



**QAA**

# **Outcomes from institutional audit**

## **Collaborative provision in the institutional audit reports**



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*Printed copies are available from:*

Linney Direct

Adamsway

Mansfield

NG18 4FN

Tel 01623 450788

Fax 01623 450629

Email [qaa@linneydirect.com](mailto:qaa@linneydirect.com)

### Summary

The institutional audit reports considered in this paper are those published by November 2004 and for institutions which did not have large or complex portfolios of collaborative provision.

The audit reports indicate that, in general, the arrangements made by institutions to oversee quality and academic standards in their collaborative provision are both sound and well conducted. The effectiveness of the management of partnerships is linked in many reports with the quality of the support and guidance given by the awarding institution. Similarly, concerns in some other reports about the effectiveness of arrangements for and the conduct of institutional oversight are associated with the quality of the liaison being achieved with partner institutions.

Features of good practice are cited in 16 reports. These identify strengths in such aspects as general management and support of collaborative links; developmental approaches to quality management; documentation, including handbooks and agreements; and approval, monitoring and review.

Recommendations are found in 28 reports. These reveal concerns about formulation and operation of management systems; liaison arrangements; documentation, including handbooks and agreements; response to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*); approval, monitoring, review and termination processes; assessment and external examiners; and staff development.

Reports contained positive comments on documentation, such as quality assurance handbooks and contractual agreements in which responsibilities for securing quality and standards were clearly described and assigned. Other reports raised concerns in the absence of such clear statements. Institutions were also recommended, variously, to consider the need for formal agreements, for consistency in agreement templates, and for reference to the management of individual programmes as well as partnerships.

Reports largely confirmed reference to and alignment of collaborative arrangements with guidance in the *Code of practice* and some noted the development of internal codes of practice modelled on it. The influence of QAA audit reports on institutional collaborative strategy or management was also evident. The benefits of internal audit were reported in several cases.

Procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision generally mirror and are incorporated into internal systems. Reports reflect a wide range of good and rigorous practice in all phases. Concerns relating to approval involved procedural consistency, externality and the viability of outcomes. In the case of monitoring, the issue for several institutions was failure to implement the annual procedures in the absence of reports.

In general, assessment arrangements and the appointment and operation of external examiners raised little comment. Moderation of assessment and the adequacy of external examiners' experience in an overseas context were, however, matters raised.

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While many reports noted the support given to partner institutions in the conduct of collaborative programmes, a number of recommendations were also addressed to the need for greater academic interaction between subject staff in the interests of equivalence of student learning experience.

### Preface

An objective of institutional audit is 'to contribute, in conjunction with other mechanisms, to the promotion and enhancement of high quality in teaching and learning'. One of the ways in which this can be accomplished is through identifying features of good practice across the reports and areas where reports have commonly offered recommendations for improvement.

In due course, QAA intends to produce an extended reflection on institutional audit in the *Learning from audit* series, but since the final institutional audit reports in the present audit cycle will not be published until spring 2006, *Learning from institutional audit* is unlikely to be published before late 2006. To give institutions and other stakeholders more timely information, QAA has, therefore, decided to produce a series of short working papers, describing features of good practice and summarising recommendations from the audit reports, to be published under the generic title *Outcomes from institutional audit* (hereafter, *Outcomes...*).

A feature of good practice in institutional audit is considered to be a process, a practice, or a way of handling matters which, in the context of the particular institution, is improving, or leading to the improvement of, the management of quality and/or academic standards, and learning and teaching. *Outcomes...* papers are intended to provide readers with pointers to where features of good practice relating to particular topics can be located in the published audit reports. Each *Outcomes...* paper therefore identifies the features of good practice in individual reports associated with the particular topic and their location in the Main report. Although all features of good practice are listed, in the interests of brevity not all are discussed in this paper. In the initial listing in paragraph 5, the first reference is to the numbered or bulleted lists of features of good practice at the end of each institutional audit report, the second to the relevant paragraphs in Section 2 of the Main report. Throughout the body of this paper, references to features of good practice in the institutional audit reports give the institution's name and the paragraph number from Section 2 of the Main report.

It should be emphasised that the features of good practice mentioned in this paper should be considered in their proper institutional context, and that each is perhaps best viewed as a stimulus to reflection and further development, rather than as a model for emulation. A note on the topics identified for the first series of *Outcomes...* papers, to be published throughout 2005-06, can be found at Appendix 3 (page 20).

This first series of *Outcomes...* papers is based on the 70 institutional audit reports published by the end of November 2004. The second series will draw on institutional audit reports published following the 2004-05 audits, and it is likely that there will be some overlap in topics between the first and second series. Papers in each series are perhaps best seen as 'work in progress'. Although QAA retains copyright in the contents of the *Outcomes...* papers they can be freely downloaded from QAA's website and cited, with acknowledgement.

