



# **Audit of collaborative provision**

**University of Bradford**

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## Preface

The mission of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. To this end, QAA carries out Institutional audits of higher education institutions. Where QAA considers that it is not practicable to consider an institution's provision offered through partnership arrangements as part of the Institutional audit, it can be audited through a separate Audit of collaborative provision.

In England and Northern Ireland QAA conducts Institutional audits on behalf of the higher education sector to provide public information about the maintenance of academic standards and the assurance of the quality of learning opportunities provided for students. It also operates under contract to the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland to provide evidence to meet their statutory obligations and assure the quality and standards of academic programmes for which they disburse public funding. The audit method was developed in partnership with the funding councils and the higher education representative bodies, and agreed following consultation with higher education institutions and other interested organisations. The method was endorsed by the then Department for Education and Skills. It was revised in 2006 following recommendations from the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group, a representative group established to review the structures and processes of quality assurance in England and Northern Ireland, and evaluate the work of QAA. It was again revised in 2009 to take into account student auditors and the three approaches that could be adopted for the Audit of collaborative provision (as part of the Institutional audit, a separate audit, or a hybrid variant of the Institutional audit, involving partner link visits).

Institutional audit is an evidence-based process carried out through peer review. It forms part of the Quality Assurance Framework established in 2002, following revisions to the United Kingdom's (UK's) approach to external quality assurance. At the centre of the process is an emphasis on students and their learning.

The aim of the Audit of collaborative provision through a separate activity is to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges of higher education in England and Northern Ireland have effective means of:

- ensuring that the awards and qualifications in higher education are of an academic standard at least consistent with those referred to in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree awarding bodies in a proper manner
- providing learning opportunities of a quality that enables students studying through collaborative arrangements, whether on taught or research programmes, to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications
- enhancing the quality of their educational provision, particularly by building on information gained through monitoring, internal and external reviews, and on feedback from stakeholders.

The Audit of collaborative provision through a separate activity results in judgements about the institution being reviewed as follows:

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards

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- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and the quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes delivered through collaborative arrangements
- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision in collaborative partners, both taught and by research
- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards offered through collaborative provision.

### **Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex**

The reports of quality audits have to be useful to several audiences. The revised Institutional audit process makes a clear distinction between that part of the reporting process aimed at an external audience and that aimed at the institution. There are three elements to the reporting:

- the **summary** of the findings of the report, including the judgements, is intended for the wider public, especially potential students
- the **report** is an overview of the findings of the audit for both lay and external professional audiences
- a separate **annex** provides the detail and explanations behind the findings of the audit and is intended to be of practical use to the institution.

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website.

## Summary

### Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Bradford (the University) from 26 April to 30 April 2010 to carry out an Audit of collaborative provision. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers through collaborative arrangements.

To arrive at its conclusions, the audit team spoke to members of staff throughout the University and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the University manages the academic aspects of its provision delivered through collaborative arrangements. As part of the process, the team visited one of the University's partner organisations in the UK where it met with staff and students, and conducted by video conference equivalent meetings with staff and students from three further overseas partners.

In the Audit of collaborative provision, the institution's management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are audited. The term 'academic standards' is 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. The term 'quality of learning opportunities' is used to describe the support provided by an institution to enable students to achieve the awards. It is about the provision of appropriate teaching, support and assessment for the students.

### Outcomes of the Audit of collaborative provision

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the University of Bradford is that in the context of its collaborative provision:

- limited confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers
- limited confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

### Institutional approach to quality enhancement in collaborative provision

The University's approach to quality enhancement of collaborative provision forms part of a wider institutional strategy. Its implementation was still at an early stage at the time of the audit visit.

### Postgraduate research students studying through collaborative arrangements

The University's postgraduate research framework and its implementation meet the expectations of the precepts of Section 1 of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA.

### Published information

The audit team concluded that only limited reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes and permits to be published about the quality of its collaborative provision and the quality of the collaborative awards.

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## Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas as being good practice:

- the active and effective contribution of course coordinators to sustaining collaborative partnerships
- the creation of DevelopMe as an innovative online resource to support collaborative provision students' engagement with the University and with one another
- the introduction of the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice by distance learning for staff in partner organisations
- the introduction of an annual monitoring review process for postgraduate research programmes.

## Recommendations for action

The audit team recommends that the University consider further action in some areas.

The team considers it essential that the University:

- implement a systematic process for ensuring that all contractual agreements for collaborative provision are kept current, up to date and accurate
- review its approach to the management of dual awards, including the process for approval, to ensure that they meet the requirements of the FHEQ and that certificates issued by the University for dual awards state explicitly and unambiguously the programme of study which the student has completed.

The team advises the University to:

- develop a systematic process for periodic review of partner institutions' capacity to support delivery of University of Bradford awards
- strengthen structures and processes for institutional oversight of quality management within the University's system of shared responsibility between schools and institutional bodies for collaborative provision
- ensure that the academic standards of joint degrees meet the University's own expectations and those of the FHEQ
- ensure that its review of external examining takes full account of collaborative provision, with specific reference to consistent follow-up of external examiners' recommendations and to their attendance at Assessment and Examination Boards
- establish robust arrangements for institutional oversight of admissions to collaborative programmes to ensure that appropriate decisions are made on entry
- put in place an effective system for approving and monitoring partner publicity for collaborative courses leading to a University of Bradford award
- ensure that students studying collaborative courses receive appropriate and accurate information about complaints and appeals procedures.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- expedite the introduction, for the use of all parties, of the University's proposed guide to the respective responsibilities of the University and of partner organisations in the management of policies and processes relevant to collaborative provision
- ensure that appropriate staff and students from partner organisations are more actively involved in the periodic review of courses
- develop a more robust and timely reporting mechanism for course coordinators to assure the University about the quality of the student experience.

## Reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team investigated the use made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure which provides a means of describing academic standards in UK higher education. It allows for diversity and innovation within academic programmes offered by higher education. QAA worked with the higher education sector to establish the various parts of the Academic Infrastructure, which are:

- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- the frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland
- subject benchmark statements
- programme specifications.

The audit found that the University generally took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. However, there were some exceptions to this in the use made of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and engagement with sections of the *Code of practice*, particularly *Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

## Report

1 An Audit of collaborative provision at the University of Bradford (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 26 April 2010. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers through collaborative provision and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students in relation to collaborative programmes.

2 The audit team comprised Prof A C Downton, Dr F C Quinault, Mr M Payne, Dr C A Vielba, Prof G J White, auditors, and Ms J B Ollerenshaw, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr A J Biscoe, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

### Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The University was established by Royal Charter in 1966, having developed from the Bradford Institute of Technology, founded in 1957. The Institute succeeded Bradford Technical College (established in 1882). The University has a background of vocational education which has influenced its objectives and mission since its incorporation. The ethos of applied, interdisciplinary education and research underpins the culture of the University. The University's mission is to provide 'high quality teaching informed by internationally recognised research and knowledge transfer, which enables students to achieve their educational aspirations and staff to enhance their careers within an inclusive, supportive and sustainable environment'.

4 Part of the University's vision is to establish wider collaboration with the city, the region and nationally. Key aims of collaborative partnerships are to 'support and enhance the development of higher education provision through capacity-building and providing new study opportunities, widen participation in higher education and facilitate the development of high level skills [and] enhance the University's reputation for high quality teaching and research'. Collaborative partnerships are accorded a key role in achieving the University's commitment to inclusion, diversity and widening participation. It is intended that, having enabled collaborative provision to grow and flourish based on the aspirations of academic schools, the University will move to a more institutionally strategic approach. A collaborative provision strategy is being developed.

5 The University currently has 18,542 students enrolled on its programmes. Thirty per cent of students are studying for University awards delivered in collaboration with a partner institution; 99 per cent (5,826) of these students are studying at overseas partner institutions. The University has 21 partner organisations, 12 of which are overseas. Four of the overseas partners are Associate Institutes, partners with whom a range of collaborations might be undertaken. All seven schools are involved in collaborative provision.

6 The University operates four types of collaborative provision: franchised programmes, validated programmes, dual awards and joint awards. In addition, the University has articulation agreements, distance learning and off-site delivery by University staff, which are distinct from collaborative provision.

7 The University's approach to quality assurance is one of 'shared responsibilities between schools and institutional bodies'. In the main, the University embeds the management of collaborative provision within its quality assurance systems as a whole, albeit with 'due regard for...additional risks'. The approach to the quality assurance of collaborative provision is set out in a separate section of the Quality Assurance Handbook. There are interlinked processes for partner and programme approval. Annual monitoring of collaborative provision is undertaken centrally. All partnerships should be defined in Contractual Agreements, which are sometimes preceded by Memoranda of Understanding. The principal support department with oversight of quality management of collaborative



provision is the Academic Standards and Support Unit. An Academic Standards Adviser from within the Unit is assigned to each of the seven schools. In addition, there is an adviser with a cross-school remit to give advice specifically on collaborative provision.

8 School-based course coordinators have a crucial role in the management of collaborative provision, including visiting a partner at least annually for the purposes of guidance, monitoring and two-way communication. Using a recently standardised template they are required to submit a report on any issues identified to the University (see paragraph 40). The commitment of course coordinators who met the team and the testimony of partner staff and students to their active and effective role in sustaining collaborative partnerships led the team to conclude that their contribution to the management of collaborative provision is a feature of good practice.

9 An audit of University collaborative provision took place in 2006. A year later an Institutional audit took place and in 2009 the University and one of its collaborative partners participated in the QAA Audit of overseas provision in India. The University has built on many of the strengths identified in the three previous audit reports. However, while efforts have been made to address all of the items raised at least in two of these reports, a number of issues which related to the effectiveness of the University's management of academic quality and standards in collaborative provision remained at the time of the 2009 overseas audit and still remain to be resolved. They are the subject of recommendations for action in this report.

10 In the period since the 2006 and 2007 audits there have been no major structural changes in the University. Institutional development is guided by the Corporate Strategy, Making Knowledge Work 2009-2014, and work is in progress on developing supporting strategies and plans including an integrated approach to quality management and enhancement. A number of senior new posts have been defined in relation to learning and teaching, graduate studies and students. University initiatives have been developed relating to sustainability and employer engagement. All these changes are intended to relate to both on-campus and collaborative provision, though to date their impact has been greater on the former.

