

# **The Manchester Metropolitan University**

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MARCH 2006

## **Preface**

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) exists to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education (HE) qualifications and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of HE.

To do this QAA carries out reviews of individual HE institutions (universities and colleges of HE). In England and Northern Ireland this process is known as institutional audit. QAA operates similar but separate processes in Scotland and Wales. For institutions that have large and complex provision offered through partnerships, QAA conducts collaborative provision audits in addition to institutional audits.

## **The purpose of collaborative provision audit**

Collaborative provision audit shares the aims of institutional audit: to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges are:

- providing HE, awards and qualifications of an acceptable quality and an appropriate academic standard, and
- exercising their legal powers to award degrees in a proper manner.

## **Judgements**

Collaborative provision audit results in judgements about the institutions being reviewed. Judgements are made about:

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements
- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the present and likely future capacity of the awarding institution to satisfy itself that the learning opportunities offered to students through its collaborative arrangements are managed effectively and meet its requirements; and
- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, (or authorises to be published) about the quality of its programmes offered through collaborative provision that lead to its awards and the standards of those awards.

These judgements are expressed as either **broad confidence**, **limited confidence** or **no confidence** and are accompanied by examples of good practice and recommendations for improvement.

## **Nationally agreed standards**

Collaborative provision audit uses a set of nationally agreed reference points, known as the 'Academic Infrastructure', to consider an institution's standards and quality. These are published by QAA and consist of:

- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*, which includes descriptions of different HE qualifications
- *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects

- guidelines for preparing programme specifications, which are descriptions of the what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study. They outline the intended knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes of a student completing that programme. They also give details of teaching and assessment methods and link the programme to the FHEQ.

### **The audit process**

Collaborative provision audits are carried out by teams of academics who review the way in which institutions oversee their academic quality and standards. Because they are evaluating their equals, the process is called 'peer review'.

The main elements of collaborative provision audit are:

- a preliminary visit by QAA to the institution nine months before the audit visit
- a self-evaluation document submitted by the institution four months before the audit visit
- a written submission by the student representative body, if they have chosen to do so, four months before the audit visit
- a detailed briefing visit to the institution by the audit team six weeks before the audit visit
- visits to up to six partner institutions by members of the audit team
- the audit visit, which lasts five days
- the publication of a report on the audit team's judgements and findings 22 weeks after the audit visit.

### **The evidence for the audit**

In order to obtain the evidence for its judgement, the audit team carries out a number of activities, including:

- reviewing the institution's own internal procedures and documents, such as regulations, policy statements, codes of practice, recruitment publications and minutes of relevant meetings, as well as the self-evaluation document itself
- reviewing the written submission from students
- asking questions of relevant staff from the institution and from partners
- talking to students from partner institutions about their experiences
- exploring how the institution uses the Academic Infrastructure.

The audit team also gathers evidence by focusing on examples of the institution's internal quality assurance processes at work through visits to partners. In addition, the audit team may focus on a particular theme that runs throughout the institution's management of its standards and quality. This is known as a 'thematic enquiry'.

From 2004, institutions will be required to publish information about the quality and standards of their programmes and awards in a format recommended in document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*, published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The audit team reviews how institutions are working towards this requirement.

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## Summary

### Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited The Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU or the University) from 20 to 24 March 2006 to carry out an audit of the collaborative provision offered by the University. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes of study offered by the University through arrangements with collaborative partners, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standard of its awards made through collaborative arrangements.

To arrive at its conclusions the audit team spoke to members of staff of the University, and read a wide range of documents relating to the way the University manages the academic aspects of its collaborative provision. As part of the audit process, the team visited four of the University's collaborative partners where it spoke to students on the University's collaborative programmes and to members of staff of the partner institution.

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

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

The term 'collaborative provision' is taken to mean 'educational provision leading to an award, or to specific credit toward an award, of an awarding institution delivered and/or supported and/or assessed through an arrangement with a partner organisation' (*Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, paragraph 13, published by QAA, 2004).

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

### Outcome of the collaborative provision audit

As a result of its investigations the audit team's view of the University is that:

- broad confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements, and that
- 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 University's clear recognition that it learns from good practice in its collaborative activity and the culture of genuine partnership that derives from this recognition
- the consortia networks that provide evidence of close collaboration with the University and enable consistency to be achieved across a range of partners
- the effectiveness, commitment and professionalism of the link tutors and the University's recognition of the importance of the link tutor role through the appointment of experienced staff to that position
- the clarity of the Quality Assurance Manual that has helped to establish comprehensive guidelines for the operation of quality management processes to be applied to collaborative provision

- the constructive and dynamic engagement with the collaborative provision audit process, manifest in an honest and reflective self-evaluation document which is clearly linked to the University's mission
- the opportunity for enhancement provided by link tutor and partner forums
- the programme log which provides a substantial reference and evidence base for the health of a programme on an annual basis
- the thorough and robust process of annual monitoring which is consistently applied across all collaborative provision, regularly reviewed, and owned by staff.

### **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 standards of the awards it offers through collaborative arrangements are maintained. The team considers it desirable that the University:

- continues to ensure that its enhancement strategy for collaborative provision constitutes an organic and evolutionary feature of its mechanisms for the management of quality and standards
- continues with its plans to make institutional-level approval and review distinct from programme-level approval and review in respect of its collaborative provision, and
- requires unit-level student feedback to be collected and incorporated within its annual monitoring of collaborative provision.

### **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 audit found that the University has responded appropriately to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, subject benchmark statements, programme specifications and the *Code of practice*.

In due course, the audit process will include a check on the reliability of the Teaching Quality Information published by institutions in the format recommended in the Higher Education Council for England's document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*. The audit team was satisfied that the University is taking appropriate steps to ensure the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that it publishes (or authorises to be published) about the quality of the programmes offered through collaborative provision that lead to its awards, and about the standards of those awards.



# **Main report**

## Main report

1 An audit of the collaborative provision offered by The Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU or the University) was undertaken during the period 20 to 24 March 2006. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes of study offered by the University through arrangements with collaborative partners, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standard of its awards made through collaborative arrangements.

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

3 The collaborative provision audit checked the effectiveness of the University's procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of academic awards through collaborative arrangements; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of the programmes of study offered through collaborative arrangements that lead to those awards; for publishing reliable information about its collaborative provision; and for the discharge of its responsibility as an

awarding body. As part of the collaborative audit process, the audit team visited four of the University's collaborative partners.

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

4 The development of Manchester Polytechnic, founded in 1970, was influenced by its original constituent colleges, namely, the College of Art and Design; Manchester College of Commerce; and the John Dalton College of Technology. The Polytechnic was enlarged through merger with Didsbury College of Education and Hollings College in 1977 and amalgamated with the City of Manchester College of Higher Education (itself the result of a merger of three colleges) in 1983. The Polytechnic acquired university status in 1992 under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and was renamed The Manchester Metropolitan University. Merger with Crewe and Alsager College of Higher Education in 1992 extended the University's educational provision in South Cheshire. More recently, in September 2003, the Manchester School of Physiotherapy joined the University.

5 The University operates a unitised, credit accumulation scheme and approximately two-thirds of MMU's current population of over 34,000 students attend full-time or sandwich programmes. In addition, some 5,000 students are on placement. In 2004-05 16 per cent of students were following taught postgraduate programmes. The number of students studying for awards of the University under collaborative arrangements since the previous audit of the University's collaborative provision in 1995 has risen from 2,500 in 1995-96 to approximately 2,800 in 2005-06.

6 The seven faculties of the University offer a broad range of provision including law, art, humanities, social sciences, business, education, science, engineering and hospitality management. There are currently approximately 600 different programmes on offer, many with a practical and vocational aspect. There is an

active research community within the University and research is managed primarily through ten research institutes.

7 The collaborative provision self-evaluation document (CPSED) prepared for the audit by the University indicated that it categorises collaborative provision as follows:

- Admission and Progression Arrangements
- Dual Award Programmes
- Franchised Programmes
- Joint Award Programmes
- Joint Programmes
- Outreach Arrangements
- Recognition
- Validated External Programmes.

However, a recent review of the University's strategic approach to collaborative provision recommended that the Joint Award Programmes, Outreach Arrangements and Recognition categories should be phased out.

8 The University has over 60 collaborative partner links, including over 30 links within Greater Manchester and Cheshire. Collaboration includes links with further and higher education institutions, as well as with commercial and professional organisations.

9 MMU's Strategic Plan for 2003 to 2010 was under review at the time of the audit and discussion papers prepared by the University's new Vice-Chancellor (with effect from September 2005) on the University's academic direction and development, the shape and function of faculties, the roles and responsibilities of the Directorate and other senior post holders were informing this review.

10 The University's mission states that:

'The Manchester Metropolitan University is dedicated to the success of all with the ability and motivation to benefit, meeting the needs of the professional and wider communities it serves through the excellence of its teaching, learning, research and scholarship'.

## Background information

11 The published information available for this collaborative provision audit included:

- statistical data provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, Higher Education Research Opportunities and the University
- the information available on the University's website
- the report of the institutional audit undertaken by QAA in June 2004 (the 2004 audit report)
- the report of the quality audit undertaken by QAA in October 1999, published in January 2001
- reports of reviews by QAA of provision at subject level in the five years prior to the collaborative provision audit
- the major review report of healthcare programmes conducted by QAA (May-June 2005), and
- the report of a review by QAA of the University's collaborative link with an overseas partner, published in November 2002.

