioning of an independent evaluation of some of the learning materials used on the programme. There is liaison between the programmes in the two colleges, facilitated through a common ALP and external examiner. There is also some movement of students between the programmes.

125 The University has produced specific guidance for approval panels looking at distance-learning programmes. This takes the form of a checklist of issues that need to be taken into consideration for such programmes and is contained in the QAH.

126 Although the University Learning and Teaching strategy generally favours a blended approach to taught programme delivery, it acknowledges that distance learning is appropriate for some modules and programmes. This is particularly the case with some master's programmes, and a number of modules have been developed for distance-learning delivery, mainly using the Student Portal.

127 The University has recently reviewed its e-learning strategy and is now intending to mainstream e-learning into programme delivery, including collaborative provision within the context of a blended learning approach. In order to implement this intention, each faculty has appointed a learning technologist to work with academic staff in developing e-learning techniques. It is anticipated that the UPC HELP CETL will contribute to some of these projects.

128 The audit team considered that the University was taking appropriate steps to secure the standards of delivery by distance-learning methods.

Learning support resources for students in collaborative provision

129 In the CPSED, the University outlined the ways in which the learning resources available in its partners are assessed as being appropriate for the delivery of the approved programmes. Partners who are accredited, affiliated or associated are expected to provide their staff and students with the learning resources necessary to support the programmes being delivered. This is assessed as part of the institutional approval process and the audit team saw evidence of this occurring. Resources are kept under scrutiny as part of the annual monitoring process and are also considered through programme committees, the JBS and the SPQ. Students who are studying at accredited and affiliated colleges are not registered as students of the University and have no entitlement to University resources. Students at associate colleges are registered and are therefore entitled to access University services.

130 In partner colleges within the UPC the same processes pertain. In addition, the University and the partner colleges themselves have made often significant investment in improving the physical infrastructure for HE provision through, for example, HEFCE capital funding, which has been passed on a pro rata student number basis, and European Union Objective One regional development funding. More recently, funding from the UPC HELP CETL has enabled a contribution to be made to the enhancement of HE facilities in two of the partner colleges.

131 Information and Learning Services (ILS) provides library and information technology (IT) services to the University, including provision at the Faculty of Health and Social Work teaching locations away from the main campuses. All students registered with the University are entitled to use the services and

ILS collaborates with partners in determining the level of service required. The entitlement includes access to the campus libraries and a University IT account, which gives access to the Student Portal. Staff in partner organisations have the right to be registered RUTs in order that they are given access to University resources including the Staff and Student Portal. They have no automatic entitlement to University library and IT services, but arrangements can be made for such services if the host faculty requires it.

132 There are strong links between the University and UPC partner colleges' libraries, with designated staff having responsibility for supporting the UPC libraries, and there is regular contact between them including an annual seminar to discuss current issues. There is also a cooperative library-to-library support service, called PRIDE, which operates between the University of Plymouth library and its partner college libraries for the benefit of UPC students.

133 Students that the audit team met on partner visits confirmed that the resources available to them were appropriate for their studies. They did comment on the difficulties some had experienced with the Student Portal in the past, but acknowledged that the University had been addressing the issue, and that there had recently been significant improvement in accessibility.

134 The University considers that its management and monitoring of learning resources available in its collaborative provision is appropriate and is carried out in a timely manner. The audit team was able to verify that this was the case and that the University's processes were responsive to changes, within a framework of comprehensive strategies. The team concluded that the quality assurance of learning resources in collaborative provision is generally effective, but the University will wish to ensure that issues raised through annual monitoring and SPQs in relation to learning resources will continue to be addressed promptly.

Academic guidance and personal support for students in collaborative provision

135 The CPSED stated that academic guidance for students is centred on academic teams, supplemented by specialist services, for example, Learning Development, which provides tutorials and workshops on study related topics at each main campus, offers an email support service, a website, and plan and deliver taught study-skills sessions in conjunction with academic staff. Email support and the on-line resources can be accessed through the Student Portal. Specialist support is available to students with disabilities through the work of Disability ASSIST, they provide a rolling programme of staff development across the University, which is available to staff in collaborative partners. They also provide three outreach assessment centres within the UPC partner college network, and coordinate biannual network meetings to develop a consistent approach to disabled students admissions, support, and guidance and information resources. Particular attention is paid to those students with disabilities who transfer from partner colleges to the main University campuses. The University is currently undertaking a review of the arrangements for disabled students in the UPC, in order to make sure that there are similar approaches in partner colleges and that Department for Education and Skills requirements are being met.

136 In partner institutions, the expectation is that an appropriate range of other support services will be available to students, and this is considered at the approval of any new partnership and also at subsequent programme approval events. A number of support networks exist for those providing these services in UPC partner colleges, including links on student funding, health services, counselling, accommodation and chaplaincies. The main University Careers service provides support for colleagues in partners' institutions and has a dedicated officer responsible for delivering such support. The audit team confirmed the claim

made in the CPSED that increasingly tutorial support is embedded within the curricula and that is often in the context of the implementation of the SkillsPlus Strategy, which integrates personal development planning, skills development and employability policies.