11 Operational management of collaborative provision is delegated by Senate to schools. Located three rungs below Senate, the Collaborative Provision Committee, chaired by a Deputy Vice Chancellor and reporting to the Learning and Teaching Committee, has responsibility for overseeing the quality assurance of collaborative provision. This hierarchy means that there can be considerable delay in Senate considering important matters related to collaborative provision, resulting for example in initial approval of a partnership being granted before being reported to Senate. The minutes of Senate for the two years prior to the audit suggest that, apart from receipt of the overview of annual monitoring of collaborative provision at the June meeting each year - 10 months after the end of the academic year to which the reports relate - there is little discussion of specific partnership issues, other than the occasional granting of a waiver of regulations pertinent to one collaborative programme and certain procedural matters. The Internationalisation Committee has a responsibility for strategic oversight of all international collaborative partners. It is only recently that the Collaborative Provision Committee and the Internationalisation Committee have regularly had representatives of every school attending meetings.

12 Periodic review and contractual agreement review are distinct processes. The former includes partners' academic provision in line with standard University procedures. The latter is undertaken because 'the contractual agreement should be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure it is still fit for purpose and that the arrangement is still financially viable'. Where possible contractual agreement review should take place in conjunction with the periodic review, although it is possible for either the University or the partner to initiate a contractual review when required. It was made clear to the audit team that it was never the intention of the University to regularly review its partner organisations, other than as part of the periodic review of the academic provision.

13 The University produced no evidence to demonstrate that the contractual agreement review process took place in the manner described. The business plans of Associate Institutes are subject to annual review. All other partnerships are monitored through the annual monitoring process, with their financial accounts being either sent in regularly or requested specially. The audit team concluded that, in the absence of periodic institutional review of a partner, there is no opportunity for the University to take a holistic view of its ongoing relationship with a partner in relation to generic issues explored during the approval process, such as local quality management, student support, facilities and learning resources. Once approval has been granted, these issues are annually monitored (through a process to which partner input is variable), reported upon by course coordinators (in a manner which lacks consistency), or might be included in academic periodic review (where partner provision could be given only limited attention), always in a context specific either to the academic programme or to the school, not to the partner institution overall. The team considers it advisable for the University to develop a systematic process for periodic review of partner institutions' capacity to support delivery of University of Bradford awards.

14 Contractual agreements with partners are normally for five years, but they are usually renewed if no significant issues have come to light, and so are in effect 'rolling contracts'. The lack of a regular partner review process has implications for the accuracy and currency of contractual agreements. The University relies on partners or course coordinators to inform them of changes to the name or legal status. A number of current contractual agreements either do not reflect recent changes of name of the partner institution or recent changes to the name of the University award offered or were signed some years after programmes had commenced delivery. Given the absence of periodic review of partners, the team considered that this put academic standards and quality at risk and regarded it as essential that the University implement a systematic process for ensuring that all contractual agreements for collaborative provision are kept current, up to date and accurate.

15 The audit team noted that it was recommended in September 2009 that, in terms of the management of collaborative provision, 'it would be helpful to do more at institutional level to support schools and partner institutions and to facilitate more consistent practice'. Among the recommendations on that occasion was the production of a guide to the management of collaborative arrangements. However, although Senate in March 2010 endorsed this, there was no evidence that these proposals had borne fruit by the time of the audit. The audit team considers it desirable that the University expedite the introduction, for the use of all parties, of the University's proposed guide to the respective responsibilities of the University and of partner organisations in the management of policies and processes relevant to collaborative provision.

16 There is insufficient institutional oversight of both the strategic development and the operational management of collaborative provision, which has exacerbated several ongoing problems which have the potential to put academic standards and quality at risk. These include inaccurate partner websites, inconsistent follow-up to external examiners' reports, and variability in the handling of course coordinators' reports following their visits to partners, resulting in a lack of consistency in information received. Responsibility for all these matters is entrusted to schools rather than to a central University body.

17 Overall, the audit team considered that the University's framework for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities of collaborative provision was not applied consistently. The team recognised that responsibility was intended to be shared between the centre and the schools and that the University was considering introducing a greater role for the centre. However, the absence of a collaborative provision strategy, poorly defined responsibilities for checking the accuracy of partner websites, and the entrusting by Senate of the operation and strategic development of collaborative provision to two subcommittees, which did not report directly to it, collectively constituted a potential risk to the management of quality and standards. Accordingly, the team advises the

University to strengthen structures and processes for institutional oversight of quality management within the University's system of shared responsibility between schools and institutional bodies for collaborative provision.

## **Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards**

18 Programme approval of collaborative provision is undertaken by a Course Approval and Review Team, which should always include an external subject expert. If the programme is with a new partner or a programme not in an existing cognate subject area representatives of the Course Approval and Review Team are required to visit the partner institution. Although there were some lapses from the standard process, there was also evidence of effective practice illustrating a conscientious approach by those involved. The team did, however, consider the University to have departed from its normal procedures when allowing seven Foundation Degrees and one honours 'top-up' delivered by a local further education college to be transferred to Bradford from its existing partners through approval on chair's action rather than via scrutiny by a Course Approval and Review Team. This procedure facilitated the commencement of delivery in time for the start of academic year 2009-10, when the modular credit framework and the format for programme specifications and module descriptors had still not been changed to match those at the University.