### **Collaborative provision in the institutional audit reports: introduction and general overview**

1 This paper is based on a review of the outcomes of the first 70 institutional audits published by 5 November 2004 (see Appendix 1, page 17). A note on the methodology used to produce this and other papers in the *Outcomes...* series can be found in Appendix 4 (page 21).

2 The *Handbook for institutional audit: England*, paragraph 13, states that:

Where practicable, the audit process includes consideration of provision offered by institutions in collaboration with other providers, both in the UK and overseas, in the light of the relevant section of the *Code of practice* and (where relevant) HEFCE's *Indirectly funded partnerships: codes of practice for franchise and consortia arrangements*. However, where an institution's collaborative provision is too large or complex for a reliable scrutiny to be undertaken, it is not included in the audit.

3 This paper discusses arrangements for collaborative provision in institutions which do not have large portfolios of such provision. In 2007, QAA intends to publish a separate series of papers discussing and analysing the findings from the collaborative provision audits: *Outcomes from collaborative provision audit*.

4 When addressing collaborative provision, institutional audit reports follow a detailed template derived from the report structure set out in Annex H in the *Handbook for institutional audit: England*. This template advises reference to the *Code of practice: Section 2, Collaborative provision and flexible and distance learning (including e-learning)*, published in September 2004, which requires that audit reports should:

- discuss the nature and extent of the institution's collaborative partnerships in the UK and overseas
- discuss the nature of the institution's response to previous QAA reports on collaborative provision (again, in the UK and overseas)
- identify where responsibility for quality and the academic standards of awards resides
- discuss the use made by the institution of the *Code of practice* overall, and especially (in this context) *Section 2*
- comment on the existence of formal documented procedures for collaborative provision, including memoranda of agreement; procedures for approval monitoring and review; lines of communication; contact with students; and administrative support.

Where an institutional audit has included consideration of collaborative provision, the relevant section of the report may contain a considerable amount of detailed information on this aspect of the institution's work.

### Features of good practice

5 Consideration of the institutional audit reports published by November 2004 shows the following features of good practice relating to collaborative provision:

- the approach to the collaborative arrangement with the [National Film and Television School], in particular, the operation of the validation process and the articulation and implementation of assessment criteria, linked to learning outcomes, across the range of programmes of study which enable the delivery of clear formative guidance and summative assessment to students [Royal College of Art, paragraphs 156 i, 32 and 38]
- students' access to a unique and world-class resource offered through the collaboration with the [Victoria and Albert Museum] [Royal College of Art, paragraphs 156 v and 96]
- the University's constructive relationship with its local partner colleges [University of Lincoln, paragraphs 268 ii, 110 and 137]
- the secure and collegial framework for managing collaborative provision [Bath Spa University College, paragraphs 179 iv, 70 and 92-97]
- the constructive development and management of the University's relations with its partner colleges, especially Matthew Boulton College [Aston University, paragraphs 253 iv and 130]
- the University's development and management of placements in student learning [Aston University, paragraphs 253 v and 131]
- the quality of the University's engagement with its associated colleges [University of Bath, paragraphs 203 i, 79 and 109]
- the effective quality management arrangements the University has developed for its collaborative provision [University of Birmingham, paragraphs 225 iv and 108]
- the University's development, operation and monitoring of its collaborative provision [Brunel University, paragraphs 216 vi, 140 and 196]
- the University's successful integration of the quality management processes of associate colleges with its own [University of Kent, paragraphs 237, 49, 54, 59 and 129]
- the means by which the University promotes continuous improvement and further development through the management of its collaborative provision, which is an area of recognised strength [University of Liverpool, paragraphs 240 iii and 115]
- the establishment of the [Academic Audit Committee] and the work it has undertaken [University of Salford, paragraphs 208 iv and 106]
- the University's processes for managing relationships with its two accredited institutions [University of Southampton, paragraphs 189 vi and 99]
- the sound arrangements underpinning the University's relations with local partner institutions [University of East Anglia, paragraphs 275 i and 135]

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- the approach to the establishment of the [Hull York Medical School], in particular the establishment of effective and innovative collaborative policies and procedures [University of York, paragraphs 198 v and 103]
- the quality of the documentation and processes underpinning the University's two collaborative partnerships [University of Buckingham, paragraphs 136 iii and 88-89]
- the design and operation of the University's [Annual Academic Health] process, including the careful arrangements to ensure attention to the annual monitoring of provision with partner colleges, and the use made by the University and its partners of the Enhancement Day component of the process [University of Brighton, paragraphs 255 ii and 120]
- the University's provision for the annual review at institutional level of memoranda of cooperation with partner institutions [University of Brighton, paragraphs 255 v and 122]
- the quality management and assurance arrangements put in place to support the [Brighton and Sussex Medical School] [University of Brighton, paragraphs 255 vi and 125]
- the exemplary Partner College Staff Handbook [University of Brighton, paragraphs 255 vii and 127]
- the considered approach to the management of collaborative provision, which incorporates mechanisms for relating the degree of direct involvement by the University to the level of confidence built up in the partnership arrangement [Coventry University, paragraphs 273 iv and 145].