137 Student academic guidance is provided by module teams on taught courses. Induction programme for new students are provided and students receive handbooks that include advice on the best means of contacting staff; face-to-face individual contact is encouraged. Students who the audit team met in partner colleges were appreciative of the level of contact, academic guidance and support they received from academic staff in their institutions. They were described as approachable, available and supportive, a view echoed more widely across the SPQs. In addition to the contact with module based academic guidance, all students have access to a personal tutorial support system. The system to be used will be considered as part of the programme approval process. Most partners and schools with collaborative provision follow the model of allocating a personal tutor to students, who act as the first line individual support and interface with central or specialist services. For postgraduate research students, the supervisor has a pastoral as well as academic role.

138 The University acknowledges that the level of support available to its students in collaborative provision will vary according to the scale of the operation and the location of the partner. Within the UPC, there is an associate dean responsible for students, who attends all JBS and who acts as the student advocate at the UPC Faculty Board. The University has a Dean of Students who takes on this role across the whole institution and therefore the collaborative provision outside the UPC.

139 The University considers that academic guidance and support to its students is satisfactory. It is supported in this view by the findings of periodic reviews, and other external reviews, many of which have commended aspects of support provided. The students that

the audit team met were generally satisfied with what was provided. The University monitors the effectiveness of its systems both through APM and the SPQ, and through the annual reports prepared by the accredited and affiliated partners and considered by LTC.

140 The audit team found the University's arrangements for academic guidance and personal support to be comprehensive and responsive to students' needs. The University showed itself to be alert to the areas where dissatisfaction was greatest and there was evidence that these issues had been, or were to be, addressed.

Section 3: The collaborative provision audit investigations: published information

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

141 The University and partner institutions provide a number of sources of information for students on collaborative provision from the time of their first enquiry about application to their graduation. Information includes pre-entry publicity and promotional materials such as prospectuses and school or faculty-specific guides, and documents provided on entry such as programme handbooks, the University student handbook, and other information available on the Student Portal. It is clear that students are increasingly accessing information about programmes through the University website, which provides links to course brochures and module descriptions. Partner institution websites provide clear and easy-to-use links to the University website. The SWS noted that some UPC students considered that the pre-entry material did not prepare them fully for the different social experience in Partner Colleges compared to that of University-based programmes. It stated that while the academic student experience was similar, students in partner colleges did not

have a similar University social life or opportunity to get involved with University activities.

142 In relation to promotional materials prepared by partner organisations, the standard Academic Cooperation agreement includes a clause stating that the University retains the right to audit references to programmes in prospectuses, brochures, publicity and marketing materials and to require the partner institution to retract any inaccurate or misleading references to programmes of the University. Within the UPC, spot checks on college marketing material is carried out on an annual basis to check the accuracy of references to the awards being advertised, and to determine if action is required to improve accuracy. Furthermore, marketing materials is a regular agenda item at UPC JBS meetings and the UPC Faculty Board. The CPSED noted that information sent to research students prior to entry is compiled by the Graduate School, in association with the administrative staff in the respective school/faculty, and this is checked by an experienced member of staff before circulation.

143 The University has recently reviewed the process of checking promotional material prepared by both UPC and non-UPC partner institutions and have produced a comprehensive set of guidelines which were approved by the Marketing and Communications Strategy Group in February 2006. Responsibility for the accuracy of information in the prospectus and on the website now lies with the faculties rather than a central department. However, the University has a Publications Sign-off Policy that requires all publicity materials produced by collaborative partners to be vetted by the University Faculty Marketing Manager, or other designated senior managers. In meetings with the audit team, students confirmed that the information they had accessed before they enrolled was accurate and reliable and their expectations of their programmes were met. Respondents to the SPQ, studying in partner institutions at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, also showed overall satisfaction with the accuracy and reliability of the information received.

144 The University has a standard template for the production of student handbooks for collaborative provision that includes information relating to academic teaching and support, background to the programme's development, programme structure and career and progression opportunities. The student handbook also includes the programme specification, definitive module descriptors and, on occasion, a detailed descriptors map. The audit team viewed a range of student handbooks and verified that the template was used appropriately or, for older programmes, that the format was similar or equivalent. Student handbooks are required to be submitted at programme approval events as part of the approval documentation. Validation reports viewed by the team confirmed that this requirement was being met. The UPC have developed a document 'Preparing a foundation degree programme for approval by UPC', which clearly outlines the importance of the student handbook and what it should contain. The team considered that this document exemplified the structures, processes, procedures and initiatives that the University has in place to realise the ambitions of the 'hub and rim' model in delivering HE in FE colleges within the region, which the team considered to be an example of good practice.