19 The University currently offers a dual award with an overseas partner and is intending to now also replace joint awards with dual awards at two other overseas partners. The proposal for the initial dual award contained the view that offering a University award based on validation of another institution's programme involved simply mapping the partner's degree as 'equivalent' to an existing University degree as it was not a new award. This view was not amended during the Course Approval and Review Team review process and still represents the University's view. The audit team was provided with no evidence that a set of tailored management processes for dual awards, recognising the differences in oversight required, and distinct from those applied to existing franchised provision, has yet been developed or formally approved by the University.

20 The audit team noted that the Course Approval and Review Team which considered the initial dual award did not include an external expert. The University told the team that this was not necessary because the approval event was concerned with the mapping of the partner's provision onto that of the University rather than approval of a new award. An unusual feature of the process was that the partner's BEng programmes were mapped against corresponding University MEng (rather than BEng) programmes. It was claimed that mapping had achieved equivalent learning and teaching outcomes. This was in a context where - although the partner's degree programmes were of four years' duration and had similar admissions criteria to the University - the degree of MEng was not available in the partner's home country. The proposal submitted to the Course Approval and Review Team also outlined differences in delivery and assessment between the partner's provision and that at Bradford, which have been accepted by the University. These included more robust attendance requirements than at Bradford and prohibition by the partner of reassessment or repeat assessment unless there are mitigating circumstances, the argument being that these differences should be accepted 'as the students are technically not University of Bradford students'. This was an assertion which the team concluded showed a misunderstanding of the nature of the University's responsibility for the management of dual awards.

21 The proposal considered by the Course Approval and Review Team outlined equivalence between the partner's modules and corresponding Bradford modules. The audit team noted that only a minority of final-year partner modules mapped directly to master's-level equivalents at Bradford, so calling into question the extent to which this partner-delivered University award was correctly aligned with the expectations of level 7 of the FHEQ. The Course Approval and Review Team minutes stated that 'the [partner] module descriptors had very little information about learning outcomes, and they were not stated in a

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way that University of Bradford would expect to see them; from reading the descriptors it was difficult to distinguish between levels'. In discussion with the team, the University accepted that the partner's provision had fewer master's-level credits than its Bradford-based counterpart, 'but as they do not follow the UK's FHEQ we would not expect this'. The team was concerned that this statement failed to recognise the distinction between the partner's own degree award offered in its home country and any degree offered by the University, which, despite being wholly delivered by a partner institution overseas, is a UK qualification which should meet the expectations of the FHEQ.

22 The mapping, scrutiny and approval processes, applied for the first time to dual awards, showed several weaknesses. Processes were uncertain in the light of a new type of collaborative provision, and no external advice had been obtained or acted upon as required by the University's normal programme approval procedures and as necessary to confirm the appropriateness of standards through the mapping exercise.

23 The approved sample certificate for the dual award includes the wording 'It is hereby certified that <name>, having completed an equivalent programme, is presented with a Master of Engineering in <mechanical/civil> engineering'. The audit team was concerned that such wording did not convey the title of the programme studied. Moreover, the use of MEng posed further difficulties because it was a title identical to that of the Bradford delivered MEng, despite there being a different programme specification covering delivery at Bradford.

24 The audit team considers that the University's approval of its first dual awards and the fact that it is intended to extend the use of dual awards is a matter that is currently putting academic standards at risk and which requires urgent corrective action. The team considers it essential that the University review its approach to the management of dual awards, including the process for approval, to ensure that they meet the requirements of the FHEQ and that certificates issued by the University for dual awards state explicitly and unambiguously the programme of study that the student has completed.

25 After consideration at school level, annual monitoring of collaborative programmes is undertaken centrally. The audit team saw several examples of such reports, which were comprehensive and sought to engage with issues pertinent to the provision in question. Despite some lapses identified by the University itself in its overview report to Senate, the annual monitoring system in many respects is sound, especially since collaborative programmes are monitored separately from home-based provision.

26 In most cases the five-yearly review of academic provision of collaborative provision operates in accordance with the University's procedures. However, in the QAA audit of the Institute for Integrated Learning in Management, India, in 2009, the University was encouraged to reflect on the benefits of greater involvement by partner staff in periodic review. Recent periodic reviews show that such involvement as partners have in these events is through relevant course coordinators. Partner staff who met the auditors consistently reported limited if any input to periodic review. The extent of student involvement in periodic review was also largely absent in a recent review of a programme delivered by a local partner. The audit team considers it desirable for the University to ensure that appropriate staff and students from partner organisations are more actively involved in the periodic review of programmes.

27 The audit team reviewed the oversight arrangements for a joint award awarded by the University and an overseas partner, first approved in 2003. Since 2003 the title of the degree has changed without the contractual agreement being updated to reflect this. The contractual agreement indicates that 50 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits (100 UK credits) utilise modules derived from the partner's programme adapted to reflect the structure of the University's programme but remaining subject to the normal academic policy arrangements of the partner. Overall, the team was satisfied that a combination of informal interaction and monitoring delivered through course

coordinators, and the more formal mechanism of annual monitoring, provided adequate oversight of year-to-year delivery. However, the team was concerned that the Course Continuation Review of this provision, last conducted in 2005, while covering franchised provision, did not make reference to this particular programme. This has meant there has been no opportunity to review, update and reapprove the core part of the joint degree that is designed and delivered directly by the partner. The University is advised to put in place formal oversight arrangements to ensure that the academic standards of joint degrees that it offers with its partners meet the University's own expectations and those of the FHEQ.