## Themes

- 6 A consideration of the features of good practice and recommendations in the audit reports that relate to collaborative provision suggests that the following broad themes merit further discussion:
  - collaborative strategy
  - oversight of quality and standards
  - frameworks and guidance
  - contact staff
  - handbooks and guidelines
  - written agreements
  - registers and taxonomies
  - external reference points
  - approval, monitoring and review (including selection of partners and approval of programmes; monitoring; periodic review; and termination of arrangements)
  - assessment and external examining arrangements
  - student support and information
  - staff support and development.



### Collaborative strategy

7 From the evidence of reports, many institutions have engaged in reviews leading to sharper definition of their collaborative strategy and its relationship to their corporate development as a whole. The effect has been to focus effort in areas and types of activity which, broadly, enhance institutions' roles in access and widening participation. In a UK context, this has meant expansion of local and regional partnerships, networks and consortia facilitating transition from further education to higher education provision by such routes as Foundation Degrees and recognition arrangements.

8 The significance of local associate college links has tended to increase and that of general validation and franchise activity to decline. Several institutions refer to a need for collaborative developments to be complementary to or compatible with campus provision. In a number of cases, universities have established joint postgraduate schemes in fields such as medicine, engineering and science.

9 Overseas, some institutions are engaged in regional concentration, with an emphasis on joint development or on programme articulation and entry to home courses. The strategy adopted by various other institutions has been to withdraw from all or most overseas collaborative arrangements. In some cases the institutions concerned have linked their decisions with the findings of external audit reports.

### Oversight of quality and standards

10 Many of the reports viewed the arrangements made by institutions to oversee quality and standards in their collaborative provision as representing good practice. A common aspect of this good practice was the effective support given to partner institutions, notably in the context of local and regional links. Reports spoke, for example, of 'clear requirements' coupled with 'effective support' [University of Bath, paragraph 109; University of Birmingham, 108]; of 'effective and supportive arrangements' [University of Kent, 129]; of 'sound arrangements to support local partner institutions' [University of East Anglia, 135]; or of 'the [University's] constructive relationship with its local partner colleges', and the 'support and guidance' it provides [University of Lincoln, 268 ii and 135].

11 Other audit reports endorsed the combination of robust management frameworks and considered management approaches in the assurance of quality and standards [Aston University, 130; Coventry University, 34 and 145; Bath Spa University College, 97; University of Southampton, 99; Brunel University, 216 vi and 196]. In some cases reports found that secure arrangements did not carry over from home to overseas provision. This might occur through the lack of an appropriate management framework for overseas commitments or on the other hand a failure to ensure its application.

12 A number of reports concluded that the arrangements for institutional oversight of quality and standards in collaborative provision were in need of further consideration. In some cases, recommendations addressed the need for clearer definition of responsibilities in the oversight of collaborative provision. Others concerned the need to improve systems for exercising oversight. Others again derived from the need for more effective implementation of quality assurance frameworks already in place. Recommendations often included a concern about the adequacy of the liaison being

achieved with partner institutions, whether overseas or at home, in the assurance of quality and standards.

### Frameworks and guidance

13 Quality assurance procedures for collaborative provision commonly replicate those used by the institution for internal programmes. Various reports comment further on the integration of quality assurance arrangements. In the view of one institution, 'the embedding of quality assurance arrangements for collaborative programmes within institutional core processes is the most effective way to assure standards and maintain the academic quality of provision'. Thus, an institution's 'successful integration of the quality management processes of associate colleges with its own' was considered a feature of good practice [University of Kent, 237 and 129]. Similarly, institutions may absorb partner colleges' internal quality assurance mechanisms into their own systems.

14 While largely replicating quality assurance arrangements, some institutions enhance aspects of their procedures in recognition of the greater risks inherent in collaboration, 'either within the UK or overseas'. Thus, in one example, the programme approval procedure for a collaborative arrangement 'is the same as for any programme to be delivered solely by the [University]', but with the addition of 'a separate...process of affiliation of an appropriate academic unit of the collaborating partner and approval to deliver that programme'. Again, mechanisms for assuring quality and standards are 'of the same kind' as those for internal programmes but 'more extensive' or 'supplemented as necessary'. In another case, the review cycle for validated programmes is halved from the internal norm of six years.