145 The SWS and the students who met the audit team expressed satisfaction with the quality and accuracy of information provided in the student handbooks and stated that they knew what was expected of them. Some noted that they had made little use of the student handbook since induction, preferring to make regular use of the Student Portal, which contains the same information. When asked, students were unsure as to the detail of procedures relating to complaints and appeals, but were confident that they knew where to look or whom to ask for information. The team was able to confirm the existence of an appropriate complaints and appeals procedure available to students through the Student Portal, and that students were aware of them. The accredited colleges have their own

procedures which are agreed at accreditation and reviewed through the reaccreditation process. Furthermore students regarded the University Student Portal as a valuable resource, and although there were isolated instances where access was initially problematic within some collaborative partners, this had been addressed by the University.

146 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University had sound procedures for ensuring the appropriateness and accuracy of published information on its collaborative provision, and that students were satisfied with both the accuracy and 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

147 The CPSED gave an account of the University's progress in relation to the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) requirements as set out in the HEFCE document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*. Institutional responsibilities in relation to TQI requirements are set out in the paper 'Roles and Responsibilities for TQI', and Quality Support has a remit to coordinate the provision of timely information for TQI requirements and to provide guidance to faculties and associate partners on these requirements. Accredited partners are responsible for loading their own material on the TQI site.

148 The CPSED noted that the revised programme specifications (see paragraph 87) are not currently published on the University's extranet so it is not possible to activate a link to the TQI website. However, information on how to obtain copies of programme specifications is available on the courses page of the University's website and at www.degreeonyourdoorstep.org. Through meeting staff from the University, the audit team was informed that the planned future development of a document management system for the University will provide the facility to make programme specifications widely

available in an electronic format, with a provisional implementation date of September 2008 proposed.

149 To date, the University has successfully uploaded on to the TQI site a summary of its learning and teaching strategy; comprehensive information regarding its employer links; an explanation of the external examiner structure, and external examiner reports on individual programmes. Furthermore, the University has made available through the TQI site summaries of recent periodic reviews relating to Collaborative Partnerships. The University made the decision to utilise the results of the National Student Survey for TQI purposes in 2005 and therefore the SPQ was not conducted among final-stage students. This approach will also be used in 2006. The CPSED noted concern about the relative 'invisibility' of information relating to collaborative provision on the TQI website, and in 2005-06 the University have taken the steps of revising the external examiners headers for TQI reports to improve the visibility of the University's collaborative programmes to prospective applicants. Quality Support has coordinating responsibility for the University's entries on the TQI website.

150 As stated in its formal collaborative agreements the University has responsibility for awarding certificates and student transcripts relating to programmes of study delivered through its collaborative arrangements, in line with Section 2 of the *Code of practice*. The audit team found appropriate procedures to be in place to discharge this responsibility.

151 The audit team concluded that the University was engaging appropriately with the HEFCE-led developments for publication of TQI and was in a good position to meet its responsibilities.

Findings

Findings

152 A collaborative provision audit of University of Plymouth (the University) was undertaken by a team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) during the week 8 to 12 May 2006. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes offered by the University through collaborative arrangements with partner organisations, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged from the audit, and by making recommendations to the University for improving on current practice.

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

153 The University of Plymouth's approach to managing its collaborative provision has been determined by, and is consistent with, its overall conception of the role that partnerships play in the mission of the University. There are two main elements to this: firstly, partnerships are designed to fulfil the University's commitment to its regional role as a key generator of intellectual capital and educational opportunity. The University is the 'hub' of a network of colleges providing new and innovative programmes that allow students to progress to the highest levels. Secondly, partnerships and collaborative education are not treated as separate from the rest of the University's activities but as an integral part of its provision. The most important practical effect of these strategies was the establishment in 2003 of the University of Plymouth Colleges Faculty (UPC) as one of the seven faculties of the University. The intention was to bring partnerships within the mainstream organisational, planning and delivery processes, and to emphasise the centrality of regional collaborations to the University's mission.

In 2004-05, 38 per cent of the University's 28,935 students were taught through collaborative arrangements, and more than half of these were within the UPC.

154 The University has identified five institutional typologies for its collaborative provision: accredited, associate, affiliated, joint and dual. Accredited partner institutions are those recognised by the University as able to design, approve, deliver, assess, review and evaluate their own academic taught programmes to a standard that is appropriate for programmes leading to a University award. Affiliated partners are those which usually deliver mainly higher education (HE) programmes but are not necessarily designated as HEIs, and have demonstrated to the University their ability to design, review and evaluate its taught academic programmes. Associate partners are normally regional UK HE or further education colleges which cooperate with the University in providing HE on a 'hub and rim' model. The partner colleges may design their own HE programmes within a scope agreed through the University's planning approval process. Joint partners are awarding bodies who have the statutory powers to award a joint degree with the University. The partner usually shares responsibility for the design, credit rating and delivery of particular programmes. Dual partners are those awarding bodies who offer, with the University the same or overlapping programme involving study at each institution.