28 The University has been partially successful in addressing issues in recent QAA audit reports related to variable practice in the use made of external examiners. In some cases it is clear that practice reflects the precepts of Section 4 of the *Code of practice*. External examiners are invited but are not obliged to attend assessment committees, but are required to attend examination boards. In practice, the team found consistently good attendance in some schools and those external examiners who had attended exam boards reported them to be well conducted. However, in some cases external examiner reports showed that externals were not always invited to or had often not attended examination boards.

29 The University assigns assessed work, in particular units or programmes to the same external examiner, whether it is produced by home or partner students (or, in one school, alternates the allocation between two externals from one year to the next). These arrangements are intended to ensure comparability of standards attained by home and collaborative students. University staff acknowledged that, where several partners were involved, it was difficult to identify comments pertaining to a specific institution's students, although - as agreed by Senate in June 2009 - the external examiner report form has now been redesigned to facilitate this.

30 External examiners' reports, or a summary thereof, are appended to annual monitoring reports alongside actions to be taken in response. In the reports seen by the audit team only about half of external examiners said that they had seen the previous year's annual monitoring report. Several external examiners were at best only partly satisfied, and at worst clearly dissatisfied, with the level of response to significant issues they had raised. The extent to which partner staff and students see a copy of external examiners' reports also varies between schools.

31 The University applies the same assessment regulations to collaborative as for home provision, except where waivers have been granted by Senate. It was repeatedly made clear to the audit team that if there was any difference of opinion between first markers at the partner institution and second markers at the University the Bradford mark would prevail, subject to the agreement of the external examiner. External examiners reports for collaborative provision generally confirm that marking standards are being maintained.

32 In May 2009 the University decided to initiate a review of external examining and that a paper, including proposed revised regulations, be prepared for consideration. The University provided no evidence that the review had commenced and subject staff met by the audit team had no knowledge of the review. Given the potential risks to academic standards noted above from variable practice in the use made of external examiners the University is advised to ensure that its review of external examining takes full account of collaborative provision, with specific reference to consistent follow-up of external examiners' recommendations and to their attendance at Assessment and Examination Boards.

33 The University has recently changed its handling of academic appeals and complaints and of breaches of assessment regulations. The audit team noted that, while complaints remain the partner's responsibility, academic appeals are now being consistently dealt with by the University. To assist partners, a 'plain English guide' to the appeals process is now available on the University intranet. The team also noted that, under a new devolved

approach to breaches of assessment regulations, partners are responsible for investigation and punishment according to standard University regulations, however serious the offence, albeit with a right of appeal by students to the University. Details of the changes have been effectively communicated to partners, but not always to students (see paragraph 63). Electronic submission of assessments is used by overseas partners, so facilitating the use of plagiarism detection software, which is used in some schools, especially for dissertations and as a check where plagiarism is suspected.

34 Students who met the audit team reported some variability in assessment feedback. Some were pleased with rapid and helpful feedback, while others have longer to wait because of the moderation process at Bradford. A turn-round time of six weeks was quoted by students of more than one partner, but the University has recently imposed a four-week maximum which, despite reservations in one school, is applicable to collaborative as well as home-based provision.

35 The University acknowledged that there are weaknesses in its collaborative provision data systems. In November 2009 the University resolved to ensure that details on partner students and partner modules should in future be more clearly distinguished on the student information system. In March 2010 Senate resolved to ensure that the good practice in several schools in comparing home and partner performance be disseminated across the institution. The audit team encourages the University in these endeavours, particularly the systematic sharing of data with partners.

36 The audit team concluded that limited confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards it offers.

### **Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities**

37 For each new or revised section of the *Code of practice*, the University produces a document that sets out how the University's procedures approved by Senate meets the precepts of the *Code of practice*. In terms of its response to Section 2 of the *Code of practice* (Part A), the document provides a comprehensive response to the precepts as set out in Part A of Section 2 of the *Code of practice*. The team found a number of cases where University practices were somewhat in variance to those contained in sections 2, 5, 7 and 10 of the *Code of practice*. In general, the team concluded that the University's approach to the *Code of practice* and its application to collaborative provision students had been somewhat lacking in rigour.

38 The role descriptor of a course coordinator embraces wide-ranging liaison responsibilities, a key feature being a visit to the partner, normally at least once a year, to meet with partner staff and students and check the continued adequacy of facilities and resources. A written report on each visit is to be submitted to the relevant school Board or a delegated committee thereof. In addition to the duties set out in the role descriptor, course coordinators sometimes chair exam boards considering partner students' performance. This was generally considered by the University and by the team to be a conflict of interest, and a practice on which the University will doubtless wish to reflect.

39 Course coordinators are selected after appraisal and their duties are factored into a workload model based on guiding principles set by Senate, but applied flexibly according to schools' own tariffs. The audit team was not convinced, even accepting the need for flexibility, that any model was being implemented systematically. The team noted that institutional staff development for course coordinators was optional, via seminars provided by the Teaching Quality Enhancement Group, with responsibility for the training of course coordinators being entrusted to schools. Given the critical role of course coordinators in the quality management of the University's collaborative partnerships, the team considered this

to be an area where strengthened structures and processes for institutional oversight of quality management within the University's system of shared responsibility for collaborative provision would be helpful.