15 On the same basis, a number of other institutions were recommended to enhance their standard quality management arrangements when applied to collaborative provision. Thus one institution was recommended to consider enhancement of its 'routine quality management arrangements...to support collaborative practice'. Another was recommended to develop its framework for managing collaborative provision to eliminate inconsistencies in procedures for approval and in the terms of its written agreements. To another it was suggested that the practice of having reports on collaborative provision considered 'alongside those for equivalent provision offered internally...may not have the capacity to take into account the inherent increased risk involved in the operation of provision based in other institutions'. Another institution's prospective 'significant' expansion of its overseas collaborative provision was judged to call into question the adequacy of its standard quality management arrangements to 'meet the challenges and manage the risks associated with such activities'. One report noted that the proposed approval of a new overseas partnership at a time when institutional regulations and procedures governing the approval of academic partnerships had still themselves to be approved 'carried the significant risk of compromising confidence in the process of validation of the new...programme'.

16 Two reports noted institutional policies of adjusting the quality management relationships with partner colleges in the light of the colleges' 'experience in managing their provision' or 'the level of confidence built up in the partnership arrangement'. In both instances these developmental approaches were associated

with features of good practice [University of Liverpool, 240 iii and 112; Coventry University, 273 iv and 145].

17 A focus for the institutional oversight and quality management of collaborative provision is provided in various instances by the establishment of a committee or board of studies/faculty with specific responsibility for this area. These committees report to the principal committee overseeing quality and standards, and may function in tandem with institutional boards of undergraduate or graduate studies. In one institution, two standing groups drawn from the principal committee separately oversee UK and overseas collaboration. Boards of studies/faculties with a specific collaborative role make use of processes and structures, such as a post of dean, mirroring those in other faculties. Elsewhere, institutional oversight of collaborative provision is placed with the committee responsible to the senate or academic board for assurance of quality and standards as a whole.

18 The practice of cross-representation on committees is well established and may occur at any level from the programme committee to the senate or academic board. In one institution partner colleges may be represented in the membership of validation and review panels. Some institutions have established joint boards of studies for each partnership or group of programmes. Universities with joint postgraduate schemes have put in place joint bodies integrated with each institution's internal quality management structures [University of Sussex, 148; University of Brighton, 125; University of York, 103]. In one case a partner college operates a school board of studies within a faculty of the awarding university.

### Contact staff

19 A key element in the support of partner colleges is the role of link tutors appointed by the awarding institution. The range of nomenclature given to this supporting and monitoring function encompasses 'link tutor', 'liaison tutor', 'liaison officer', '(subject) adviser', 'subject contact', 'programme coordinator', 'programme moderator', 'university contact', 'university assessor' and 'visitor'. One report noted that memoranda of agreement identified 'school, subject and module contact persons' at the awarding institution as well as basic visiting requirements. Another reported on a school post of 'partner college coordinator' set up 'to ensure parity across the four partner colleges involved with the school and to oversee the work of link tutors'.

20 A number of audit reports commented on visiting and reporting arrangements, including the submission of annual monitoring reports to faculty and institutional quality committees. One report mentioned the support provided by subject advisers for joint boards of studies. Some reports noted the effective liaison between university and college contacts. One report observed that link tutors provided 'an effective communication channel at the planning and approval stages, as well as day-to-day liaison for courses once in operation'. Several reports noted that partner staff had confirmed the value of liaison arrangements. In two cases the systems adopted were seen as 'effective', 'developmental' and 'supportive' [University of Bath, 109; University of Birmingham, 108]. Reference was made in some reports to the value of regular meetings between staff occupying contact roles.

21 Some examples occurred of institutions lacking clear liaison arrangements at subject or programme level. Thus one institution's subject level contacts were found to be 'informal' and 'incidental', and 'there appeared to be no clear arrangements in place for programme-level interaction'. Another institution was advised to establish the responsibilities of its schools for collaborative provision, and to define reporting arrangements for link and liaison tutors. One report noted institutional recognition of 'the risks inherent in over-reliance on individuals in the operation of collaborative arrangements'; another suggested further consideration of 'the principle of vesting significant responsibilities for advice on both quality and standards in an individual role', where these responsibilities incorporated 'most aspects of quality assurance, academic standards, quality enhancement, and the monitoring of the provision of learning resources, along with a wider advisory role'.

22 Reports also discussed the liaison role of central administrative departments and the support provided by them for academic links. Aspects of administrative responsibility mentioned in reports included monitoring of collaborative arrangements, publication of handbooks and policy documents, as well as involvement in staff development initiatives. One administrative department was perceived to act as 'the key liaison point' for partner institutions.

23 Several examples were quoted of consultative groups formed to promote links and disseminate good practice between partner institutions. Reporting links for these groups varied, ranging from school quality committees to a university senate. In one case the liaison group performed a key role in the annual monitoring process.

### Handbooks and guidelines

24 Many reports noted the clarity and detail of institutional handbooks in which responsibilities for securing quality and standards in collaborative provision are described. They noted also the alignment of quality assurance arrangements with guidance contained in the *Code of practice* (see below, paragraph 29). One report identified good practice in the general quality of the documentation supporting collaborative partnerships [University of Buckingham, 89]; others the value placed on institutional documentation by collaborative partners. Reports commented on publication of a helpful supplementary handbook on procedures for reference by staff in partner colleges [University of Brighton, 127]. Two other reports noted systems of annual review of institutional handbooks.

