



Addressing the challenges of managing collaborative activity

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QAA

UK Quality Assured



Introduction

- The presentation will review the quality assurance-related aspects of collaborative provision that have challenged UK Universities over the past 6 years, and consider strategies to address them;
- The outcomes of (i) Institutional Audit, (ii) Institutional Review (E&NI), Institutional Review (W), (iv) Collaborative Provision Audit and (v) HE Review have been considered from October 2009 to October 2015;
- Source: QAA Knowledgebase:
<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/research/knowledgebase-search>
- Two-thirds (10 of 15) of the QAA Reviews in England, Northern Ireland & Wales that have led to 'no/limited confidence' or 'requires improvement to/does not meet' judgements over the past 6 years have been due to the institution's collaborative provision!

QAA reviews/audits with negative judgements 2009-14

Method	Institution	Judgement affected
IA	Liverpool John Moores University (Nov 09)	standards (CP)
IA	Brunel University (Dec 09)	standards (CP)
CPA	University of Bradford (Apr 10)	standards & quality (CP)
IA	York St John University (Apr 10)	standards
IA	University of Bolton (Dec 10)	standards & quality (CP)
IA	University College Plymouth St Mark & St John (Dec 10)	standards & quality (CP)
CPA	Leeds Metropolitan University (Jun 11)	standards & quality (CP)
IRENI	University College Falmouth (Feb 12)	quality (CP)
IRENI	Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music & Dance (Mar 12)	quality
IRENI	Loughborough University (May 12)	quality (CP)
IRENI	Greenwich School of Management (Jun 12)	quality
IR(W)	Aberystwyth University (Jun 12)	standards (CP)
IRENI	Anglia Ruskin University (Nov 12)	standards (CP)
IRENI	BPP University College (Nov 12)	information
HER	University of Bradford (Apr 14)	quality (research)

Why is collaborative provision a risk?

- The lure of the pot of gold (and the response when the pot is only a quarter full)
- Assumptions that there is an understanding of UK:
 - (i) quality assurance and enhancement expectations
 - (ii) learning, teaching and assessment approaches
 - (iii) student engagement expectations
- Language and cultural barriers
- Partnership working from a distance
- Inadequate due diligence and ongoing risk assessment

Reasons for negative audit/review judgements

- Partner approval and review (*B10*)
- Programme approval, monitoring & review (*A3.1, A3.3, B1, B8, B10*)
- Legal Agreements (*B10*)
- Staff development (*B3, B10*)
- Admissions (*B2, B10*)
- Accuracy & availability of information (*A2.2, B10, C*)
- Collaborative Partners Register (*B10, C*)
- Assessment (*A3.2, A3.4, B6, B7, B10*)
- Student engagement (*B5, B10*)
- University oversight (*A2.1, B10*)
- Recognition/articulation agreements (*B10*)
- Dual awards (*A2.1, A3, B10*)

Legal Agreements

- “the collaborative relationship between xxx and yyy has existed for 18 years and currently there is **no formal memorandum of understanding or agreement** between yyy and xxx which would confirm respective responsibilities“
- “In one case, however, ... was **unable to locate the signed copy of a memorandum** with a collaborative partner covering a two-year period following revalidation in 2009“
- “several collaborative programmes ... have commenced and operated for some time **without appropriate legal agreements being in place**”
- “**students were enrolled before agreements were** fully developed”
- “the **agreement was not signed until June 2012, although students were enrolled** on the programme at the start of that academic year“
- “the timing of the events meant that the partner **agreement was not concluded until after the first students had enrolled** on the programmes”
- “...Agreement for one partner was signed by both parties in 2009, covering the period 2007-2011. xxx agreed to extend this agreement for two intakes in November 2010; however, this **extension is not formally documented and signed** by both parties”
- “Some of the memoranda were signed by xxx, while others were unsigned and undated, **some were signed retrospectively** and **another was signed by a Head of Department**”

Legal Agreements

- “The Memorandum of Agreement ... **does not contain some of the detail** that might be

Key Messages

- Get your legal team on board with new collaborative partnerships (and additions/amendments) asap
- Get your legal team to prepare templates for your common types of collaborative arrangements
- Use QC Chapter B10, Indicator 7 for guidance on what should be in your agreements
- Ensure that agreements are signed off before enrolment
- Make sure you have a process in place to monitor when agreements expire, and take the opportunity to review

University award offered or were signed some years after programmes had commenced”

Partner Approval & Review

- “The policy and procedures for establishing a new collaborative partnership **do not set out in detail how a process of due diligence** would be completed. Nor do they make clear

Key Messages

- Conduct thorough financial, legal and academic due diligence on any new partner, in advance of approval
- Take that due diligence seriously! Act on it if concerns are raised (i.e. manage the risk)
- Use the legal agreement to manage the risk (eg. termination clauses)
- Periodically review ‘risky’ partnerships on a shorter cycle

management, student support, facilities and learning resources”

- “The University **does not have a separate formal process of partner review**, nor does it have a detailed written procedure for termination of partnerships”

Programme approval

- *“composition of panels has not been consistent with xxx’s requirements... either had no*

Key Messages

- Don’t take short cuts to get a collaborative programme approved quickly, on the basis that the partner wishes to commence recruitment asap
- Approval of franchised provision requires the same external scrutiny, even if the programme has already been approved back at home
- *The issues ...emerged as problems needing remedial action after students had been enrolled, ...the programme approval process had been insufficiently rigorous”*
- *“programme approval process for collaborative provision had allowed awards to be approved despite not being named in xxx's regulations“*
- *“followed immediately by the validation of two programmes later in the same afternoon, with only 45 minutes scheduled for consideration of a programme at postgraduate level. A second day was used to consider a number of other programmes”*