40 There have been a number of initiatives to enhance the quality and timeliness of information received via course coordinator reports. The audit team concluded that as yet limited progress had been made in standardising the process for submission and consideration by schools and the University of course coordinators' reports. The failure to consistently use the standard template means that variable attention is being given to the student experience; reports continue to be received by an array of school-level committees and the Collaborative Provision Committee has considered matters arising from only a small number of reports. Accordingly, in order to improve the quality of learning opportunities and to further secure the academic standards of University awards, the team considered it desirable that the University develop a more robust and timely reporting mechanism for course coordinators to assure the University about the quality of the student experience.

41 In March 2010 Senate agreed that staff-student liaison committees might not always be the most appropriate means of gathering collaborative provision student opinion and that more flexible approaches could be adopted. Nonetheless, the University is adamant that all students, including those in partner institutions, should complete stage evaluation questionnaires at intervals during their programmes. Four schools are currently piloting online evaluation questionnaires, which have the potential to allow partner students to feed their views direct to the partner institution. The student from one local partner who met with the team cited an example of responsiveness to an issue which had been raised; those from overseas partners perceived there to be some variability in response. The reports of course coordinators' visits to partners sometimes refer to meetings with students, but these largely consist of information communicated on behalf of the University. It is a requirement that student evaluation is incorporated into annual monitoring reports. The team concluded that the University was making appropriate efforts to capture partner students' opinions via the annual monitoring process, but that it may wish to consider how students can be better informed of actions taken in response to their comments.

42 The University encourages the scholarly activity of its collaborative partners, which includes academic conferences, pedagogic developments and pedagogic conferences run by partners. With franchised collaborative provision, courses are designed by University staff for delivery at Bradford and its partners, and research at Bradford influenced the development of their courses and modules, and hence was transmitted to partner staff who were responsible for delivering the franchised provision. Plans to expand research amongst partner staff sometimes include registration of staff for higher degrees at the University, but there are no systematic arrangements of this sort in place at present.

43 Some of the University's collaborative provision is delivered through distance or blended learning, including recorded lectures available online, web access to the University library and course materials, and one-to-one supervision of project and dissertation work through Skype. Students from partners confirmed that they had good access to the Bradford virtual learning environment and online library facilities, and also noted that some partners provided local web facilities and/or their own local virtual learning environment to augment facilities hosted by the University.

44 Learner Support Services works with partners on a needs basis to audit their local provision and identify gaps which can be supported through the University's online services. Online 'Hub' resources provided by the University are equally available to all University students including collaborative partner students, but the location-specific resources are more relevant to local and regionally-based partner students than to international partner students. The University also provides other online resources, including DevelopMe, a social networking site which the University has set up for both Bradford and collaborative partner students. The audit team observed that the latter included a number of student groups based

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at international partner institutions and considered it a feature of good practice. Online resources also include facilities for electronic coursework submission, and plagiarism detection software.

45 In summary, the team concluded that the University has well-developed and effective online resources which are used by both Bradford and partner students. Partner students' use (particularly in the case of international partners, who may also provide alternative local resources) is more selective and variable than use by Bradford's students, but still provides useful blended learning and student support to augment local arrangements.

46 Responsibility for providing support for collaborative provision students resides largely with the partner institution, and the detail of what should be provided is outlined in the contractual agreements. Collaborative provision students may also access student support services available at Bradford. Generally students were satisfied by the support provided for them.

47 Admissions requirements for all collaborative programmes are determined by the University at course approval. The University's Code of Practice on Admissions was approved in March 2009. The team noted that a University response to the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education* had been due in September 2007, but had not been available until January 2009. Notwithstanding this delay, the team concluded that the University's Code of Practice was still in a developmental state at the time of the audit, with no reference to admissions arrangements for collaborative partners.

48 The University does not sign off admissions decisions for one local partner because all applicants are practising NHS staff normally with first degrees and suitable background and experience. The audit team found evidence that not all applicants to this partner's courses will necessarily have consistent prior educational experience, and that University oversight arrangements are not currently sufficient to monitor admissions to this partner reliably. A similar weakness in tracking partners' admissions decisions was also apparent at an international partner, where a condition of the most recent periodic review was to monitor all the decisions taken by the partner on behalf of the University on student admissions.

49 It became apparent that, in some schools, partners issue offer letters, and mature partners may be given delegated permission to make postgraduate offers, despite the standard arrangement being for all postgraduate offers to be made by the University. When asked how the University knew where there is delegated admissions authority and where it is centralised, no clear answer was forthcoming. When asked how delegated admissions were monitored, the response was that this was either monitored through checks conducted by the course coordinator during visits, or through monitoring of student progression either at the end of the semester or annually.

50 The audit team concluded that the diversity of devolved admissions arrangements operated by schools makes it difficult for the University to achieve consistent oversight of admissions, with the result that the University could not provide evidence to assure the team that all partner admissions met the University's entrance requirements. The team therefore considered it advisable that the University should establish robust arrangements for institutional oversight of admissions to collaborative programmes to ensure that appropriate decisions are made on entry.

51 The University supports collaborative partner staff in developing their capabilities as teachers, using online staff development resources and feedback, and support and advice provided by course coordinators and other Bradford staff during their visits to partners. The audit team found that the University generally offers good support to its partner academic staff where requested, has suitable arrangements in place to support academics new to teaching, and offers a range of good-quality staff development opportunities. New partner staff are expected to be suitably qualified. The University's standard requirement



is that all partner staff CVs should be supplied to Bradford for approval, and this policy was consistently implemented in the partner audit trails that the audit team examined.