25 Some institutions were advised of the need to revise their guidelines to include missing procedures or types of collaboration, to clarify responsibilities in quality management, or to bring arrangements into line with the *Code of practice*.

### Written agreements

26 Numerous reports confirmed that institutions were employing written agreements in line with the advice of *Section 2* of the *Code of practice*, especially Precept 13. In particular, they noted the clear statement of responsibilities assigned to each of the parties: in the words of one report, agreements 'demarcate the respective responsibilities of the [University] and its partners'. Another report observed that a

formal agreement signed by both institutions and defining each party's responsibilities for course delivery and quality assurance was 'an integral part of all approval procedures'. The formulation of agreements contributed, in one case, to the identification of a feature of good practice [University of Buckingham, 136 iii and 89]. The conduct of an annual review of agreements, taking account of 'changes in individual arrangements and in the nature of external requirements' was also found to be good practice [University of Brighton, 255 v and 122].

27 The approaches of various institutions to the matter of agreements raised concerns. Several were recommended to establish appropriate formal agreements, in line with the *Code of practice*, for all their collaborative activities. Others were advised to revise their extant agreements to clarify responsibilities for the assurance of quality and standards. Some reports noted the internal variability of memoranda of agreement in respect of such matters as partner staff and students' entitlements and access to resources. One institution, in which agreements had been set in place by schools and in which 'considerable variability' had been noted by its Academic Board, determined that future agreements would require institutional authority. Several institutions have responded to the advice of audit reports in ensuring that all collaborative partnerships are secured by an institutional agreement. One report commented on the need for agreements to refer in detail to the management of individual programmes rather than merely to the institutional partnership. Instances were given both of an agreement being signed prior to formal consideration of the associated proposal and of an agreement still awaiting confirmation one year into the running of the two-year programme concerned.

### Registers and taxonomies

28 Some reports advised institutions to maintain and update their registers to ensure that all collaborative arrangements were accounted for. Other reports advised institutions to establish a taxonomy and regulatory framework taking account of the different types of collaborative arrangement that were in place or planned, in order to ensure consistency and transparency in quality assurance procedures. The scope of this advice extended to the role of overseas placements in internal awards.

### External reference points

29 Audit reports largely confirmed appropriate institutional reference to and alignment of collaborative arrangements with guidance in *Section 2* of the *Code of practice*. Some noted further mapping against the draft of the revised *Section 2* as it was circulated for consultation prior to being finalised. Particular areas of alignment mentioned in reports included institutional agreements; the selection of partners; programme validation [University of Lincoln, 135]; and periodic review. Some reports noted the development of internal codes of practice modelled on this section of the *Code of practice*. In a few cases, reports indicated lack of or limited reference to the *Code of practice* in the development of collaborative partnerships.

30 The influence of QAA audit reports on institutional collaborative strategy or management appears in various examples. In some cases, where findings had been critical, the strategic effect appeared to encourage withdrawal from certain, if not

most, overseas commitments. More generally, the impact of both institutional audit reports and reports on individual overseas programmes has been to assist review and strengthening of quality management in areas such as monitoring, written agreements, quality assurance guidelines and committee structures. One report noted as a feature of good practice the influence of an internal audit on a 'substantial' revision of institutional quality assurance systems, which took full account of the *Code of practice* [University of Salford, 208 i and 106].

31 The value of internal audit in raising institutional awareness of collaborative activity and of points of risk was noted elsewhere.

### Approval, monitoring and review

#### Selection of partners and approval of programmes

32 The kinds of matters associated with the process of initial approval of a collaborative partner include risk analysis, consideration of 'the business case' or 'the nature of the proposed programmes', the institution's academic characteristics, or its 'overall standing'. The process is likely to be conducted at or involve the senior executive level, although deliberative channels may also be used. Some reports noted that initial consideration also required visits to the proposed partner, which might include discussions with students.

33 Two reports identified a need for selection procedures to be clarified and/or tightened. In one case the institution's guidelines emphasised 'exchange of information' with prospective partners, rather than its responsibility to establish their 'fitness for partnership', and omitted the approval procedure. In the other, the institution was advised to ensure that adequate consideration was given to the scrutiny of collaborative partners and sites where its programmes were to be taught, with specific reference to access to learning resources, student support and the approval of teaching staff.

34 Collaborative programme approval procedures broadly replicate those in general use. Institutions which delegate approval responsibility to faculties or schools may, however, convene institutional validation panels for collaborative proposals. Other institutions not employing delegation may adjust their approval procedures to take account of the academic, quality management and/or resource aspects of collaborative partnerships.