155 The University has also identified seven collaborative provision typologies for arrangements at the programme level: validation where the programme is designed and offered by a partner organisation; contracted out where the University contracts out all or part of an approved University programme to a partner organisation to deliver; research where a written agreement is established with the collaborating institution ensuring compliance with the University's Minimum Benchmarks for postgraduate research students, agreed joint supervisory arrangements, and clearly articulated fees and

payments arrangements; credit rating where the University grants specific credit to modules offered and sometimes designed by a partner organisation; outreach where programmes are delivered by the University's own staff off-campus, using another organisation's premises and/or learning resources these are sometimes delivered as part of a consortium with other HEIs and/or employers; school experience and clinical placements which form part of an approved University programme; and articulation where the University grants specific credit and advanced standing to students completing a named programme of study pursued in a partner organisation, usually overseas.

156 The University applies its academic regulations and assessment policy equally to all collaborative provision, with the exception of accredited partner colleges whose own internal procedures are subject to regular approval. Affiliated partners are normally required to operate within the University's quality assurance system and procedures but may function under different regulations with prior approval from the University. Memoranda of Agreement set out the responsibilities of each partner and reflect appropriate levels of autonomy and experience in managing standards. The University's Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) has oversight of standards and quality for both internal and collaborative provision on behalf of the Academic Board. The Institutional Partnerships Committee (IPC) was established in January 2006 to annually review the strategic, financial and legal implications of new or continuing partnerships.

157 The processes and procedures for quality assurance of collaborative provision are described in the University's Quality Assurance Handbook: Taught Programmes and in its Research Degree Regulations and Procedures. The principles informing the management of quality are flexibility and sufficiency, allowing local interpretation and a devolved quality management structure. Within each Faculty the associate deans (learning and teaching), or their equivalent, manage quality assurance and enhancement for all programmes, including

those provided by partners, through a structure of programme committees, faculty learning and teaching committees (FLTCs) and faculty boards. In the UPC, these are supplemented by joint boards of studies (JBS) and subject fora which allow regular contact between staff at all levels of the both the University, 'the hub', and the partners, 'the rim'. Subject fora are particularly important in bringing staff in from the University and its partner colleges together to discuss the curricula, staff development, quality enhancement and arrangements for the progression of students from the colleges to the University. The effectiveness of these arrangements had been recognised in the success of the University in winning funding for various aspects of its collaborative provision, the most recent example of which was the Centre of Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CETL) award for its Higher Education Learning Partnership (HELP) initiative.

158 The view of the audit team was that the distinct and innovative principles and strategies developed by the University to manage its substantial collaborative provision were working well in practice and were an example of good practice. In particular, the 'hub and rim' model of provision and progression, exemplified by the establishment of the UPC, was well understood and supported by students and staff in the partner institutions. The goal of building an academic culture and 'communities of practice and scholarship' that inform teaching, scholarly activity and research across the collaborative partners, had been substantially achieved.

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

Approval, monitoring and review

159 The University's quality assurance processes distinguish between the approval of potential partner institutions and the approval of programmes to be delivered through collaborative arrangements. The processes for institutional approval of UK and overseas

partners were revised in 2004-05. For UK partners, the approval process includes documentary searches, a briefing visit, and an institutional approval panel meeting, before a final recommendation, including the proposed status of the partner: accredited, associate, affiliated, is submitted to the Academic Board for approval. In the case of overseas partners, a wide range of documentation is scrutinised by an approval panel, followed by an initial visit and report by a senior member of University staff. A subsequent visit by a subgroup of the approval panel might take place if appropriate. Recommendations to approve a partnership are considered by the Academic Board before a Memorandum of Agreement is signed. The Academic Cooperation Agreement used for collaborations within the UPC includes a clear statement that the partner 'shall not sub-contract the delivery of any programme to another College'. The University is producing similar standard templates for all collaborative provision.

160 The University has recently created IPCs that will report, and recommend jointly to the Academic Board and Chancellery, proposals for new or extended partnership arrangements. It will also monitor the register of collaborative agreements and will monitor international partnership arrangements annually through summary reports from faculties

161 The approval of programmes to be delivered through collaborative arrangements in faculties other than the UPC follows standard University procedures as outlined in the QAH. A revised approval process for UPC programmes was introduced in 2005-06 and now follows a three stage process: first a preliminary meeting between the UPC Associate Dean and senior staff of the partner college concerned; second a Stage One approval event where an approval panel, comprising an Associate Dean in the UPC, Subject Forum Chair (SFC) and/or Academic Link Person (ALP), meeting the proposing programme team; and third a Stage Two approval event chaired by a senior member of University staff, not from the UPC or the cognate subject faculty, and the panel including two external advisers.

162 The audit team noted the detailed and helpful guide developed by Educational Development and Learning Technologies (EDaLT), entitled 'Designing your programmes and modules', which clearly explains the criteria to be met in taking a programme from design to delivery. It also considered the guidance notes 'Preparing a foundation degree programme for approval by UPC' to be a comprehensive guide to planning, designing, and developing Foundation Degrees and an example of good practice in the context of the structures, processes and procedures and initiative that the University has in place to realise the ambitions of the 'hub and rim' model.