12 The University and its partners provided QAA with:

- an institutional CPSED with appendices, including a summary of the collaborative provision register
- the institutional self-evaluation document (SED) and SED appendix volume prepared for the 2004 institutional audit
- a CD-ROM containing the above documents in addition to a copy of the 2004 audit report
- a copy of the University's Regulations for Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes of Study 2005-06
- documentation associated with each of the four partners visited as part of the audit, in hard copy and on CD-ROM

- documentation associated with the five desk-based studies which were part of the audit, and
- the University's Quality Assurance Manual (QAM) was also available on-line to the audit team.

13 During the briefing and audit visits, the audit team was given ready access to a range of the University's documents in hard copy and in electronic form. These included five discussion papers prepared by the Vice-Chancellor (see paragraph 9 above) and an action plan arising from the CPSED relating to the University's intentions for enhancement. The University also provided the team with a range of documentation relating to partners selected for visits and for desk-based studies. The partners visited provided further documentation. The team was very grateful for the prompt and helpful responses to its requests for information.

### **The collaborative provision audit process**

14 Following a preliminary meeting at the University in May 2005, QAA confirmed in July 2005 that four partner visits would be conducted between the briefing and audit visits. The University provided its CPSED in November 2005. On the basis of this and other published information, the audit team confirmed the four partner institutions that it would visit. The University provided QAA with briefing documentation in January 2006 for each of these partner institutions.

15 The audit team visited the University from 8 to 10 February 2006 for the purposes of exploring with senior members of staff of the University, members of staff actively involved in collaborative partnerships, student representatives and representatives from 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 ensuring that the team had 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, in addition to the four partner visits, five desk-based studies would be undertaken.

16 Visits to partner institutions followed the briefing visit and took place in the period 15 February to 15 March 2006. During these visits members of the audit team met senior staff, teaching staff and student representatives of those partner institutions. The team is grateful to the staff and students of the partner institutions for helping it to gain an understanding of the University's arrangements for managing its collaborative links.

17 The audit visit took place at the University from 20 to 24 March 2006, and included further meetings with staff of the University. The audit team is grateful to all those staff who participated in meetings.

18 The audit team comprised Dr P Brunt, Ms L Daly, Dr R Davison, Professor J Simons, auditors, and Mrs A Jones, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr I Ainsworth, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

### **Developments since the institutional audit of the awarding institution**

19 The 2004 audit report identified several features of good practice including MMU's self-critical approach in preparing a clear and evaluative SED; the University's QAM; its demonstrable commitment to the enhancement of the quality of the students' learning experience; the introduction of a University-wide group to provide enhanced institutional-level focus on interactions with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs); the effectiveness of the Learning and Teaching Unit (LTU) and the associated Learning and Teaching Fellowship Scheme in coordinating and leading innovations in teaching, learning and assessment; the supportive and high quality learning environment provided for students; and the effective dissemination of information across the University.

20 The report identified a number of points for further consideration which also have a bearing on collaborative provision. These included the desirability of reviewing the University's policies on penalties for late submission of undergraduate coursework and internal moderation of summative assessments; enhancing the accessibility and effectiveness of support mechanisms for part-time students; continuing to develop a more systematic institution-wide means of obtaining and responding to student feedback; making more effective and systematic use of statistical/performance indicator data in annual monitoring and programme review processes; and extending the adoption of effective peer support across the University.

21 The University's Academic Standards Committee (ASC) discussed the 2004 audit report to determine ways of building on the good practice identified and to address the desirable actions highlighted in the report. The imposition of penalties for the late submission of coursework has now been standardised for students across the University to include those on collaborative programmes; and a review of the University's procedures for the moderation of summative assessments has taken place. The experience of part-time students was an institutional theme for the University's 2004-05 Annual Monitoring Exercise (AME) and the newly constituted Student Experience Subcommittee which reports to the University's Learning and Teaching Committee has reviewed this area further and recommended the development of an institutional strategy to address the quality of the part-time student experience within the University's wider teaching and learning strategy. MMU's scheme for surveying, analysing and responding to student opinion at programme level has been rolled out to all students, including those on collaborative provision.

22 Programme teams, including those responsible for collaborative provision, are now required to engage with a specified set of seven programme performance indicators as a formal part of the AME. For MMU enrolled students

this data is readily available via the University's electronic student management information system (TARDIS). However, for students on externally validated provision it is currently provided by the programme teams themselves, pending full roll out of TARDIS for all student groups (to include external students) by 2007.

23 The audit team noted that a QAA major review of the University's National Health Service funded health care programmes, including several examples of collaborative provision, took place in May/June 2005. The major review report identified strong partnership links and the effectiveness of internal structures and procedures as particular strengths. It also identified a weakness in the effectiveness of statistical data, echoing that found in the 2004 audit report. The University is addressing this through the planned replacement of its current student record system with a more effective system for use in both the University's collaborative and non-collaborative provision.

24 While MMU is still addressing the issue of how to successfully and fully embed peer support, it appeared to the audit team that the University's collaborative partners have a variety of innovative and effective peer support processes in place. The team noted that the University intended drawing on this and other good practice in its newly instituted collaborative partner forum. The team also noted that the procedures for the moderation of summative assessments (which apply equally to collaborative and non-collaborative provision), are now articulated more clearly in the QAM than at the time of the 2004 audit.

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

### **The awarding institution's strategic approach to collaborative provision**

25 The CPSED stated that collaborative provision is an integral part of the University's 'vision, mission and strategy' and MMU sees the development and enhancement of links with local, regional, national and international partners as bringing benefit to the University, its students and staff, and its partners. There has been 'controlled growth in the extent and range' of the University's collaborative activity, with a modest increase in students studying under collaborative arrangements since the last audit of its collaborative provision in 1995 (see paragraph 5 above). Over that same period, faculties have been instrumental in driving the development of collaborative links 'to satisfy strategic imperatives or in response to specific opportunities, set within the context of institutional objectives'. Directorate and Academic Board discussion of faculty strategic plans ensures that collaborative activity is encapsulated within faculty strategic plans in line with the University's strategic objectives.

26 The University has identified four strategic priorities for academic partnership: to widen participation in higher education; broaden the range of educational opportunities available to students; promote local, national and international links; and to enhance and support specialist initiatives, including research and academic enterprise. Collaborative provision comprises one element of the University's academic partnership activity and includes taught programmes, staff research, student exchanges, placement learning, engagement with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, cooperative agreements and memoranda of understanding with other institutions in the UK and abroad, commercial collaborations and close involvement with two

local consortia. The University has a strategic commitment to a broad range of partnerships but it is also planning to reduce the number of partners so that there is a larger MMU student population in each partner link.

27 As previously indicated (see paragraph 7 above), MMU classifies its collaborative provision into eight categories although its Academic Partnership Standing Group (APSG) has proposed that this could usefully be reduced. The guiding document for the University's collaborative activity is the Institutional Code of Practice for Collaborative Provision (ICPCP) which was approved in 2003 and informed by the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

28 At the time of the 2006 audit, the University was in the early stages of conducting a review of its collaborative provision, under the direction of APSG (which reports to ASC). This had been prompted by the September 2004 publication of the revised *Code of practice, Section 2*, the production of the CPSED and the preparations for the current audit. Areas identified for consideration included a revised strategic approach to collaborative provision and a reassessment of the four strategic priorities identified (see paragraph 26 above) with a view to focusing on a smaller number of rich links tightly coupled to MMU's mission; a simplified system of classification of collaborative provision; more effective central monitoring; and increased liaison with local partners through two consortia of higher education and post-16 colleges (see paragraph 29 below). The review is expected to lead to a revised ICPCP (anticipated to be implemented in 2006-07) and will address recommendations made in this 2006 collaborative audit report.

29 A recent collaborative provision initiative of the University is the development of two local consortia: one based in the Greater Manchester area, the other in the Cheshire and Warrington area. Initiated in 2003, the Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance (GMSA) involves six HEIs and 25 post-16 colleges in the area.

The aim of the GMSA (which has been awarded HEFCE funding for initial preparatory work) is 'to provide a more coordinated approach to progression pathways, credit accumulation and transfer, and the curriculum framework'. Two of GMSA's main thrusts relate to Foundation Degrees and the establishment of a common quality and regulatory framework. In meetings with staff involved in the consortia, the audit team detected a strong sense of the strength and coherence of the consortia. MMU Cheshire is a member of the Cheshire and Warrington Further and Higher Education Consortium which is currently focusing on the development of Foundation Degrees, staff development and uniformity of academic standards.

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

30 The CPSED confirmed the University's recognition and acceptance of its responsibility for the standards of its awards, however and wherever programmes leading to its awards are delivered. The SED indicated that MMU will approve a collaborative arrangement only for programmes falling within its area of expertise and authority. All MMU programmes, including those delivered collaboratively, are subject to Academic Board approval following initial consideration by the ASC, Programme Approval Subcommittee (PASC) and the Directorate.