35 Numerous reports commented on the rigour of approval procedures. Rigour was associated with, for example, the use of externals, procedural consistency or alignment with the expectations of the *Code of practice*. The developmental use of the validation process, as well as of the prior stages of consideration, by one institution was found to represent good practice [Royal College of Art, 38].

36 Concerns, leading to recommendations, were expressed in various reports about the conduct of processes for approving collaborative provision. One report commented on inconsistent operation of procedures for establishing collaborative programmes in the context of a 'somewhat underdeveloped...corporate framework for managing collaborative activity'. The issue for two reports was the viability of approvals given where fundamental or numerous conditions were set and their

satisfaction remained obscure despite the programmes being allowed to run. In one of these cases the lack of external involvement was also noted as a weakness. In two other cases recommendations were attached to concerns about the rigour of oversight of validation facilities at associate or affiliated colleges.

### Monitoring

37 The evidence of audit reports is that institutions generally integrate annual monitoring of collaborative programmes with internal procedures. In one such case the audit team noted the good practice informing, *inter alia*, the monitoring of collaborative provision [Brunel University, 140]. In another, the report noted the requirement for collaborative partners to employ the same template as internal programmes and to 'participate in a rigorous approach to annual monitoring'.

38 One report identified good practice in an institution's 'careful arrangements to ensure attention to the annual monitoring of provision with partner colleges' [University of Brighton, 255 ii and 36]. These arrangements included parallel consideration of programme reports by school boards of studies and by an institutional committee containing representatives from partner colleges, and also annual institutional reports from partner colleges received by that committee. Another report noted the device of an 'annual quality visit' to the collaborating centre 'to review the performance of both partners and to provide an opportunity for any centre-wide issues to be discussed with staff and students of the centre and reported to the [institution]'. Two reports noted the inclusion in annual reports of feedback from students and external examiners, and in one case the consideration of data on student progression and achievement.

39 Three recommendations were associated either with a failure to implement annual monitoring procedures (in the absence of any reports) or with the lack of any provision for involvement by the awarding institution in a partner college's annual monitoring processes. In each of these cases the recommendation advised of the need to acquire effective institutional oversight of quality and standards in collaborative provision. There was also comment on gaps both in the receipt and the consideration of annual monitoring reports. Particular difficulties were experienced in obtaining reports from overseas partners. Two reports also noted lack of comment on overseas partnerships in faculty boards of studies minutes or faculty annual synoptic monitoring reports.

### Periodic review

40 Arrangements for periodic review of collaborative provision are generally based on or part of internal processes. Several reports noted the role of visits to partner colleges, as well as the inclusion of external panel members, in collaborative review procedures. One report noted the replacement of departmental with partner college staff in collaborative review panels. Adjustments to the reporting route within the awarding institution, to sharpen the collaborative focus, were observed by two reports. In another case, the review cycle for collaborative provision was, at three years, half that for internal programmes. One report found good practice in the 'positive impact' made by quality review engagements 'not only upon the programmes themselves but also on the internal reflections and discussions that had taken place

as a result on wider matters of quality assurance in the collaborating institutions' [University of Bath, 109]. Another institution had conducted an 'executive review' of collaborative provision in the light of certain 'quality assurance challenges', which had included the nature of the academic environment provided by partner institutions, in order to consider its ability to ensure equivalence of quality and standards. One institution was advised to reconsider review procedures, involving an overseas postgraduate partnership, which had led to 'significant areas of concern being identified as part of a delayed quality review process and not sooner'.

### Termination of arrangements

41 Some reports commented on aspects of the termination of collaborative programmes or partnerships. One institution's strategy of withdrawal from all its overseas and remote UK partnerships was accompanied by a number of mechanisms, to protect academic standards and support continuing student cohorts, which included electronic access, maintenance of subject links, and examining board and external examiner arrangements. Two other reports noted the professional manner in which institutions had terminated collaborative partnerships.

42 On the other hand, some institutions were advised to clarify or reinforce the procedures applying to discontinuation. One report noted the lack of explicitness on the basis for recommending termination of a programme; another advised of the need to ensure effective oversight, as by receipt of annual monitoring reports, of all overseas programmes in course of finishing. A further report commented on the lack of reference in the written agreement to arrangements to protect students' interests in the event of termination; another queried the placement of authority for terminating collaborative arrangements below institutional level.

### Assessment and external examining arrangements

43 Two reports made recommendations concerning the adequacy of institutional oversight of academic standards in partner institutions. In one case involving external validation, the report identified a lack of processes for moderation by the awarding institution of the standards of student achievements at the partner institution, the monitoring of students at programme level being dependent on sampling by external examiners. In the other case moderation was not consistently undertaken by staff of the awarding institution and the institution was advised to 'develop a clear and rigorous framework for the management of...work with its collaborative partners, particularly in relation to assessment'. Another report noted that, contrary to those applying internally, the assessment regulations for partner colleges appeared not to limit the number of resit opportunities, which it found 'potentially inequitable in its effects on opportunities for progression' and 'a variance difficult to justify in academic terms'.