163 All collaborative provision is subject to annual monitoring. Programme committees considered a centrally specified evidence base and the minutes, action plans, arising from the meeting is forward to the FLTC and Faculty Graduate Affairs Committee for consideration. The associate deans (teaching and learning) and the associate deans (graduate affairs) respectively produce a brief summary report for Faculty Board. This, together with the Board minutes is submitted to the LTC for consideration. In the case of the UPC, however, the Director of Quality Assurance (or equivalent) in the partner colleges produces a college action plan based on minutes of the programme committee, the programme action plan, the external examiner report and the written response to it, for consideration and approval at the JBS, Faculty Board and subsequently the LTC.

164 The audit team noted that there was some appropriate variation in the APM procedures undertaken in relation to overseas partners in keeping with the University's strategy of a 'sufficient' approach to the specification of quality requirements that recognises that arrangements will vary according to the type of relationship with the partner and the types of programmes involved. In some overseas provision, visits by University staff and their reports play a key role.

165 The University revised its process for periodic review in 2004. Under the revised process, collaborative provision is included in

the relevant Faculty Periodic Review, and thus uses standard University procedures, or in the new institutional review process for partners within UPC. This new process was piloted in 2004-05 and is made up of two stages: firstly, the periodic subject review, which takes place in the Partner College and considers the coherence and relevance of the taught programmes, the academic standards and student achievement across the provision, the quality of the student learning experience, and opportunities for enhancement; and secondly, strategic review, which takes place in the University, is chaired by a University Deputy Vice-Chancellor (or nominee) and examines the reports of the periodic subject reviews in the context of the partner's strategic plan for HE. Subsequently the outcomes of the periodic subject reviews and the strategic review are drawn together in an Institutional Review Overview Action Plan, which is reported to the LTC, the relevant JBS and the UPC Faculty Board.

Feedback from students and other stakeholders

166 The University regards student representation and feedback as essential in providing the University with a balanced view of the quality and standards of the education and services provided. This is appropriately reflected in level of student representation within partner institutions and University deliberative structures. The Student Written Submission (SWS), and students met by the audit team, particularly welcomed the HE student/staff liaison committees and a student representatives' forum established in some UPC partner institutions. The team was impressed by the initiative of appointing a Partner College Coordinator, and noted as good practice the continued partnership that exists between the University and University of Plymouth Students' Union to improve student representation in its collaborative provision.

167 Systematic feedback from students studying in collaborative provision is sought annually through specially tailored versions of the Student Perception Questionnaire and data

arising from them are made available to all partner colleges. The University recognises that there is some variation in how student feedback is obtained at the programme level, but had made a considerable effort to ensure that feedback is obtained and used effectively in the management and enhancement of quality in its collaborative provision. Feedback from employers and graduates is also collected but the level of involvement varies between disciplines. The audit team saw clear evidence of employer involvement in the development of Foundation Degrees, although it was unclear how their views were used in relation to ongoing quality assurance.

168 Overall, the audit team formed the view that the University is committed to student involvement in its quality management of collaborative provision, and had put in appropriate and effective procedures to gather their views.

Staff development

169 The audit team considered that the University has in place effective mechanisms to ensure that staff in partner institutions are supported appropriately. Staff development requirements are identified through the APM action plans and more informally through the work of the ALPs. The team identified as good practice the University's collegiate approach to staff development, which provides extensive opportunities to all staff involved in the delivery and support of University programmes across partner institutions, as exemplified through: the comprehensive programme of staff development events available to staff working in partner colleges and other collaborative provision; the clearly identified funds for partner institutions to develop scholarly activity and staff research profiles; the desire to develop cognate academic communities across the UPC using subject fora to enhance communication between partner institutions and University faculties; sustain and develop generic staff development events, and embed a culture of academic debate, development, research and scholarship; opening the opportunity for staff from a partner institution to apply for and

secure fellowships such as the HELP CETL fellowship, which funds recipients to develop research, and teaching and learning projects that are highly regarded by partners.

Conclusion

170 The audit team formed the view that the revised processes in approval, annual monitoring and periodic review provided appropriate and effective institutional oversight of the quality and standards in all collaborative provision, and would concur with the University's view regarding the importance of the SFCs, ALPs, associate deans (teaching and learning) and the Associate Dean (Quality) in the UPC in ensuring that these processes work effectively. This, accompanied by the strong and scrupulous use made by the University of external peers and the apposite consideration of external review seen by the team, would support the judgement that broad confidence can be placed in the University's current procedures for assuring 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

171 The University stated that its approach to securing academic standards is to apply its academic regulations and assessment policy equally to all collaborative provision, with the exception of accredited and, with prior approval, affiliated partner colleges, whose own internal procedures are subject to approval (see paragraph 156). Academic standards are confirmed through subject assessment panels and award assessment boards, and monitored through the University's annual programme monitoring (APM) processes, all of which apply equally to collaborative provision. Oversight of procedures for safeguarding standards, including for collaborative provision, is maintained through the LTC.

172 The University's formal arrangements for assessment, the appointment and induction of

external examiners and the responses to their reports are broadly similar across all provision and partnerships. The audit team considered that the range of support and guidance provided for external examiners, including the external examiners' website which provides extensive guidance on standards, the UPC guidelines on mentoring, and the UPC-organised annual conference for its external examiners, were an example of good practice.