31 The criteria to be satisfied and principles underpinning the University's approval, monitoring and review procedures apply equally to both collaborative and University-based provision. In the case of the former, additional safeguards are in place reflecting the particular nature of the provision. Information relating to management, academic standing, legal status and financial stability of partner organisations is considered at an early stage in the approval process. The University's Head of Academic Standards checks current and former links between the partner organisation and other HEIs, and approval of a collaborative link involves an engagement with senior

management of the partner organisation and the subsequent signing of an agreement which must be confirmed by ASC. Learning resources and the learning environment are considered as part of the approval process. For approval and review of collaborative programmes, an additional meeting between key MMU and partner staff is held before the full approval/review event takes place to ensure that both parties have a common understanding of the forthcoming approval/review event and to provide partner staff with feedback on the programme documentation. MMU staff also visit partner organisations to assess learning resources. Design, robustness and fitness for purpose of quality assurance procedures are the responsibility of the Academic Division which includes the Academic Standards Unit (ASU) and the Academic Registrar's Office (ARO).

32 The University's QAM, Regulations for Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes of Study and Regulations for Academic Awards guide the quality management of all MMU-based and collaborative provision. Management of collaborative provision is additionally guided by the ICPCP, approved by Academic Board in March 2003, and undergoing revision at the time of the 2006 audit. The ICPCP is designed to ensure that appropriate policies and procedures are in place to 'govern the development, delivery and evaluation of those programmes of study which take place entirely, or in part, outside the university in order to safeguard the standards of the awards and assure the quality of the educational experiences from which they are derived'. It covers processes relating to academic standards and quality, written agreements, assessment regulations, certificates and transcripts, information for students, publicity, resources, approval and review. The ASU, ARO, Finance Division and the Secretary's Department check partner agreements. The ASU maintains a register of collaborative provision and holds copies of all current agreements.

33 ASC maintains an overview of collaborative provision on behalf of the University. All collaborative provision is allocated to one of the seven faculties and responsibility for quality management resides in the faculties, through their faculty academic standards committees (FASCs). Supported by the ASU, faculty deans, faculty secretaries and FASC chairs have a pivotal role to play in ensuring effective interaction between faculty and University management levels of operation. Faculty deans carry forward quality and resource issues to central divisions and monitor responses to the issues raised. Faculty secretaries, who have monthly meetings with senior staff of the Academic Division, ensure that the University's processes are followed, and FASCs oversee academic quality management within the faculties. All FASC chairs are ASC members and, consequently, act as a link between their faculty and the University.

34 The audit team observed from FASC minutes that considerable monitoring of collaborative provision is taking place at faculty level. Meetings with faculty staff revealed they are cognisant of the processes for quality management and are secure in their understanding of the role that they play in that management. The team noted that experienced staff are appointed to serve as link tutors in recognition of the key part they play in ensuring the application of the University's regulatory framework for collaborative provision.

35 Assessment regulations for collaborative provision students are identical to those for University-based students. External examiners are appointed by the University, and together with key University staff, attend examination boards which are chaired by a senior member of the University. For those categories of collaborative provision students who are not enrolled with the University but, rather, with another awarding institution, the regulations of that institution apply but the CPSED indicated that MMU's approval, monitoring and review procedures 'assure the academic standing of authorised variations'. On the basis of its reading of the documentation provided, and its

meetings with staff associated with the University's collaborative links, the team came to the view that the University's approach to assessment in collaborative provision is robust and secure.

36 The audit team considered that the University's QAM, Regulations for Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes of Study, Regulations for Academic Awards and the ICPCP were comprehensive, informative, useful and clear reference documents, fulfilling a positive role in the maintenance of standards. The team further considered that the University appreciated the key role performed by link tutors in ensuring that collaborative partners are aware of the University's expectations, and this is reflected in the appointment of experienced staff to this role. From their meetings with staff and students, and their reading of material provided by the University and its partners, the effectiveness, commitment and professionalism of tutors were evident to the team.

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

37 Prompted by the publication of the revised section *Code of practice, Section 2*, and its preparations for the collaborative audit, MMU, in consultation with its partners, has embarked upon a review of its collaborative provision. Coordinated by APSG, the review has been informed by best practice (both internal and drawn from its partners) and has had four major themes (see paragraph 28 above).

38 At the time of the 2006 audit, actions already completed as part of this review included the establishment (in 2005) of the APSG to oversee the development of the University's strategic approach to collaborative provision and the planned appointment of faculty academic coordinators who will be members of APSG and form a link between link tutors in a faculty and the standing group; the formal articulation of a new institutional strategy for collaborative provision and the simplification of its collaborative provision



typology; revised AME processes to include much clearer delineation of reporting on collaborative provision in both quality action plans and in external examiner reports, thereby improving the University's ability to identify both issues and enhancement opportunities; and the introduction of programme logs for all programmes (both collaborative and non-collaborative) with provision for their review every other year by the relevant FASC.

39 Other actions included the introduction of a flow chart to facilitate the timely implementation of activities associated with the approval process, for example, contract completion; the creation of a suite of financial templates to facilitate development of the appropriate financial annexes to partnership agreements; the introduction of a twice-yearly forum for the University and partner link tutors to identify issues, share good practice and to agree enhancements; the requirement for visits to confirm the quality of partner learning resources as part of the approval process; and the development of an academic partnership website.

40 Actions in progress at the time of the collaborative provision audit included the development of fuller guidance on the roles and responsibilities of MMU and partner staff engaged with collaborative provision; the introduction of revised approaches to due diligence and risk assessment in order to strengthen the viability of proposals at the approval in principle stage to safeguard against unsustainable collaborative arrangements; a review of the entitlements of students (and staff) on collaborative programmes to ensure greater equity between enrolled and external students; the development of TARDIS to include collaborative students for the first time in 2005-06 with a view to complete integration of information of all types of collaborative students (enrolled and external) by 2006-07; greater MMU Students' Union support for student representatives in the partner colleges; and separation of institutional approval and review processes from those associated with programme approval and review.

41 The audit team met staff engaged in collaborative activity who confirmed that these actions had already significantly enhanced MMU's capacity to effectively manage the quality and standards of its collaborative provision. The team agreed with this analysis and noted the constructive and dynamic manner in which the University and its partners had engaged with the collaborative provision audit process, manifest in an honest and reflective SED which is clearly linked to the University's mission. In its view, this constituted a feature of good practice and a number of the enhancements cited in the CPSED, such as the link tutor and partner forums, and the programme log which provides a substantial reference and evidence base for the health of a programme on an annual basis, constituted further features of good practice. The team considered that it would be desirable, and would wish to encourage the University, to continue to pursue the implementation of its full enhancement agenda with the vigour and enthusiasm it has already evidenced in preparing for the collaborative provision audit, and to ensure that its enhancement strategy for collaborative provision constitutes an organic and evolutionary feature of its mechanisms for the management of quality and standards.

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

#### **Partner and programme approval**

42 Standard University processes of approval, as specified in the QAM, apply to all categories of collaborative provision. The University does not administer a separate process for the approval of a partner institution. Instead, partner approval is embedded in the programme approval process and so needs to be repeated with every new programme approval, even with existing partners.

43 Approval entails consideration of the proposal by the relevant faculty dean and FASC, followed by PASC scrutiny. Proposals approved at these stages are then considered by the

Directorate which focuses mainly on strategic and resource areas. As with all MMU programmes, collaborative programmes are subject to ASC approval in principle. A faculty-based approval event then follows with two external members on the approval panel established. In the case of collaborative provision, the QAM states that it is desirable that one of the external panel members has experience of collaborative provision. The event is chaired by a senior member of staff external to the faculty involved. The QAM indicates that collaborative proposals must be accompanied by details of the collaborative partner, including the 'academic, ethical, legal and financial standing of the partner', as well as confirmation that University regulations and policies have been received and accepted by the partner. Documentation provided for approval panels must also include the draft collaborative agreement.

44 Before a collaborative programme approval event, MMU staff (usually including the link tutor) visit collaborative partners to check the learning resources available to support students following programmes leading to awards of the University. As well as programme-specific resources, the infrastructure of partners (library, student support, laboratories and so on) is also considered to enable a judgement to be made about the adequacy of the learning environment provided. A report of the resource visit forms part of the documents considered by the programme approval panel.

45 Faculty secretaries and a member of the ASU check the programme documentation before its submission to approval panels to ensure, amongst other things, that proposals are consistent with QAA's Academic Infrastructure. Approval panels submit their reports, the collaborative agreements and accompanying schedules, and any recommendations and conditions, to the FASC and PASC, and formal recommendations are made to the ASC. ASC makes the final decision on individual cases, acting under delegated authority from the Academic Board which

requires all programmes to conform to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) in terms of academic standards and learning outcomes.

46 The audit team saw evidence of the University's procedures being implemented effectively and heard that the resource visits were thorough and encompassed both resources available to support a particular programme of study, and the resources available at partners to support the collaborative student learning experience more generally. The team was also told that collaborative partner staff were fully briefed by the University (through the link tutor mainly) about the approval process so that staff involved in collaborative activity with the University had a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities.

47 The audit team learnt that the University was shortly to consider a proposal to develop a centrally managed process for the approval of a partner institution, as distinct from programme approval. If approved, this would be fully operational from 2007-08. The team would encourage the University to consider the desirability of developing such a proposal. In view of the fact that it had also found an example of a collaborative programme commencing before the formal agreement had been signed, the team would also wish to encourage the University to exercise more rigour in ensuring that agreements are signed before a programme begins. The team considered that the involvement of central MMU bodies in the final stages of approval enables the University to maintain an overview of approved provision and any themes emerging in the approval reports.