52 An innovative example of proactive staff development support is being piloted with a partner institution, where the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice by distance learning (PGCHEP) course for new academic staff is being delivered entirely using distance learning methods. The audit team recognised as a feature of good practice the recent introduction of innovative delivery of the University's PGCHEP by distance learning to enable access by staff in partner organisations.

53 The audit team concluded that, although there are some positive elements, the University's overall approach to the management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students is not sufficiently comprehensive or joined up. The team has concerns and has made recommendations above about the currency of contractual agreements (see paragraph 14), the University's mechanisms for ensuring that learning opportunities remain appropriate (see paragraphs 13 and 40), the current absence of a detailed guide to the quality management of collaborative provision (see paragraph 15), the insufficient institutional oversight of the management of quality (see paragraph 17), and the lack of robust institutional arrangements to oversee admission decisions for collaborative provision students (see paragraph 50). Accordingly, the team concluded that limited confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

#### **Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement in collaborative provision**

54 The University's intentions for a quality enhancement strategy have been subsumed into the Academic Policy Framework. The Framework, the implementation of which is to be overseen by a new Academic Framework Development Delivery Board, states that an enhancement strategy will be developed 'in which Schools prepare enhancement targets'. Schools are in the process of developing these enhancement targets, in connection with their annual monitoring reports, which involve collaborative as well as home-based provision. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy for 2005-09 remains in force, as its successor has not yet been developed. The new strategy will embrace collaborative provision. The three new senior posts, of Dean of Graduate Students, Dean of Students and Director of Learning and Teaching, also have a responsibility for enhancement.

55 The Quality Enhancement Sub-Committee is responsible for articulating the University's approach to quality enhancement, promoting its communication to staff and students via the Teaching Quality Enhancement Group and establishing a rolling programme of thematic audits relating to learning and teaching. Four thematic audits have been initiated and have made varying progress but none are complete.

56 The Teaching Quality Enhancement Group aims to enhance the quality of the University's taught provision by supporting its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and the dissemination of good practice, as well as through curriculum and staff development. Its staff includes e-learning advisers and learning technologists. It organises an annual Learning, Teaching and Assessment Conference and a Learning Support Seminar series to help academic staff keep up to date with developments in teaching and learning. It also manages the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice. Information about all of these matters is posted on the University website. In terms of its work on enhancing collaborative provision, the University emphasised the pilot project with an overseas college that is delivering the first module of the PGCHEP programme as a key focus of the Teaching Quality Enhancement Group and pointed to the Learning Support Seminar held in April 2009 entitled 'Sharing Good Practice in Collaborative Provision'. In addition, the University has recently resolved to produce a web-based guide to the

management of collaborative arrangements; remind schools of the means by which they are expected to compare student performance on home and partner programmes; adopt a standard approach to course coordinators' visit reports; and revise the University's guidance on effective dialogue with students in partner institutions.

57 The audit team welcomed the University's formulation of its Academic Policy Framework but concluded that some of the elements that are key to its implementation, including the Academic Framework Delivery Board and the Quality Enhancement Strategy, were still at a very early stage of development. The rolling programme of thematic audits is also at an early stage, and the 2009-14 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy is not yet complete. What is already well established is the Teaching Quality Enhancement Group and, although most of its work to date has been with Bradford staff, rather than those in partner institutions, the 2009 seminar on Sharing Good Practice in Collaborative Provision did lead to some significant recommendations. The audit team welcomes the University's decision to act upon these and would encourage it to do so as soon as possible.

## **Section 5: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students studying through collaborative arrangements**

58 The only research degree delivered collaboratively by the University is a Doctorate of Business Administration (DBA), which is also delivered in Bradford. It is taught and assessed in English. Students have the same range of modules to choose from, which are taught by the same staff. Because the requirements of DBA students are significantly different from those of students enrolled for PhDs, the teaching of research methods, previously delivered by the Graduate School, has been brought in-house by the school. Information about the programme is set out on the partner's website and in the DBA Programme Handbook issued to students. The latter is generally comprehensive, though it does not make mention of procedures for complaints or appeals by students.

59 Each student is allocated two supervisors and students and supervisors complete an annual, individual progress report. The programme is overseen by a Director of Studies at Bradford and a Programme Director at the partner. The programme includes a number of Peer Review Workshops and one of these is utilised as an opportunity for a formal meeting between students and the directors, and this constitutes a staff-student liaison committee.

60 In 2009 the University introduced an annual monitoring review process for postgraduate research programmes. The first annual review of the DBA was extensive in its scope and resulted in an action plan. The audit team considered the introduction of an annual monitoring review process for postgraduate research programmes as a feature of good practice. The creation of the post of Dean of Graduate Studies is already helping the University to further improve its management of postgraduate research programmes in general.

61 The University's Codes of Practice for research students, supervisors and examiners are currently being revised to bring them into line with relevant University ordinances and regulations. Information for research students, including new Annual Progress Report forms for both students and supervisors, has now been brought together in one place on the University's electronic 'hub'. The site is clear, well-organised and comprehensive, although it does not include information on complaint or appeal procedures. The audit team was advised that a formal document, demonstrating alignment with Section 1 of the *Code of practice*, will be drawn up shortly. The audit team concluded that the University's postgraduate research framework and its implementation meet the expectations of the precepts of Section 1 of the *Code of practice*.