173 The collaborative provision self-evaluation document (CPSED) explained that following a review of arrangements in associate partner colleges in 2002-03, an increasing number of external examiner appointments have been made to programmes within a college rather than within a subject discipline across the partnership. The University stated in the CPSED that this facilitates greater engagement with programme teams and the identification of college-specific issues. The audit team accepted this view, but was concerned that where the same award was delivered in a number of different colleges, as was the case for some Foundation Degrees, this would limit the extent to which the University could maintain an overview regarding the comparability of standards for similar programmes with the same award title delivered at different sites. The team considered it desirable for the University to reflect on the arrangements for the allocation of external examiners to Foundation Degree programmes and its arrangements for bringing together the judgements of external examiners regarding the standards of awards with the same title.

174 The audit team found the University's procedures for dealing with external examiner reports to be clearly set out, with programme teams required to draw up action plans to address any issues raised, and inform external examiners of the action taken. Evidence seen by the team, however, led it to conclude that it was possible for a considerable time period to elapse before a response was sent to an external examiner. The team noted the University's intention to apply the good practice that existed in the UPC in managing external

examiner reports, and recommended that the University should consider incorporating into the process an additional mechanism to check that approved responses have been forwarded to the external examiner within the published timescale.

175 Notwithstanding these issues relating to external examiner appointment and responding to reports, the audit team concluded on the basis of its review of committee minutes and extensive documentation, that the arrangements for managing the external examiner systems and the consideration of their reports were generally working effectively for collaborative provision.

176 The University produces a range of statistical data for annual monitoring and periodic review at programme, school or partner, and the faculty level. The CPSED acknowledged that it has often been difficult to disaggregate data for student subsets within the same programme, for example, those studying the same award at different sites, and that some partners rely heavily on locally generated college-based data. The audit team noted variations in the use of University and partner-derived data in annual monitoring reports, and the University acknowledged the need to further refine definitions for the data sets. The team was also informed that work was being undertaken to improve the quality and availability of data for partners, and to represent statistics for periodic review to better allow comparisons between programmes in a subject area to be made. The new student record system when fully implemented will offer enhanced reporting capabilities. Overall, the team found the University to be making appropriate use of data for the purposes of monitoring standards, within the constraints of its current student record system, ahead of the full phasing in of the new system. However, the team would encourage the University to continue to develop and strengthen the availability and use of data at all levels for the purposes of better informing the management of standards in collaborative provision, as well as the achievement of strategic objectives in relation to collaborative provision.

177 The University makes clear in its formal collaborative agreements that it has responsibility for awarding certificates and student transcripts relating to programmes of study delivered through its collaborative arrangements, in line with Section 2 of the *Code of practice*. The audit team found appropriate procedures to be in place to discharge this responsibility.

178 The audit team formed the view that the University had in place an effective framework for safeguarding standards in awards gained through collaborative provision. As a result broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative provision.

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

179 The CPSED explained that the University's approach to mapping programme outcomes against subject benchmark statements and the qualification descriptors of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) was developed initially as a support for associate partner colleges. This has resulted in regularly updated guidance documents to support programme and module design. Subject fora and Quality Network meetings also help to develop understandings of the significance of subject benchmark statements and the *Foundation Degree qualifications benchmark* (FDQB) in underpinning programme specifications and ensuring alignment with the FHEQ and the *Code of practice*. The audit team saw much evidence of staff development and dissemination of good practice in relation to consideration of the implications of the FDQB, particularly in relation to employer engagement and work-based learning through conferences, publications and the initiation of small-scale mini-audits.

180 Programme specifications are required to be produced for programme approval based on a University template and guidance, now

incorporated into the EDaLT booklet 'Designing your programmes and modules'. A revised template, which sought to ensure that programme specifications were more student-orientated was agreed in 2004. Faculties were asked to review existing programme documentation with a view to publishing revised programme specifications for the start of 2005-06, either on the Student Portal or in student handbooks. The majority of programmes now have a programme specification, although not all follow the new template.

181 Overall, the audit team agreed with the University's view that there are rigorous and established processes in place, applied across all taught collaborative provision, for programme approval that involves explicit referencing of programme outcomes to the FHEQ and to subject and qualification benchmark statements.

182 In January 2005, LTC took the opportunity to revisit the *Code of practice*, by receiving a report from key individuals with oversight of particular sections of the *Code*, reporting on progress with alignment and identifying any gaps or inconsistencies. The LTC has maintained overall oversight of implementation of the revised sections of the *Code*, particularly in relation to the implementation of Section 6 on the assessment of students which was the subject of a recommendation in the institutional audit report (2005), and also Sections 2 and 5 on collaborative provision and academic appeals and student complaints. Evidence of the work of the Learning and Teaching Task Group and the Assessment Policy Working Group confirmed to the audit team that the University was making progress in the development of minimum requirements and guidance for the moderation of marking and provision of feedback to students.