#### **Annual monitoring**

48 Standard MMU annual monitoring processes, as specified in the QAM, apply to all categories of collaborative provision with the exception of admissions and progression, some joint awards where MMU is not the administrative body, and recognition. However, the audit team learnt that, in practice,

collaborative provision under these arrangements adopts MMU's approach to annual monitoring so that, in effect, there is total consistency in annual monitoring. Link tutors are in regular contact with staff in collaborative partners and support such staff in satisfying the requirements of the AME.

49 Annual monitoring involves the production of a series of reports, from programme level to University level, with associated action plans. Documentation relating to a programme is gathered annually to form a programme log. The log comprises all the documents relevant to the monitoring of the health of a programme and includes external examiner reports and responses to those reports, progression statistics, the definitive programme document, relevant board minutes and staff curricula vitae (CVs). FASC then scrutinises the log on a regular basis.

50 Each programme committee produces an evaluation of a programme at the start of the year by giving consideration to the previous year's performance indicators (external examiner reports, student feedback and progression data). A quality action plan (QAP) is then produced which sets out the enhancement and actions planned for the academic year ahead and, at the same time, the previous year's action plan is checked for progress to ensure that all issues have been suitably addressed. Each head of department distils the QAPs into one departmental quality improvement plan (QIP). From these QIPs, faculty deans and FASCs both produce faculty overview reports which are submitted to the ASC. The deans' reports are more action orientated and include a specific section on collaborative provision. The Chair of the ASC (the Deputy Vice-Chancellor) then produces a report for the Academic Board which, once confirmed, is circulated internally and to collaborative partners to provide feedback at all levels. Resource and strategic issues raised by the report are considered by the Directorate.

51 The University recognised a weakness in the layered reporting system in that collaborative provision could gradually become less and less

prominent in the process. To remedy this, from 2005-06, separate QAPs for each collaborative programme have been introduced so that, in the faculty stages of the process, collaborative provision maintains a more prominent profile.

52 From reading documents provided, and its meetings with staff, the audit team came to the view that annual monitoring is thorough and robust, with a clearly articulated structure that is consistently applied across all collaborative provision, and well embedded in the University. The team formed the view that the annual production of the programme log is a feature of good practice. It noted MMU's review of the annual monitoring process which had led to the introduction of changes in 2005-06 to address a perceived weakness. The team found the proposed change to be appropriate but it is too early to comment upon the effectiveness of the separate QAPs for collaborative programmes. The team formed the view that annual monitoring was 'owned' by staff and, as such, considered that it constituted a feature of good practice.

### **Review**

53 Programme review aims to ensure that provision remains relevant, fully informed by national and institutional benchmarks and that standards, and the quality of the learning resources, are appropriate to the level of the award made by the University. Reviews are normally scheduled every five years, with an absolute maximum of seven years allowed between reviews. The review process involves two stages: approval in principle followed by a formal approval event. Approval in principle is carefully guided by a pro forma requiring programme teams to set out the rationale for the provision, provide details of any proposed developments, and to indicate any impact on resources. Programme teams are required to consult stakeholders, internal and external, including students. The review pro forma requires endorsement at faculty level (through FASCs), and at University level (through the PASC, Directorate and ASC), before proceeding to a formal review event.

54 For collaborative provision, a visit to partners to assess learning resources and to brief partner staff about the review process is required. Faculty secretaries and the ASU check review documentation, including collaborative agreements, prepared by programme teams to ensure compliance with the University's regulations. The documentation is then considered by a panel which includes two external members. Wherever possible, one of the external members has experience of collaborative provision. PASC considers the review event report before its submission to ASC which makes the final decision on the approval of the provision. ASC receives assurance, usually via the review event chair, that any conditions have been satisfied and that recommendations have been addressed. The University obtains an overview of the process through the AME outlined above (see paragraph 50 above).

55 Review is programme based and the University has no separate documented process for reviewing a collaborative partner. However, the audit team learnt that issues raised by link tutors associated with two overseas partners had given rise to collaborative partner reviews of those partners, resulting in the partnerships being terminated.

56 The audit team was told, and read documentation, which indicated that review visits undertaken by MMU staff were conducted thoroughly and professionally. Following meetings with staff associated with collaborative activity, the team came to the view that the review process is robust and is fulfilling its function in assuring the standards and quality of its collaborative provision. The proposed process of separating out programme and partner approval (see paragraph 47 above) applies equally to review, thus ensuring a periodic engagement with a partner at senior management level. The team considered that it would be desirable for the University to introduce the changes proposed to avoid unnecessary duplication.

### **External participation in internal review processes for collaborative provision**

57 The same requirements for external input into internal review and approval processes apply for collaborative provision as for University-based provision. This occurs principally in two ways: through external examiners who verify standards of awards and ensure fairness in assessments, and through external assessors who provide an independent academic/professional input into programme approval and review processes. The University's ICP on external examining which is comprehensive, is supplemented by the broader ICPCP relating to collaborative provision. As previously indicated (see paragraphs 43 and 54 above), two independent external assessors are required on programme approval and review panels for collaborative provision. The audit team noted from approval and periodic review reports made available to it that external assessors are also involved in discussion of the standing and finances of a collaborative partner given the current link between institutional and programme approval processes. Link tutors may assist, as necessary, in identifying suitable candidates who meet the required criteria. The Head of Academic Standards approves external assessor nominations against published criteria. Whilst external examiners may be called upon to comment on changes in policy, they cannot also be used as external assessors.

58 On the basis of its reading of material available to it, and through its discussions with staff associated with MMU's collaborative activity, the audit team concluded that the University was making strong and scrupulous use of external input in the approval and periodic review of collaborative programmes offered through its partners.

## External examiners and their reports in collaborative provision

59 The 2004 audit report confirmed the central role of external examiners in the University's quality management. MMU's QAM sets out a comprehensive set of external examining procedures which apply equally to collaborative provision. The ICPCP also expresses the intention that, wherever possible, the same external examiner should moderate both collaborative and the equivalent University-delivered provision. ASC has delegated authority for the consideration of nominations and approval of appointments to the External Examiners Subcommittee (EESC).

60 In the small number of cases where external examiner appointments are made solely for a collaborative partner (for example, where programmes are not also delivered at MMU and involve external validation or specialist franchises), the audit team found that the University's institutional codes and regulations applied and that examiners' reports were comparable. The team noted that chief external examiners are appointed with additional duties to comment on learning outcomes, advise Boards of Examiners on potential disagreements, and to maintain an overview of programmes. The team further noted that meetings of Boards of Examiners for collaborative provision were conducted in accordance with the relevant regulations with appropriate representation on the part of examiners, MMU and partner staff.

61 External examiners are required to submit their reports (on a pro forma which includes a Teaching Quality Information (TQI) summary) within six weeks of the relevant meeting of the Board of Examiners. Faculty secretaries are responsible for receiving reports and for initial circulation to the appropriate programme committee, head of department, faculty dean, the chair of the relevant FASC, and the ASU. Programme committees are required to consider external examiner reports and to note formal responses in programme logs with agreed actions recorded, as appropriate. Thereafter, exceptional issues form part of the

AME which requires collaborative provision to conform to the same guidelines and timescales as MMU-delivered programmes.

62 From its reading of material provided by the University, the audit team noted the central role of link tutors, alongside others such as programme leaders, in ensuring that due recognition is given to items raised by external examiners where these apply to collaborative provision, and that action is taken as appropriate. At an institutional level, should exceptional issues relating to collaborative provision arise from external examiner reports, then faculty overview reports, produced by faculty deans as part of the AME, are made to ASC. Thereafter, the Chair of the ASC makes an overall report, including a commentary on collaborative provision, to the Academic Board.

63 The CPSED acknowledged the benefit of a common external examiner for collaborative provision and equivalent MMU-delivered provision in maintaining appropriate and equitable standards. However, the CPSED also noted a weakness in that to date, many external examiner reports do not distinguish between the performance of collaborative provision students and MMU-based students. The audit team noted that while there are some examples of reports where a distinction is made, it is currently not possible for the University to take a full overview of collaborative provision issues from external examiner reports at an institutional-level. The team was told that this is being addressed through proposed changes to the report template which would facilitate such institutional-level comparisons. In September 2005, the EESC was tasked with this activity and is due to report to ASC later in the 2005-06 academic year. In the team's view, such improvements for isolating collaborative provision issues in external examiner reports would enhance the communication of responsibilities for action.

64 Nevertheless, external examiner reports and formal responses to them comprise a significant element of the AME, internal periodic reviews and external reviews.

The audit team found that relevant issues from external examiner reports were discussed at programme committees and that formal responses to external examiner reports were candid and detailed. The evidence available to the team demonstrated a proactive approach and indicated that external examiners acknowledged and appreciated the way in which issues raised in their previous reports had been resolved.

65 While the audit team noted that the extent to which external examiner reports were brought to the attention of collaborative partners varied according to the nature and extent of the collaborative provision, it found that partners had been suitably informed of relevant external examiner comments. The University has assessed its arrangements for external examining against the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining* and the team agreed with the University's judgement that it satisfies the precepts contained therein.