44 Some reports raised issues concerned the appointment and operation of external examiners. One report noted that, in the context of overseas (as opposed to UK) collaborative arrangements, it was not always the practice to ensure commonality of external examiners for collaborative provision and the equivalent programme within the awarding institution; it recommended that in all cases the same external examiner be assigned to similar or equivalent versions of programmes. Another institution was



advised that external examining arrangements should ensure that examiners had 'sufficient competence in the language...of instruction and assessment'. In another overseas example, the report commented on the external examiner's unfamiliarity with the programme structure and assessment schedule. Generally, however, it appeared that audit teams were content with the arrangements for assessment and external examining.

### Student support and information

45 Reports which commented on arrangements for support of students following collaborative programmes focused on handbook provision and access to learning resources. In contrast to instances quoted of handbooks not being provided, others were given of full and informative handbooks addressing the status and entitlements of students within the awarding institution. Some reports noted lack of or 'variable' access to learning resources, including libraries and electronic media. One report described a case where, although it was a requirement of the awarding institution that evaluation of such resources be undertaken as part of the approval and review procedures, neither the approval nor the review report had alluded to student access [University of Portsmouth, 136]. Another report, however, stated that the resources available to students engaged in collaborative arrangements were 'exceptional' and constituted a feature of good practice [Royal College of Art, 156 v and 96]. In another example, institutional arrangements for managing and monitoring placements and exchange programmes, which included evaluation of student experience within the programme review process, were also considered to represent good practice [Aston University, paragraphs 253 v and 131]. In a situation where no progression route was available between partner college awards and the awarding institution's internal degree programmes, the report found a need to ensure that the location of award-bearing programmes was 'carefully specified in all relevant publicity to avoid the potential for misleading applicants'.

### Staff support and development

46 As indicated above (paragraph 10), the support and guidance provided by awarding institutions for their collaborative partners is identified, in a number of reports, as a key element in their effective oversight of quality and standards. Various reports note the encouragement given through both formal and informal means to academic development and dissemination of good practice. At postgraduate level, one report noted the strength derived from collaborative research and teaching.

47 Several recommendations also, however, emerge from this area. In two cases reports identify the need for an institutional strategy to promote academic staff development in partner colleges. Others comment on the absence of staff development initiatives even when collaborative agreements make such a commitment. Some reports focus on lack of access to staff development programmes available to staff of the awarding institution. One report suggested the need for 'a more inclusive approach' which would assist dissemination of good practice taking place in partner institutions. Running through these texts was a wish to see greater academic interaction between the corresponding subject staff in the interests of equivalence of student learning experience.

### **Conclusion**

48 The evidence of the 70 institutional audit reports published in 2003-04 is that arrangements for institutional oversight of standards and quality in collaborative provision are for the most part soundly designed and operated. The reports also indicate that in developing their quality management systems, most institutions have taken close account of the *Code of practice* and that equivalence in standards and quality between internal and collaborative provision is, in general, being secured.

## **Appendix 1 - The institutional audit reports**

### **2002-03**

University College Chichester, February 2003  
The Royal Veterinary College, February 2003  
Cumbria Institute of the Arts, March 2003  
Institute of Education, University of London, March 2003  
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, March 2003  
Middlesex University, March 2003  
Royal Academy of Music, March 2003  
Royal College of Art, March 2003  
University of Cambridge, April 2003  
School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, April 2003  
Bath Spa University College, May 2003  
University of Lincoln, May 2003  
London Business School, May 2003  
Newman College of Higher Education, May 2003  
Norwich School of Art and Design, May 2003  
Rose Bruford College, May 2003  
Royal College of Music, May 2003  
Royal Northern College of Music, May 2003  
The School of Pharmacy, University of London, May 2003  
College of St Mark and St John, May 2003  
The Surrey Institute of Art & Design, University College, May 2003  
Trinity and All Saints College, May 2003  
Trinity College of Music, May 2003  
Royal College of Nursing Institute, July 2003

### **2003-04**

University of Bath, October 2003  
University of Bradford, November 2003  
University of Buckingham, November 2003  
University of Essex, November 2003  
University of Exeter, November 2003  
University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, November 2003  
University of Sheffield, November 2003  
Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, December 2003  
Royal Agricultural College, December 2003  
University of Southampton, December 2003  
St Martin's College, Lancaster, December 2003  
University of Surrey, Roehampton, December 2003