183 As a consequence of its reflection on Section 2 of the *Code of practice*, the University has put in place a number of developments intended to strengthen and codify its quality assurance arrangements for collaborative provision. This includes the establishment of the collaborative provision register, and the development of a typology of collaborative

provision arrangements, together with procedures for the approval of new international and UK partners, and guidance notes on the development and approval of articulation arrangements.

184 The audit team saw a number of examples of how the typology, associated guidance and procedures documents are informing the future development and quality management of approval processes at both faculty and institutional level. It was clear to the team that the development of the typology has been significant in raising awareness across the University of the *Code of practice* on collaborative provision, and in promoting transparency and consistency across faculties.

185 The audit team formed the view that the University has made appropriate and timely use of the Academic Infrastructure in relation to collaborative provision, and continues to engage with it in the development of policy and procedure.

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

186 The organisation and management of the delivery of a University's programmes and awards through partnerships with other institutions are inherently complex. This is particularly true where the volume and range of collaborative provision are large and growing, as they were at the University of Plymouth at the time of the audit. The CPSED provided by the institution prior to the audit proved to be a comprehensive and reliable guide to this complexity. The main intention of the CPSED was to describe and justify the institution's arrangements for the management of standards and quality, and to show how these are consistently but flexibly applied to all its collaborative provision. The CPSED also

devoted considerable space to an account of the various mechanisms that allow the University to monitor and improve the quality of the student experience of its programmes and awards delivered by partners.

187 The CPSED also described clearly the University's intentions to further enhance the management of collaborative provision. There were in place a range of mechanisms that allow it to monitor its performance and generate proposals for improvement. The CPSED included a number of sections that reflected on the information produced by these mechanisms, and which described the plans for further development that had resulted.

188 The CPSED was able to demonstrate the information-gathering capacity of the variety of mechanisms in place across the institution and embedded in its links with partners, that allow it to regularly monitor and improve strategies and procedures that affect quality and standards. The audit team concluded that the CPSED was accurate and comprehensive and provided an excellent platform for the audit.

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

189 The University is committed to the enhancement of its collaborative provision both in terms of managing quality and standards and the student experience. In order to achieve this commitment, the University is pursuing a number of initiatives that will strengthen its collaborative provision further. These include: the establishment of new procedures for giving institutional approval and considering new partnerships; the use of internal quality audits; strengthening external representation in approval processes and continuing to improve student representation. In their review of these initiatives and others, the audit team was able to conclude that the University has good reason to claim that the development and enhancement of collaborative provision plays an important part in delivering the University's

mission and strategy in relation to developing markets, enhancing intellectual capital and widening the social basis of the student population. Staff in both the University and partner institutions are committed to enhancement, and of particular significance are the roles of associate deans (learning and teaching) and (quality) and Quality Support. It was also clear that there was a genuine partnership between the University and its partners and that its strength lay in the joint development of programmes and objectives. Many of the partners felt that their standing and profile had been substantially improved as a result of their joint work with the University.

190 The University in its use of its quality assurance procedures and policies identifies areas for further improvement and development. These have informed the enhancement plans seen by the audit team. In addition, it was clear that quality enhancement was a significant factor in developing the University's academic strategy, as demonstrated by the success of the University in securing four CETLs and the innovative creation of the UPC. It is also reflected in the ways in which the University's priorities for advancing its research and regional ambitions are being implemented.

191 The audit team concluded that the University's proposals for quality enhancement are timely and relevant to its current stage of development. It is clear that the University is keen to enhance its collaborative provision further and has put in place appropriate mechanisms to enable it to do so.

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

192 The University provided a current and detailed account of its progress in relation to Teaching Quality Information (TQI) for its collaborative provision to the audit team. The University reported that it had uploaded all TQI requirements to date, including all external examiner reports and periodic review reports which had been received, along with a summary of its learning and teaching strategy,

comprehensive information regarding its employer links, and an explanation of the external examiner structure. Quantitative data at both the programme and institutional level are provided by HESA, with the University making the decision to utilise the results of the National Student Survey for TQI purposes. In the CPSED, the University did express concern about the relative 'invisibility' of information relating to collaborative provision on the TQI website, and in 2005-06 the University have taken the steps of revising the external examiners headers for TQI reports to improve the visibility of the University's programmes to prospective applicants.

193 Programme specifications are not currently published on the University's website, so it is not possible to activate a link to the TQI website. However, information on how to obtain hard copies of programme specifications is available on the courses page of the University's website. Through meeting staff from the University, the audit team was informed that the planned future development of a document management system for the University will provide the facility to make programme specifications widely available in an electronic format, with a provisional implementation date of September 2008 being proposed.

194 The audit team concluded that the University was taking appropriate steps to fulfil its responsibilities in relation to TQI. The University is alert to the requirements of the Higher Education Funding Council for England's document, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance* (HEFCE 03/51), and is moving in an appropriate manner to fulfil its responsibilities in this respect. On the basis of the available evidence, the team found the University's currently published information regarding its collaborative provision to be both accurate and reliable.