### **The use made of external reference points in collaborative provision**

66 The SED indicated the extent to which MMU expected staff to be aware of the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*. The CPSED outlined the University's engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and indicated that the ASC, its working groups and reports of senior members of the Academic Division, ensure that the University's procedures are aligned to, and consistent with, the Academic Infrastructure. The QAM sets out how the University has responded to, and incorporated, external reference points into its quality assurance procedures.

67 The audit team found, through its discussions with staff of the University's collaborative partners, that there was an appropriate level of awareness of relevant sections of the *Code of practice*, the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements and programme specification requirements. Responsibility for bringing relevant information to the attention of partner staff rests primarily with link tutors

who have a central role in cascading information, and through MMU organised workshops. The team saw evidence of this information dissemination and heard of the way in which partners' own quality assurance processes ensured currency with relevant external reference points. Faculty secretaries also contribute to ensuring that staff involved in collaborative activity are aware of the University's policies and procedures and, hence, the Academic Infrastructure, as appropriate.

68 ASC is responsible for initiating the consideration and incorporation of any new reference points into programme specifications. To enhance understanding of the Academic Infrastructure among partners, specific workshops are arranged, and the APSG has undertaken to monitor this issue. The University participated in a variety of QAA-led consultation exercises preceding the production of revisions to relevant sections of the *Code of practice*. This participation had led to further revisions of the University's own institutional codes of practice.

69 Programme specifications (required for all programmes) enable programme teams to evidence their engagement with the FHEQ and relevant subject benchmarks. A working group of ASC, the MMU Programme Specification Working Group, is currently producing suitable revisions to guidelines that will apply to all taught programmes for the 2006-07 academic year. This will enable publication of programme specifications on-line. The audit team found, in reading documentation and in meetings with staff involved in the University's collaborative activity, that programme specifications were appropriate and that timely recognition had been made of relevant external reference points. The team was told that link tutors have assisted partners with the preparation of documentation for approval, including the design and modification of programme specifications, as necessary.

70 Two further ways in which the University and its partners have responded to external reference points include student personal development planning (PDP) and the admission of students with advanced standing. In the

former case, University models (based on the principles contained in *Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, published by QAA) apply to partners, although PDP arrangements have been designed to meet discipline needs. The Student Experience Subcommittee (a subcommittee of the newly constituted Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC)) considered PDP requirements and ASC monitored its introduction. In June 2005, Academic Board determined that PDP arrangements for the 2005-06 academic year should form part of the programme specification and programme log, and required ASC, through PASC, to ensure that this happened. LTC is currently monitoring the impact on partners linked to more than one faculty. Similarly, in June 2005, Academic Board confirmed that the accreditation of prior learning would be implemented from 2005-06 and reviewed by the Board in 2006-07.

71 The audit team found that MMU had adopted a thorough approach to the use of external reference points and was able to confirm that the University was appropriately aligned to the *Code of practice*.

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

72 Ten programmes offered collaboratively in a variety of discipline areas, including sub-degree, honours degree and postgraduate provision, are recognised or accredited by PSRBs. ASC's PSRB Standing Group monitors relations with external agencies. As previously indicated (see paragraph 19 above), this was identified as a feature of good practice in the 2004 audit report. In addition, there is a comprehensive section relating to engagement with PSRBs in the QAM. A University ICP outlines mechanisms for engagement with PSRBs and requires detailed evidence of liaison between faculties and PSRBs prior to the approval, monitoring and review of accredited

provision. A collaborative proposal involving a PSRB is subject to close scrutiny at the approval in principle stage of the approval process. The University's PSRB Standing Group (and thereby the ASC), considers QAA subject review reports relating to collaborative provision involving PSRBs, in addition to PSRB reports. At programme level, PSRB reports are incorporated into the AME and periodic reviews.

73 Link tutors may have a role in liaising with relevant PSRBs as well as with the collaborative partner. Where this occurs, there are equivalent University-delivered programmes also linked with the same PSRB. The audit team concluded that the University had engaged positively with external agencies. Moreover, it came to the view that the quality and standards of the collaborative provision were enhanced through this additional collaboration.

### **Student representation in collaborative provision**

74 MMU takes its responsibility for listening to the student voice very seriously and it deploys a range of mechanisms to ensure that students on collaborative programmes have the opportunity to participate in the management of these programmes through programme committees and other related bodies. The University requires collaborative partners to make appropriate arrangements for the nomination or election of student representatives and this process is monitored through the operation of the link tutor system.

75 The University's own view of the success of its strategy is realistic and recognises the difficulties inherent in developing a stable body of student representation on programmes where learning may be dispersed, where part-time students may have heavy domestic or professional responsibilities, or where collaborative provision is offered in overseas locations where there is a different understanding of the staff-student relationship from that which occurs in the United Kingdom. In such cases, however, the nature of the collaborative arrangements - relatively small scale and offering an intimate level of

communication between students and their tutors - facilitate the development of less formal systems which, MMU claims, offer a successful mechanism for the collection of student opinion which is equivalent in effectiveness to that offered by more formal arrangements.

76 The audit team found that this claim was borne out in its discussions with collaborative partner staff and students. For example, although formal student representation has not been easy to develop in one small but very long-established overseas collaborative arrangement, it was clear to the team that the student voice was available to both overseas-based tutors and to the awarding institution's team and that students were content that if they wished to raise an issue they would be heard and, where appropriate, their concerns would be acted on. In addition, the CPSED set out a number of the University's intentions to enhance its capacity to develop a robust system of student representation in collaborative provision.

77 The audit team noted in discussion with students that arrangements for the development and extension of training for student representatives into institutions offering collaborative provision were in hand. It saw evidence of student representative involvement in various programme committees and noted that minutes of programme committees often also recorded immediate discussion of the issues raised and, on occasion, immediate response to them. In meetings with students the team also established that students knew the identity of their student representative and how to contact them should this be required. The team considered that MMU was seriously addressing the issue of student representation, both as a good in itself, and as a mechanism by which the University might further inform its overview of, and grasp on, quality and standards in collaborative awards. The overall picture was of a system that was working well within the limitations and constraints identified by the University itself.

## **Feedback from students, graduates and employers**

78 Feedback from students is obtained in various ways. A programme-level survey represents the basic requirement but there was evidence that some collaborative partners went beyond this and also collected detailed feedback at the unit level. There is, in addition, an MMU student survey although, at the time of the 2006 audit visit, this was still being rolled out to include students on collaboratively delivered awards.

79 The University also collects and uses feedback from graduates and employers. The team saw evidence of graduate feedback in a range of annual review reports. Feedback from employers was used in various ways. For example, one Foundation Degree brings in graduates who are themselves working in the industry - and are therefore potential employers - to work with students and uses other employers to advise on assessment and to take part in other feedback exercises. On another Foundation Degree, employers are part of the programme team.

80 The University does not make a strong distinction between its arrangements for collecting student feedback on its own programmes and those arrangements as they relate to collaborative provision. At the time of the 2006 audit visit, the project to roll out the MMU student survey by tasking the LTU to coordinate the project was progressing slowly and it appeared that only one faculty (MMU Cheshire) had so far responded to a request to put clear links to the survey on its website.

81 Student opinion with regard to opportunities to present feedback was very positive, and the audit team heard that students were given ample opportunities to express their views about the strengths and weaknesses of their experience and they considered that these opinions were heeded. In the case of smaller courses, this could be quite an informal process involving a dialogue between students and/or student representatives and tutors. The evidence



available to the team indicated that the University was effectively collecting and reviewing student feedback in a number of different ways that exceeded its own basic requirements both formally (through unit-level feedback which supplemented the minimal formal requirements of the AME) and informally (through staff-student dialogue).

82 The audit team found that the University's claims about its mechanisms for the collection of feedback were accurate and there were evidenced mechanisms for an appropriate response to be made. However, it appeared that the University did not always take advantage of the evidence available. For example, one collaborative partner had its own mechanisms for the collection of very detailed unit-level feedback but the University did not require to see it. This contrasted with the unit-level analysis done by another partner which was submitted to programme team staff based at the University who considered it and acted on it, where necessary. This difference in approach is explained by the difference in the status of the partnerships (the one overseas and external, the other an integrated part of an MMU programme). Nevertheless, the team considered that it would be desirable for the University to consider formalising the arrangements for feedback collection at the unit level and the communication of this feedback to the University from the collaborative partner as a further enhancement of a system which is already broadly effective. This formalisation might, among other things, assist the University in capturing and synoptically evaluating the experience of specific groups of students undertaking study on collaboratively delivered programmes, for example, part-time undergraduates.

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

83 Statistical information on admission, progression, completion and assessment is available to the University via the annual monitoring process carried out by collaborative

partners and reviewed at faculty level. FASCs use this information to assess the health of collaborative awards and, where appropriate, to take action (including, potentially and actually, the termination of a collaborative arrangement). The overview by each faculty dean might also refer to issues relating to the progression of students on collaborative programmes leading to MMU awards. Currently, the system for the presentation of progression data varies from partner to partner insofar as the information held varies depending on whether students are enrolled or external. However, there is no variation in the way that the material is used once it reaches the University and enters the annual monitoring cycle which includes a review of retention based on a three-year information sample.