Programme monitoring & review

- “no annual monitoring reports for the provision”

Key Messages

- Collaborative programmes should ideally be annually monitored and periodically reviewed using the same processes as for your home provision (with added considerations such as link tutors’ reports)
- If you annually monitor or periodically review at the level of the School/Department, ensure that collaborative provision is not forgotten, or an afterthought

attention. However, it is not always clear in the documentation who will be responsible for taking action, what action is required, or the timescale for completion”

- “Critical Review documents were particularly problematic; some did not contain the monitoring material prescribed and others tended to omit those evaluative aspects specified by the procedure, instead confining themselves to description”

Assessment

- “Associate colleges are permitted to manage assessment processes at modular level, leading to a reduction in the direct oversight performed by xxx.... delegated to partners who had little or no experience of assessing students according to xxx's requirements”
- “different thresholds for particular classes of awards between home and collaborative programmes with the same name”
- “a wide range of problems with implementing its assessment policies and regulations at its overseas campus, including ... repeated delay in completing an exam board”
- “the review team identified an apparently persistent issue with respect to one particular partnership where students were not receiving written feedback on their assignments”

Assessment (external examiners)

- *“external examiners were at best only partly satisfied, and at worst clearly dissatisfied,*

Key Messages

- Ensure partners are fully aware of your institution's expectations with respect to assessment, and provide appropriate development to enable them to adhere to them from the start
- Even then, be very careful what assessment responsibilities you are prepared to initially delegate
- Don't go ahead with partnerships where travel to the partner is logistically difficult, or too expensive
- As the Degree-Awarding Body, you appoint externals!
- When an external raises (or repeats) a serious concern, ensure that you respond!

Accuracy & availability of information

- “the published **programme specifications are not all complete**”
- “One programme specification implies This **information is misleading**...”
- “some handbooks contained **no information about complaints and appeals**”
- “**there was not a clear link between the handbook and the appeals procedures**”
- “**the information published by partner institutions was inaccurate**. Contractual agreements ... contain clauses requiring partners to seek approval for all publicity relating to xxx degrees, and giving approval by default if xxx has not responded within a x days. The team heard of instances where default permission had occurred”
- “**conflicting responses regarding the responsibility for monitoring web-based published information regarding collaborative provision**”
- “This was particularly acute for **students at partner colleges, who do not have access to the University's student portal** where the information currently sits”
- “a specific example of non-English language material about the University's courses for which **the University could not confirm that a certified translation had been provided or approved**, and thus concludes that the University's policy and procedures for verifying partner-published information are not operating consistently”

Accuracy & availability of information

- *“The extent to which partner staff and students see a copy of external examiners’*

Key Messages

- Use key staff (e.g link tutor) to review partner information for prospective and current students
 - Carry out regular audits of partners’ websites
 - Consider the publication of a generic University guide for partners’ students, identifying key information sources
 - Ensure your Certificates and Transcripts follow the guidance in (i) QC Chapter B10, Indicator 19 and (ii) QC Part C, Indicator 6.
- *“xxx guidelines state that both certificates and transcripts will normally record at which institution the student pursued his or her programme of study however, not all transcripts carry all of this information”*

Collaborative Partners' Register

- *“the summary information published by xxx about its collaborative partnerships and*

Key Messages

- Make an individual in the University responsible for maintaining the partners' register
- Don't forget Study Abroad partnerships (eg. ERASMUS)
- Ask for annual lists of placement providers from your Schools/Departments

reviews of the partnerships”

- *“A limited partnership register is compiled by the University and published on its website. However, the full list of partnerships is only available internally.”*
- *“The University has a collaborative register, which it currently does not publish on its website”*

University 'oversight'

- “xxx’s *Quality Handbook made no specific reference to collaborative activity.* nor did

Key Messages

- Ensure your AQ policies and academic regulations cover collaborative provision (‘no difference to home programmes doesn’t work – some additional regs & policies are always needed)
 - Ensure your relevant Committee(s) include collaborative provision in their Terms of Reference
- “Responsibility for the operational side of collaborative provision is delegated to deaneries The audit team considered that these *arrangements were not strong enough to manage effectively the risks* inherent in collaborative provision”
 - “In the case of the Academic Quality Audits of its arrangements with one collaborative partner, the *evidence for a number of critical recommendations being fully considered* by the deliberative structures of the University *is not present*”

Joint & Dual Awards

- “...no evidence that a set of tailored management processes for dual awards.

Key Messages

- Undertake robust due diligence to satisfy yourself that you can ‘share’ responsibility for academic standards with the partner
- Don’t treat dual awards as articulation agreements. Acknowledge that they are dual awards
- You must take ‘some’ oversight of partners’ maintenance of standards through the assessment process

independent scrutiny of student work, the University is failing to ensure the proper oversight of the standards of its awards”

- “Students are able to accumulate up to 1/6 of programme credits from such courses, with neither faculty nor external examiners involved in assessment or moderation”

Advice for those new to collaborative provision

- Carry out detailed due diligence on any new partnership, and respond to any concerns raised (i.e. manage the risk)
- Front load the support and development of a new partnership (it will reap its rewards)
- The 'Link Tutor' role is critical to the success of a collaborative arrangement – value and support you Link Tutors
- Avoid programmes delivered and assessed in a language other than English!

Thank you

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