Features of good practice

195 The following features of good practice were noted:

- i the structures, processes, procedures and initiatives that the University has in place to realise the ambitions of the 'hub and rim' model in delivering higher education in further education colleges within the region. These are exemplified by the establishment and operation of the University of Plymouth Colleges Faculty (UPC); the joint boards of study (JBS); the refinement of standard quality assurance documentation to accommodate the requirements of partner institutions and associated guidance, including the document 'Preparing a foundation degree programme for approval by UPC' (paragraphs 41, 51, 52, 62, 144,162)
- ii the deliberate construction of an academic culture supporting 'communities of practice and scholarship' across the collaborative partners, as demonstrated by subject fora, University fellowship schemes; the operation of the Higher Education Learning Partnership Centre of Excellence in Learning and Teaching; the funding of scholarly activity and research in some partners; and other targeted investment of resources (paragraphs 46, 116, 123, 158)
- iii the guidance and support provided to external examiners through the University website, the UPC annual conference, and the formalisation of mentoring arrangements for external examiners working with the UPC (paragraphs 79, 172)
- iv the partnership between the University and the University of Plymouth Students' Union to improve student representation in its collaborative provision (paragraphs 103, 166)
- v the collegiate approach to staff development that provides extensive opportunities to all staff involved in the delivery and support of University programmes across partner institutions (paragraphs 118, 169).

Recommendations for action

196 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- i reflect on the arrangements, for the allocation of external examiners to Foundation Degree programmes, with the same award title delivered at different partner colleges; and the procedures for bringing together the judgements of external examiners regarding the standards of these programmes (paragraphs 81, 173)
- ii incorporate into the process for dealing with external examiner reports an additional mechanism to check that University-approved responses have been forwarded to the external examiners within the published timescale (paragraphs 82, 174)
- iii continue developing and strengthening the availability and use of data at all levels within the University for the purpose of better understanding progression, retention and completion, and for the monitoring of strategic objectives (paragraphs 114, 176).

Appendix

The University of Plymouth's response to the collaborative provision audit report

The University welcomes the positive commentary on its Collaborative Provision and the recognition of its serious commitment to collaborative working as outlined in the many aspects of good practice identified in the report. This recognition by QAA has already led other HEIs to approach the University for the purpose of sharing good practice. We are pleased to anticipate the raised profile that the report will give to the University and we welcome further enquiries from staff in other institutions with whom we will freely share our expertise as a contribution to enhancing national quality in collaborative provision.

In relation to the recommendations that the auditors thought were desirable:

- 1) The University notes the identification of the issue of using different external examiners for similarly named awards at different partners in the region, and has already taken steps to strengthen the sharing of opinions and information between external examiners in the same broad subject areas across our regional college partners, to provide additional assurance that standards are comparable and that best practice in the subject area is being identified. This summer, the University of Plymouth Colleges Faculty (UPC) established new procedures whereby external examiners' reports on similar awards in different colleges are shared amongst the group of subject examiners, with a request to consider whether any matters identified by one examiner might also be an issue in a similarly titled programme that others examine. This sharing of experience will be followed up by a meeting for such clusters of external examiners at the annual UPC External Examiners' Conference. Outcomes of these two consultations will be summarised by the relevant Subject Forum Chair and passed to the dean, UPC who will then, if necessary, take further action, including a request to relevant externals to consider any identified themes further in their next visit and reports.
- 2) In relation to the recommendation to improve the timeliness of responses to external examiners, there was some early discussion of the issue at the University's Learning & Teaching Committee in June 2006. The Committee noted that guidelines on timeliness were already in place, but that there were differences in practice in the methods for responding to externals' reports.

The good practice which the auditors noted in the University of Plymouth Colleges Faculty (UPC) (attaching the written response with the external examiner's report to the annual programme monitoring papers which were sent to Faculty Board) was not thought to be possible in the more complex structures operating in other faculties. Subject externals report on a group of modules in the subject, which may be included in a number of different programmes (some of which may also be in different Schools). It is therefore difficult to know exactly who should be responsible for making the written response (although all programme committees involved will have noted the external's report and will be including any issues in their annual monitoring action plan). Associate Deans (Learning & Teaching) in each faculty have therefore been tasked with contributing their suggestions on how, in their particular faculty, they could be assured that all external examiner reports have a written response, and that the response is both timely and signed off by an appropriate authority e.g. a Head of School.

Quality Support, for its part, is looking into ways in which the University's database of external examiners could be extended to include a field for recording the receipt of responses (and the date), as well as receipt of reports. Further discussion will then take place, between Associate Deans

and Faculty Quality Administrators with Quality Support, led by the DVC (Academic) with responsibility for Learning & Teaching, where it is intended that clear responsibilities and agreed process/es for signing off written responses will be established.

- 3) With regard to improvements to the data which underpins the quality assurance processes, particularly the data for progression, retention and completion, the promised UNITE system will be installed and fully implemented by January 2007 for enrolment, invoices, curriculum, applications and assessment. The main advantages of the new system will be realised when UNITE is also linked to the University's new Corporate Information System, which supplies data for management-level statistical information. The capacity to store data, rather than over-write it, will enable the University to undertake trend analysis, including comparisons over time.