84 The University recognises the need to harmonise the way in which data is held on its management information system and is in the first year of a two-year project to integrate information on both enrolled and external students into its TARDIS management system. This will enable quicker, more flexible and responsive access to a range of information regarding different categories of student, and will also include staff in partner organisations more fully in the process by which management information is developed and used as a quality tool. The audit team noted that progress towards a fully integrated system was on schedule.

85 The audit team saw, and was told of, examples that demonstrated the appropriate use of statistical information as a management tool. For example, FASCs regularly review such information through their scrutiny of programme logs (which form another rich source of information). FASCs can use such reviews to identify matters that require action or monitoring, for example, numbers of students completing Foundation Degrees and requiring admission to level 3 programmes at the University. Extensive information was also seen in QAPs where, for example, cohort progression numbers were accompanied by commentaries on, inter alia, reasons for

withdrawal which would enable the relevant faculty to decide whether anomalous patterns suggested that a particular collaborative partnership was developing into a high risk activity. Documentation relating to cohort progression or examination boards also included useful commentary that could be used to interpret the raw figures and enable distinctions to be made between, for example, full and part-time students.

86 The ICP on Recruitment and Admissions has recently been revised to include reference to collaborative provision. The University oversees, through its link tutors, the process by which partner organisations admit students, and it ensures that each partner complies with agreements made regarding the level of initial qualification required for entry to each award or programme. This process varies depending on whether the partnership involves enrolled students (where the University has full control) or external students (where the University relies on the trust it places in partner organisations based on its experience of working with them, and the information it derives from the AMEs and other periodic engagements - including periodic visits from link tutors). The audit team saw no evidence to suggest any misplaced trust but recognises, with the University, that MMU's progress towards the full integration of all collaborative partnerships and student information into TARDIS will enhance its ability to monitor and control the admissions process.

87 Notwithstanding any limitations of the current system of data collection in the absence of an integrated TARDIS, the audit team came to the view that the University makes good use of information on progression and completion and is able to act on it swiftly.

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

88 The University is responsible for ensuring that the staffing resources for programmes delivered in its name are appropriate. It

achieves this through programme approval, initially, and subsequently through periodic review, during which processes the CVs of staff supporting the collaborative programmes in question are scrutinised. The audit team learnt that where new staff are appointed during the lifetime of a collaborative course, CVs are submitted to the link tutor for approval. The recently instituted programme log acts as a repository for the CVs of all staff associated with the delivery of a collaborative programme, and the team saw examples of programme logs confirming this practice.

89 In some areas of the University, the audit team noted specific examples of good practice in the processes used to appoint new staff to collaborative provision. For example, in the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education, MMU representatives have been invited to sit on partner appointment panels and, in the Faculty of Food, Clothing and Hospitality Management, the relevant head of department is sent copies of all applications for positions in its overseas partner organisations.

90 Responsibility for the appraisal of teaching staff is delegated to the collaborative partner; in this context the audit team was made aware of a number of innovative and sophisticated schemes for engaging the teaching staff concerned in peer review/support. The team considered the University's intention to draw on the experience of their collaborative partners in this area, through its newly constituted collaborative partner forum, to be a feature of good practice.

91 The University is also responsible for ensuring that staff in partner organisations are trained and equipped for the proper delivery of its programmes on an ongoing basis. As with the appointment of staff, the suitability of a partner's approach to staff development is assured through the University's approval and review processes. Issues identified are subject to conditions stipulated at approval. Details of the particular staff development activities undertaken by those involved in the delivery of collaborative programmes are maintained in the programme log. The audit team reviewed

a number of programme logs and found ample evidence of routine engagement in such activities.

92 Collaborative partner staff confirmed that they benefited from staff development opportunities offered by their own employers, and from their engagement with MMU which offered a range of additional opportunities. These included participation in staff development days at MMU, and the development of skills and competencies in the use of cutting edge teaching and learning resources located at MMU. The audit team noted strong evidence on a number of programmes that the students and staff at partner colleges were able to use MMU facilities in this way. In addition, collaborative partner staff participated in MMU research seminars; the annual learning and teaching conference sponsored by MMU Cheshire; and an annual staff symposium held for both collaborative partner and MMU staff involved in the delivery of the University's foundation year programme.

93 The audit team heard that collaborative partner staff felt very strongly supported by MMU in the development and management of collaborative provision and that this in, and of, itself was thought by staff to provide an excellent staff development opportunity. The team was of the view that MMU has in place appropriate processes to secure the quality of the teaching staff in its collaborative provision and that the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, are met.

### **Learning support resources for students in collaborative provision**

94 The simultaneous institutional and programme approval process requires that the learning resources available for the provision proposed are adequate for the delivery of the programme(s) on the delivery site. The University currently distinguishes between enrolled students (who have access to all MMU facilities) and registered (external) students (who have access only to the resources at the collaborative partner unless a separate funding agreement has extended the range available to

them). The University recognises some of the difficulties inherent in this distinction and, in the long-term, aims to develop a system of access which is relatively blind to the administrative status of the student. However, this aim is conditioned by legal and funding considerations.

95 The audit team noted that students' views of the quality of resources available to them varied according to the administrative status of a partnership. Enrolled students appeared more than satisfied with the facilities available and the learning opportunities on offer. Registered (external) students were less happy and the team heard that the University was not yet consistent in the application of its own policies concerning visiting access to, for example, its library for these students. The team's meetings with staff and students suggested that this may be attributable to a lack of clarity in the dissemination of these policies to all relevant staff.

96 MMU's commitment to enhance what is on offer to students is not in question but has been complicated by a legal issue relating to the status of different kinds of students and their eligibility for inclusion in various licensing arrangements. The University has plainly tried extremely hard to resolve this issue and continues to do so. The audit team considered that further discussion of the option to treat all students as enrolled irrespective of their funding status might be of benefit in taking this issue forward to a solution but understood the legal, technical and financial complexities involved. Nevertheless, the University's current position is fully consistent with its declared policy and the commitments enshrined in the contracts made with collaborative partners, and there is no doubt that it is in full command of the situation and continuing to consider how best, strategically, to take matters forward. However, it might wish further to clarify to partners with registered (external) students that although such students are the partners' own from a funding point of view, that does not diminish or erode the University's responsibility for ensuring the provision of an equivalent experience, including access to learning resources.

### **Academic guidance and personal support for students in collaborative provision**

97 Responsibility for academic guidance and personal support is delegated to collaborative partners and specified through the agreement schedule for each collaborative award, in addition to being communicated through, for example, student handbooks. The audit team heard that there is some variation in the type and degree of support and guidance available depending on the nature of the collaborative partnership. The team was also told that link tutors work to ensure that matters relating to the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, reflected in the University's own Code of Practice, are cascaded into the partner organisations through their regular meetings with tutorial teams.

98 The University considers that the activities associated with pastoral and academic support are, necessarily, varied and need to be calibrated to reflect and meet, as far as possible, the needs of particular students and partnerships. For example, students entering the University from different kinds of smaller programmes will often find that the move from a very close-knit experience to the University at large can be unsettling, and the CPSED outlined various mechanisms that have been put in place to ease this process. On the other hand, some programmes pose no transitional problems and benefit not only from the full range of support offered within the University but also from the supplementary support on offer through the partner. In overseas collaborations, staff based at collaborative partners offer a full range of academic and personal support and this is supplemented, both formally and informally, through visits by link tutors and other MMU staff.

99 The University's International Office does not play a formal role in supporting students on overseas collaborative programmes but it is able to offer advisory and support services to such students should this be required by the relevant faculty. The capacity of link tutors to engage in support for students at partner organisations

has also been enhanced by the establishment of a link tutor forum which was seen by the link tutors as greatly strengthening their understanding of the role as it applied across the full range of collaborative partnerships by offering them the opportunity to exchange ideas and practice with colleagues who have a range of different experiences, but who are all involved in the same activity.

100 The audit team noted from its meetings with students that they were consistently content with the support offered by both MMU and its partners. Although there was some variation in student awareness of the role and identity of the link tutor, this did not detract from their overall sense that they were well supported and knew where to turn if they had a specific problem. This uncertainty may well derive from the dual role (for example, link tutor and programme leader) played by some link tutors rather than from any absence of link tutor support. This positive student response was repeated across the range of partnerships and across the different types of student. There was also evidence that students were offered supplementary support through email correspondence if they were unable, due to personal circumstances, to meet their tutors personally. Efforts were also made to offer some students out of hours support (through, for example, a computer help-desk). The audit team noted from documentation made available to it that there were also weekly tutorials in some partners.

101 Arrangements for work-based learning and placements are agreed during the validation and approval process and communicated to students through their handbook. The audit team found that the University was appropriately aligned with the *Code of practice* and ensured that its partners were similarly aligned via the use of its own ICP. Matters requiring swift resolution in the management of placements are handled through link tutors. There was some variation in the placement of students with some programmes offering a high degree of support in identifying student placements while others offered virtually none,

with staff arguing that the discovery of a placement opportunity was a responsibility that ought to reside wholly with the student. The team noted, however, that the variations it had observed were entirely consistent with the published information available to students on the programmes involved.

