Addressing the challenges of managing collaborative activity

Dr Frank Haddleton
Director of Academic Quality Assurance, University of Hertfordshire
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Judgement affected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IA</td>
<td>Liverpool John Moores University (Nov 09)</td>
<td>standards (CP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IA</td>
<td>Brunel University (Dec 09)</td>
<td>standards (CP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPA</td>
<td>University of Bradford (Apr 10)</td>
<td>standards &amp; quality (CP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IA</td>
<td>York St John University (Apr 10)</td>
<td>standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IA</td>
<td>University of Bolton (Dec 10)</td>
<td>standards &amp; quality (CP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IA</td>
<td>University College Plymouth St Mark &amp; St John (Dec 10)</td>
<td>standards &amp; quality (CP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPA</td>
<td>Leeds Metropolitan University (Jun 11)</td>
<td>standards &amp; quality (CP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRENI</td>
<td>University College Falmouth (Feb 12)</td>
<td>quality (CP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRENI</td>
<td>Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music &amp; Dance (Mar 12)</td>
<td>quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRENI</td>
<td>Loughborough University (May 12)</td>
<td>quality (CP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRENI</td>
<td>Greenwich School of Management (Jun 12)</td>
<td>quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IR(W)</td>
<td>Aberystwyth University (Jun 12)</td>
<td>standards (CP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRENI</td>
<td>Anglia Ruskin University (Nov 12)</td>
<td>standards (CP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRENI</td>
<td>BPP University College (Nov 12)</td>
<td>information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HER</td>
<td>University of Bradford (Apr 14)</td>
<td>quality (research)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 expected in such a document and, these omissions constitute a moderate risk.”

• Each contractual agreement is different, and not all are up to date. xxx acknowledged that it had been very slow in issuing a new contract with yyy, which dates from 1997.

• Memoranda were varied in structure and nature, and were reported as being translations of Chinese versions which had been developed over time. Some of the memoranda indicated the duration of the agreement; others did not.

• Contracts indicate that XXX is responsible for making admissions decisions but in practice these are undertaken by partner staff.

• There is a schedule of interim reviews and revalidations updated manually, but that there is currently no formal schedule of reviews of memoranda of cooperation.

• Contractual agreements are in effect ‘rolling contracts’. The lack of a regular partner review process has implications for the accuracy and currency of contractual agreements. A number of current contractual agreements either do not reflect recent changes of name of the partner institution or recent changes to the name of the University award offered or were signed some years after programmes had commenced.

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.
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 did not see or hear evidence that xxx had taken sufficient steps to safeguard both itself and its students in yyy from difficulties that might have been anticipated, given the initial identification of the political context as a strategic risk by xxx.”

• “information upon which xxx assesses the suitability of its prospective partners may be inadequate, or lack independence of judgement that would be provided by a panel visit.”

• However, in practice, decisions may be taken without the formal outcome of such due diligence being presented.”

• “XXX had not undertaken due diligence before signing the agreement” (research).

• “no opportunity for xxx to take a holistic view of its ongoing relationship with a partner in relation to generic issues explored during the approval process, such as local quality 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.”

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.
Programme approval

- "composition of panels has not been consistent with xxx’s requirements... either had no external member or... grounds for questioning their independence and experience"

- "externality and independence were sometimes lacking and xxx failed to follow its own procedures"

- "approval of a partner, and the delivery of a programme by that partner, might take place without a visit by an external peer to consider the resources and other facilities onsite"

- "process to formally approve this arrangement... was insufficiently robust in that it:
  - lacked the externality required to provide confidence that...
  - reduced the usual level of scrutiny given to the academic standards...
  - did not confirm the validity, relevance or academic level of the programmes, nor the appropriateness of their curricula and assessment strategies"

- "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"

Key Messages

- Don’t take shortcuts 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
Programme monitoring & review

- “no annual monitoring reports for the provision”
- as a consequence of not actively monitoring and reporting through the deliberative structures all action taken in response to Academic Quality Audit recommendations, was at risk of not being assured that appropriate action had been taken
- not all partnerships appear to generate annual reports, raising questions about the effectiveness of the monitoring of collaborative provision and the ability of the University to exercise oversight over its collaborative provision
- no evidence of the operation of the franchise being reported in the previous 3 years, nor could the team find a formal decision to continue the franchise in any of the documentation for the relevant Departmental Review
- annual monitoring reports completed by partners…had not been considered by any University committee
- in the annual quality cycle, has identified a number of matters that need continued 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

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

- “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, with the level of response to significant issues they had raised"

• Adverse comment from the external examiner on marking standards and the related inadequate preparation of tutors, led to periods in which a course was running without the safeguard of an external examiner. Additionally, as external examiners are not formally employed by XXX, the University can only dismiss those who are not performing satisfactorily with the express agreement of the validated partner.

• Agreement provides that a collaborative partner's academic regulations may be used, having been approved by XXX. Programme boards are chaired by the partner's deans of faculty. External examiners' reports have raised standards-related concerns, over a number of years, in relation to condoning failures, adjustment of marks, generous marking, the use of questions available online, and some problems with programme board arrangements.

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

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 programmes was incomplete and inaccurate. On this basis, it was difficult to see how xxx could maintain effective oversight of the activity through its deliberative structures.”

• “At the time of the review, the published list of partners contained two omissions.”

• “During the review visit, …noticed that three collaborative agreements that had been approved at …. were not yet listed on the publicly accessible document.”

• “information provided by xxx on its website in relation to its collaborative relationships was incomplete, and the information provided by its partners was sometimes unclear.”

• “listings were inconsistent in providing information on dates of the establishment and 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.”

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
University ‘oversight’

“xxx’s Quality Handbook made no specific reference to collaborative activity, nor did there appear to be any published guide to staff on the selection, establishment and quality assurance of collaborative educational partnerships”

• the first course to be validated for delivery by a partner …. no policies and procedures have been developed. …. there was a general lack of awareness of issues related to the development of collaborative provision

• no oversight of the partnership was available at institutional level. ….. it was not possible for xxx to form a view on the effectiveness of the operation of this franchise

• “xxx’s oversight through the committee structure of its collaborative activity, especially in respect of levels of risk, requires strengthening”

• insufficient clarity in practice about the division of responsibilities for the quality management of collaborative provision between the three main committees

• 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”

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, recognising the differences in oversight required, and distinct from those applied to existing franchised provision, has yet been developed or formally approved”

• “The Course Approval and Review Team ... did not include an external expert. The University told the team that this was not necessary because the approval event was concerned with the mapping of the partner’s provision onto that of the University rather than approval of a new award”

• “the argument being that these differences should be accepted ‘as the students are technically not University of XXX students’”

• “awards are being given in the name of the University even when there is no oversight of work by the University’s external examiner”

• “In allowing the partners of dual awards to be considered as ‘equal partners’, taking full responsibility for assessment and the confirmation of marks but not requiring the 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”

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
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

Dr Frank Haddleton
Director of Academic Quality Assurance
Head of the Centre for Academic Quality Assurance
University of Hertfordshire

F.Haddleton@herts.ac.uk