University of York, December 2003  
University of East Anglia, January 2004  
University of Durham, February 2004  
University of Liverpool, February 2004  
Writtle College, February 2004  
Bournemouth University, March 2004  
The Institute of Cancer Research, March 2004  
University of Kent, March 2004  
University of Leeds, March 2004  
Loughborough University, March 2004  
Open University, March 2004  
University of Oxford, March 2004  
University of Salford, March 2004  
University of Warwick, March 2004  
University of Wolverhampton, March 2004  
Aston University, April 2004  
University of Birmingham, April 2004  
University of Bristol, April 2004  
University of Central Lancashire, April 2004  
Coventry University, April 2004  
The London Institute, April 2004  
University of Portsmouth, April 2004  
Anglia Polytechnic University, May 2004  
University of Brighton, May 2004  
Brunel University, May 2004  
University of Keele, May 2004  
The Nottingham Trent University, May 2004  
University of Reading, May 2004  
University of Sussex, May 2004  
Wimbledon School of Art, May 2004  
University of Greenwich, June 2004  
King's College London, June 2004  
University of Lancaster, June 2004  
The Manchester Metropolitan University, June 2004

**Appendix 2 - Reports on specialist institutions**

The Royal Veterinary College, February 2003  
Cumbria Institute of the Arts, March 2003  
Institute of Education, University of London, March 2003  
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, March 2003  
Royal Academy of Music, March 2003  
Royal College of Art, March 2003  
School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, April 2003  
London Business School, May 2003  
Newman College of Higher Education, May 2003  
Norwich School of Art and Design, May 2003  
Rose Bruford College, May 2003  
Royal College of Music, May 2003  
Royal Northern College of Music, May 2003  
The School of Pharmacy, University of London, May 2003  
The Surrey Institute of Art & Design, University College, May 2003  
Trinity and All Saints College, May 2003  
Trinity College of Music, May 2003  
Royal College of Nursing Institute, July 2003  
Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, December 2003  
Royal Agricultural College, December 2003  
Writtle College, February 2004  
The Institute of Cancer Research, March 2004  
The London Institute, April 2004  
Wimbledon School of Art, May 2004

### Appendix 3 - Projected titles of *Outcomes...* papers

In most cases, *Outcomes...* papers will be no longer than 15 sides of A4. QAA retains copyright in the *Outcomes...* papers, but as noted earlier, they may be freely used, with acknowledgement.

Projected titles of *Outcomes...* papers in the first series are listed below.

| Title   | Publishing date (provisional) |
|---|-------------------------------|
| Initial overview  | April 2005                    |
| External examiners and their reports                        | April 2005                    |
| Programme specifications                                    | April 2005                    |
| Staff support and development arrangements                  | October 2005                  |
| Student representation and feedback                         | November 2005                 |
| Programme monitoring arrangements                           | January 2006                  |
| Assessment of students                                      | January 2006                  |
| Learning support resources (including VLEs)                 | January 2006                  |
| Validation, approval and periodic review                    | January 2006                  |
| Work-based and placement learning, and employability        | March 2006                    |
| Arrangements for international students                     | March 2006                    |
| Progression and completion statistics                       | March 2006                    |
| Collaborative provision in the institutional audit reports  | March 2006                    |
| Academic advice, guidance and supervision                   | April 2006                    |
| Specialist institutions and institutional audit             | May 2006                      |
| Institutions' frameworks for managing quality and standards | May 2006                      |
| Subject benchmark statements                                | tbc                           |
| The Framework for higher education qualifications           | tbc                           |

## Appendix 4 - Methodology

The methodology followed in analysing the institutional audit reports uses the headings set out in Annex H of the *Handbook for institutional audit: England* to subdivide the Summary, Main report and Findings sections of the institutional audit reports into broad areas. An example from the Main report is 'The institution's framework for managing quality and standards, including collaborative provision'.

For each published report, the text was taken from the documents published on QAA's website and converted to plain text format. The resulting files were checked for accuracy and coded into sections following the template used to construct the institutional audit reports. In addition, the text of each report was tagged with information providing the date the report was published and some basic characteristics of the institution (base data). The reports were then introduced into a qualitative research software package, QSR N6®. The software provides a wide range of tools to support indexing and searching and allows features of interest to be coded for further investigation.

An audit team's judgements, its identification of features of good practice, and its recommendations appear at two points in an institutional audit report: the Summary and at the end of the Findings; it is only in the latter, however, that cross references to the paragraphs in the Main report are to be found, and it is here that the grounds for identifying a feature of good practice, offering a recommendation and making a judgement are set out. These cross references have been used to locate features of good practice and recommendations to the particular sections of the report to which they refer.

Individual papers in the *Outcomes...* series are compiled by QAA staff and experienced institutional auditors. To assist in compiling the papers, reports produced by QSR N6® have been made available to provide a broad picture of the overall distribution of features of good practice and recommendations in particular areas, as seen by the audit teams.

**Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education**

Southgate House

Southgate Street

Gloucester

GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000

Fax 01452 557070

Email [comms@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:comms@qaa.ac.uk)

[www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

Company registration number 3344784

Registered charity number 1062746

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