102 The University is very explicit about the need to recognise appropriate diversity and this diversity came out in various meetings held in the course of the audit and in documentation available to the audit team. The team found that there is a clear institutional view based on entitlement and the requirement that all students should benefit from both academic and personal guidance. An overview of the systems for support is maintained via the AME and the regular meetings that link tutors have with programme teams in the collaborative partners. Where unit-level student feedback was available, there was clear reference to tutorial support which could, if necessary, be addressed should a serious problem be identified. Documentation available to the team, especially programme committee minutes and student evaluations, demonstrated that the University exercises detailed scrutiny of arrangements for support and guidance and this capacity is enhanced by the contributions of link tutors. The team found that the claims made in the CPSED for academic guidance and personal support were accurate and the University has well-founded plans for further enhancement of student support.

### **Section 3: The collaborative provision audit investigations: published information**

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

103 Students studying under collaborative arrangements receive admission and programme information (including a copy of the University's regulations) directly from

collaborative partners at enrolment. Students who met the audit team indicated that the advertising materials used to promote their programmes were both accurate and informative and confirmed that they were clear that their programmes of study would lead to an MMU award. Students were also very clear about the benefits that this conferred given their view of the good reputation held by the University in the relevant subject areas.

104 Student handbooks (for both MMU programmes and for programmes delivered collaboratively) are included in programme logs which are subject to periodic audit by FASCs. Advertising and publicity materials (including the prospectus, websites and free-standing marketing literature) are routinely checked by the relevant faculty administrative staff to ensure their accuracy. These requirements are enshrined in the formal agreements between the University and its collaborative partners.

105 The audit team was told that, in the past, the University prospectus had not systematically included reference to collaborative partners and provision. However, APSG had recently debated this matter and, in future, the MMU prospectus will include a list of the University's collaborative partners, MMU programmes offered through those partners, and contact details. The team was also told that the University has now rolled out across the University a more systematic procedure for monitoring the publicity and marketing material issued by its partners, based on the practice of MMU Cheshire which involves that faculty's marketing group in checking and approving such material. The team noted that faculty marketing officers have regular meetings as a team and are in frequent contact with their equivalents in partner organisations.

106 Collaborative partner students were aware of the existence of procedures to be followed in the event of them wishing to make a formal complaint and/or appeal. In practice, however, such procedures were rarely, if ever, used given that issues were invariably satisfactorily resolved on a more informal day-to-day basis. Some of the students who met the audit team were less

clear, however, about their individual status as MMU enrolled or college enrolled students and, where students holding different status existed in the same partner college, the team noted that this had the potential to cause confusion about individual entitlement to MMU learning resources despite the fact that entitlement is clearly and unambiguously defined at validation (and subsequently in the appropriate agreement), and communicated to students.

107 The audit team reviewed a number of student handbooks and found them to be both accurate and informative. The team saw a range of marketing materials and was able to confirm the accuracy of the materials relating to collaborative provision. The team also considered materials relating to the University's collaborative provision on the internet, the intranet, and on partners' websites, and found these materials to be both accurate and informative.

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

108 Currently, and in line with TQI requirements, the University provides statistical data to HESA for its MMU enrolled students. In future, however, it intends to extend this to all students, whether MMU enrolled or external students.

109 In discussing the challenges that meeting TQI requirements has posed, the University commented that its current practice of requiring external examiners to fill out an adjunct report for upload onto the TQI website was difficult to manage and that it may review this procedure in the future. The audit team noted that the University is intending to amend its programme specifications to include precise details of PDP arrangements for all of its programmes (both collaborative and non-collaborative) and that MMU is intending to make these amended specifications available to students in electronic format through its website.

110 The audit team considered that the University satisfies TQI requirements for the publication of summaries of periodic review reports; summary external examiner reports and strategy statements for employability and for learning and teaching. This it does for both its collaborative and non-collaborative provision. The team concluded that the University is taking appropriate steps to ensure the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that it publishes about the quality of the programmes offered through collaborative provision that leads to its awards and the standards of those awards.

## Findings

## Findings

111 An audit of the collaborative provision offered by The Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU or the University) was undertaken during the period 20 to 24 March 2006. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the programmes of study offered by the University through arrangements with collaborative partners, and on the discharge of the University's responsibility as an awarding body in assuring the academic standard of its awards made through collaborative arrangements. As part of the collaborative audit process, the audit team visited four of the University's collaborative partners. This section of the report summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged during the audit, and making recommendations to the University for action to enhance current practice in its collaborative arrangements.

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

112 The University's strategic plan (2003 to 2010) indicates that MMU is committed to collaborative provision as one of the central methods of meeting its aim of widening participation. Although it is intending to reduce the number of collaborative links, MMU remains firmly committed to collaborative provision. It has developed a framework for the management of collaborative provision which dovetails with structures that are in place for University-based provision. Hence, to a very large extent, the mechanisms for collaborative provision are identical to those for University-based provision. The University's faculties have a key role to play in driving the development of collaborative partner links but do so within a clearly defined institutional framework. Recent developments include the formation of two local academic consortia which aim to facilitate progression from further to higher education, and to minimise the administrative burden by using common quality assurance mechanisms.

113 The University has several categories of collaborative partner and, depending on the nature of the collaboration, students may be MMU-enrolled or registered students. Collaborative students who are enrolled with the University enjoy the rights and privileges of MMU-based students and have access to the full range of University resources, including library and electronic journals. Registered students have no such automatic rights and do not have borrowing rights. However, the University is actively moving towards a position of parity of access to resources regardless of whether a student is enrolled or registered.

114 Following a review of the University's strategic approach to collaborative provision, the following categories of collaboration are currently active:

**Admission and Progression:** The University recognises that successful students in another institution's course are eligible for admission to the University with advanced standing.

**Dual Award Programmes:** Students receive an award from both the University and the collaborative partner. Students are enrolled with the University.

**Joint Programmes:** The University and a partner collaborate in programme delivery. Students are enrolled either with the University or the partner (not both) and receive an award from their enrolling institution.

**Franchised Programme:** The collaborative partner offers a University programme, in whole or in part. Students are registered with the University for an award. Enrolment may be with the University or the partner.

**Validated External Programme:** The University deems that a programme developed and delivered by a partner is appropriate in terms of standards and quality, to lead to a University award. Students are registered with the University and are enrolled with the partner.

The categories of Joint Award Programmes, Outreach Arrangements and Recognition are being phased out as part of an initiative to simplify the classification system adopted by the University.



115 Management of these categories follows a common format. Link tutors are assigned to all categories and provide operational and developmental support to partner staff. Annual monitoring mechanisms are also the same. Each collaborative programme, regardless of category, produces annual reports in the form of action plans which feed into the monitoring reports of the relevant MMU faculty. The University appoints external examiners to all of its programmes and student feedback is gathered in all categories leading to an MMU award.

116 Overall, the audit team found that the University is managing its collaborative provision effectively and professionally.

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

117 Approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision follow the same processes as University-based provision. The 2004 QAA audit found that these procedures were working effectively for University-based provision and the findings of this collaborative audit echo those conclusions in the context of collaborative provision. There are some additional features designed to accommodate the particular requirements of collaborative provision. These include senior management from MMU and the partner institution signing off a formal contract and the checking of the academic, financial and legal status of a partner before an agreement is signed. Visits to partners to assess the suitability of their learning resources and broader support structures (library, counselling, welfare and so on) are also conducted and reported to approval and review panels.

118 All processes are clearly documented in the University's Quality Assurance Manual (QAM). Approval of a new collaborative programme involves resource checks by University staff, faculty and University approval in principle, followed by an approval event which includes two external members. Programme and partner approval are

integrated in the current process. However, the University is considering an amendment by which partner and programme approval will exist as separate, discrete events.

119 Programme monitoring occurs annually with programme teams producing action plans which are then distilled into an overall faculty plan. Collaborative provision programmes have their own action plans to ensure that issues relevant to collaborative provision maintain an adequate profile. Periodic review is based at programme level although reviews of collaborative partners may also be held should indicators suggest that this is desirable. As with approval, the University is exploring the possibility of separating programme and partner periodic review.

120 The approval event is intended to ensure that resources are adequate for programmes delivered through collaboration. Programme approval panels are required to refuse approval if resources are not deemed to be appropriate. The inclusion of two external members on approval panels ensures that resources are comparable to those on similar programmes elsewhere in the higher education sector. Once a programme is approved, the link tutor maintains regular contact with, and visits, partner staff to ensure that the provision is well managed and that resources are maintained at an appropriate level. Any issues impinging upon the quality of the student experience will usually be addressed quickly by the programme team working in cooperation with the link tutor.

121 Monitoring and review ensure that programmes are subject to regular scrutiny by the University and continue to meet the requisite standards. External examiners appointed by the University provide an independent element to the ongoing scrutiny of the quality of collaborative programmes. In addition, students themselves monitor the quality of their programmes and are able to voice any concerns they may have to the relevant programme board and/or link tutor. The audit team noted that staff in some collaborative partners provide end-of-unit questionnaires; for other units, feedback from

students is an integral element of the unit. The team further noted, however, that the University does not require the detail of such questionnaires to be fed back to it. The team believed that this may represent a missed opportunity on the part of MMU and it came to the view that the University may wish to consider the possibility of requiring unit-level student feedback to be collected and incorporated within its annual monitoring of collaborative provision.

122 The audit team was told that link tutor visits include meetings with students and provide an opportunity for students to voice their opinions and concerns. Some collaborative students communicate directly with link tutors via email. Students also meet the collaborative partner link tutors who then liaise with the University link tutors, as appropriate. All programme boards include student representatives who are able to voice general student concerns. The Annual Monitoring Exercise (AME) requires programme teams to provide commentary on issues raised by students. This provides the University with a formal record of any concerns raised by students, together with the actions taken by programme teams to address these concerns.

123 The University has confidence in its arrangements for managing the quality of its collaborative provision and this is corroborated by recent QAA reviews. The University is not complacent, however, but is 'committed to a process of continuous enhancement'. The audit team agrees with this view. Through its use of both internal and external input, MMU identifies areas for improvement and establishes task groups and mechanisms to operationalise these, as in the case of the formation of the Academic Partnership Standing Group (APSG), and the Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) Standing Group.

124 The audit team found the University's processes for the selection and approval of partners, and for programme approval, monitoring and review, to be effective and robust. The team considered that the mechanisms for the nomination and approval

of external assessors are transparent and explicit and it found that appropriate use is made of external input in the University's processes. It was clear that assessors had engaged with these processes in a detailed and candid manner, and that due attention had been taken of their opinions. In the team's view, the planned differentiation of programme and institutional approval will bring greater clarity to the approval process, avoid duplication of work, and facilitate the timely completion of contractual agreements. The team concluded that 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.

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

125 The University's procedures for the assessment of student achievements, the monitoring of that assessment by external examiners, and approval, monitoring and review mechanisms are the same in programmes delivered through collaborative provision as for University-based programmes. Statistical performance indicators for students studying through collaborative provision are also analysed in the same way as for students registered with the University. The AME used within the University, and in collaborative provision, provides a thorough and effective mechanism for the evaluation of the performance of students and for the safeguarding of standards in collaborative provision. Further technical advances proposed in the way in which data is collected should enhance the opportunities for analysis and evaluation.

126 The audit team concluded that robust mechanisms exist for the nomination and approval of external examiners and that

appropriate use is made of them and their reports in collaborative provision. External examiner reports and responses to them form a central part of the AME. Link tutors are able to act on any issues without the delay of processing them through the AME, but such activities are consistently reported.

Furthermore, the University is able to take an overview of collaborative provision issues by means of the process of exceptional reporting at programme level, deans' reports at faculty level and, at the institutional level, by the annual report made by the Chair of the Academic Standards Committee (the Deputy Vice-Chancellor). The University is considering ways to strengthen its links with external examiners involved with collaborative provision by revisions to report templates to enable them to more readily distinguish collaborative provision issues.

127 MMU's collaborative provision has been subject to external review by QAA and relevant PSRBs. The adoption of a structure of operational and theme-based committees, in addition to standing and working groups, has enabled the University to take an overview of themes related to the academic standards of its provision with collaborative partners. The effectiveness of the University's committee structure is subject to regular review to ensure that it remains fit for purpose.

128 The audit team found the University's procedures for safeguarding the standard of its awards offered through collaborative arrangements to be effective. The team judged that broad confidence could reasonably be placed on the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements.

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

129 The University reviews the Academic Infrastructure regularly. The appointment of faculty deans as pro-vice-chancellors with additional specific, theme-based responsibilities, and the standing and working groups created, ensure a thorough knowledge and understanding. The QAM identifies how each component of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA, is integrated into institutional practice. The incorporation of collaborative provision into University-based procedures further ensures that collaborative partners' own policies are well matched. The means by which collaborative partners' knowledge of the Academic Infrastructure is ensured is well established and subject to regular improvement. This is enabled through workshops organised by the University and facilitated by link tutors and faculty secretaries.

130 The University requires subject benchmark statements to be considered as part of programme approval and review, and explicit reference is made to them in programme specifications which are mandatory for all taught programmes of study. The University is currently seeking ways to enhance the use and format of programme specifications. Engagement with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* is also a requirement in the production and modification of programme specifications.

131 The audit team found that the University is making effective use of the Academic Infrastructure in the context of collaborative provision, and agreed with the University view, as expressed in the CPSED, that the Academic Infrastructure is integrated into institutional practices and procedures.

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

132 The CPSED offered a clear and comprehensive guide to the University's approach to the management and development of collaborative provision. It was well linked to the University's mission, suitably evaluative and did not seek to conceal areas where the University felt challenged or where systems were still evolving. The CPSED had been compiled as the result of an extensive and inclusive process of consultation and this enabled University staff to speak to it with confidence. The audit team found the CPSED to be a helpful and informative document that was well-referenced and facilitated the team's enquiries into the University's processes and strategic intentions. In particular, the team found the CPSED's open and frank acknowledgement of areas where the University had been slow to take action on the findings of previous engagements helpful in guiding its own enquiries, and noteworthy as an example of a genuinely self-critical and enhancement-led approach to the audit process.

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

133 Prompted by the publication of the revised *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, and its preparations for the collaborative audit, the University, in consultation with its partners, has embarked upon a review of its collaborative provision and processes. Coordinated by the University's APSG, the review has been informed by best practice (both internal and drawn from the University's partners) and has generated a series of enhancements which link tutors, faculty

deans, programme leaders and partners had found to have already significantly enhanced MMU's capacity to effectively manage the quality and standards of its collaborative provision. In the view of the audit team, a number of these enhancement activities constitute good practice, in particular, the programme log which provides a substantial reference and evidence base for the health of collaborative programmes on an annual basis, and the opportunity for enhancement provided by the link tutor and partner forums.

134 The audit team came to the view that the University is fully aware of its enhancement needs in respect of its collaborative provision and is proactively managing this agenda to good effect. In view of the benefits already felt by those involved, the University is encouraged to continue to pursue the implementation of its full enhancement agenda with the vigour and enthusiasm evident in preparing for the collaborative audit and, particularly so, in respect of those key enhancements which remain to be fully implemented, for example, and in particular, the move to separate institutional approval and review processes from those associated with programme approval and review.

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

135 A wide range of published materials, including marketing and publicity material, learning resources, student guidance and student handbooks associated with the University's collaborative programmes is provided to students. Where such material is provided by collaborative partners, appropriate processes are in place to confirm the reliability of the information available to students. The audit team considered that, in line with the requirements of the Higher Education Funding Council for England's document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*, the University is taking appropriate steps to ensure the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that it publishes (or authorises to be published) about the quality of the

programmes offered through collaborative provision leading to its awards and the standards of those awards.

### **Features of good practice in the management of quality and academic standards in collaborative provision**

136 Of the features of good practice noted in the course of the collaborative provision audit, the audit team noted in particular:

- i the University's clear recognition that it learns from good practice in its collaborative activity and the culture of genuine partnership that derives from this recognition (paragraphs 24 and 37)
- ii the consortia networks that provide evidence of close collaboration with the University and enable consistency to be achieved across a range of partners (paragraph 29)
- iii the effectiveness, commitment and professionalism of the link tutors and the University's recognition of the importance of the link tutor role through the appointment of experienced staff to that position (paragraphs 34, 36, 55, 62, 67, 69, 99 and 102)
- iv the clarity of the Quality Assurance Manual that has helped to establish comprehensive guidelines for the operation of quality management processes to be applied to collaborative provision (paragraph 36)
- v the constructive and dynamic engagement with the collaborative provision audit process, manifest in an honest and reflective self-evaluation document which is clearly linked to the University's mission (paragraph 41)
- vi the opportunity for enhancement provided by link tutor and partner forums (paragraphs 41, 90, and 99)
- vii the programme log which provides a substantial reference and evidence base for the health of a programme on an annual basis (paragraphs 41 and 52), and

- viii the thorough and robust process of annual monitoring which is consistently applied across all collaborative provision, regularly reviewed, and owned by staff (paragraph 52).

### **Recommendations for action by the awarding institution**

137 It is desirable that the University:

- i continues to ensure that its enhancement strategy for collaborative provision constitutes an organic and evolutionary feature of its mechanisms for the management of quality and standards (paragraph 41)
- ii continues with its plans to make institutional-level approval and review distinct from programme-level approval and review in respect of its collaborative provision (paragraphs 47 and 56), and
- iii requires unit-level student feedback to be collected and incorporated within its annual monitoring of collaborative provision (paragraph 82).

## **The Manchester Metropolitan University's response to the collaborative provision audit**

The University very much welcomes the CPA report which confirms the judgements contained in the 2004 institutional audit report and which provides further endorsement of the effectiveness of its systems for the management of standards and quality. This is especially important given the size and complexity of the University's collaborative provision. The identification of such a significant number of examples of good practice recognises the efforts made to focus on building a consistent, constantly improving, high quality learning experience for all students studying for MMU awards, no matter where they are located, and to support our collaborating organisations by building a 'culture of genuine partnership.'

In addition to the judgements of broad confidence the University also welcomes the report's desirable recommendations, not least in their support for its enhancement strategy. An action plan to address a series of intentions for enhancement, with identified targets and timescale for completion, formed part of the documentation available to the audit team, and its achievement is on schedule.

In particular the University appreciates the report's recognition of its continued commitment to use the audit process as a developmental instrument in its open and self-critical approach to quality enhancement. The University is determined to continue learning from external peer review engagements of all kinds and, in particular, to benefit fully from QAA's revision of the institutional audit process as part of its own strategy to remain an enhancement-led, student centred, high quality institution.