## Section 6: Published information

62 The standard process by which the University ensures that its own publicity is accurate and complete includes checks by course coordinators on the paper and web-based material produced by partner institutions in relation to University awards. In more than one case the audit team found that the information published by partner institutions was inaccurate. Contractual agreements with partner institutions contain clauses requiring partners to seek approval for all publicity relating to University degrees, with some containing clauses giving approval by default if the University has not responded within a certain number of days. The team heard of instances where default permission had occurred. The team advises the University to put in place an effective system for approving and monitoring partner publicity for collaborative programmes leading to University of Bradford awards.

63 The audit team viewed a sample of handbooks from partner institutions. The extent and accuracy of information given in the handbooks was variable. With respect to complaints and appeals, some handbooks gave helpful information and referred students to the relevant University websites. Other handbooks contained no information about complaints and appeals. The team considered that there was unjustified variability in the information provided to students regarding complaints and appeals and that students could be disadvantaged, in some cases by a lack of information and in other cases by inaccurate information. The University is therefore advised to ensure that all students studying on collaborative programmes receive appropriate and accurate information about complaints and appeals.

64 External examiners' reports are shared with partner institutions through the annual monitoring review. However, students in partner institutions do not see the reports. The team encourages the University to find ways of sharing these reports with collaborative provision students.

65 The University publishes a register of collaborative provision on its website. However, the audit team found discrepancies between the published register and programmes listed on partner websites and internally on school websites. The audit team encourages the University to take steps to ensure that the published register is fully up to date and accurate.

66 The University provides information about the name and location of the institution where collaborative degrees have been studied on the University transcript which accompanies degree certificates. However, the audit team found that some students who had studied for their degrees in partner institutions were not given University transcripts but supplied with other documents that did not bear the name or location of the partner institution. Some University transcripts seen by the audit team contained out-of-date information about resit marks as they did not reflect recent changes in assessment regulations. The team considered that the University's approach to transcripts is potentially misleading and does not reflect the guidance in Section 2 of the *Code of practice*. It therefore encourages the University to ensure that all collaborative provision students are provided with accurate transcripts that state the name and location of study.

67 The audit team concluded that only limited reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes and permits to be published about the quality of its collaborative provision and the quality of the collaborative awards.

## Section 7: Features of good practice and recommendations

### Features of good practice

68 The audit team identified the following areas as being good practice:

- the active and effective contribution of course coordinators to sustaining collaborative partnerships (paragraph 8)
- the creation of DevelopMe as an innovative online resource to support collaborative provision students' engagement with the University and with one another (paragraph 44)
- the introduction of the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice by distance learning for staff in partner organisations (paragraph 52)
- the introduction of an annual monitoring review process for postgraduate research programmes (paragraph 60).

### Recommendations for action

69 Recommendations for action that is essential:

- implement a systematic process for ensuring that all contractual agreements for collaborative provision are kept current, up to date and accurate (paragraph 14)
- review its approach to the management of dual awards, including the process for approval to ensure that they meet the requirements of the FHEQ and that certificates issued by the University for dual awards state explicitly and unambiguously the programme of study which the student has completed (paragraph 24).

70 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- develop a systematic process for periodic review of partner institutions' capacity to support delivery of University of Bradford awards (paragraph 13)
- strengthen structures and processes for institutional oversight of quality management within the University's system of shared responsibility between schools and institutional bodies for collaborative provision (paragraph 17)
- ensure that the academic standards of joint degrees meet the University's own expectations and those of the FHEQ (paragraph 27)
- ensure that its review of external examining takes full account of collaborative provision with specific reference to consistent follow-up of external examiners' recommendations and to their attendance at Assessment and Examination Boards (paragraph 32)
- establish robust arrangements for institutional oversight of admissions to collaborative programmes to ensure that appropriate decisions are made on entry (paragraph 50)
- put in place an effective system for approving and monitoring partner publicity for collaborative courses leading to a University of Bradford award (paragraph 62)
- ensure that students studying collaborative courses receive appropriate and accurate information about complaints and appeals procedures (paragraph 63)

71 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- expedite the introduction, for the use of all parties, of the University's proposed guide to the respective responsibilities of the University and of partner organisations in the management of policies and processes relevant to collaborative provision (paragraph 15)

- ensure that appropriate staff and students from partner organisations are more actively involved in the periodic review of courses (paragraph 26)
- develop a more robust and timely reporting mechanism for course coordinators to assure the University about the quality of the student experience (paragraph 40).

## **Appendix**

### **The University of Bradford's response to the Audit of collaborative provision report**

The University is pleased that the outcome of the audit is positive, while remaining puzzled that policies, processes and practices warranting a judgement of full confidence in 2006 and 2009 are now deemed less than acceptable.

The University is also pleased to note the audit team's support, reflected in its recommendations for action, for several measures reported to them as planned or already in progress before the audit took place. As is our usual practice following QAA audit, an action plan will be developed to ensure that these and all other appropriate recommendations and suggestions are addressed.

We shall continue to build on the features of good practice identified in the report, and to maintain and strengthen other positive aspects of our management of quality and standards in collaborative provision. These include our requirement for second marking or second consideration by University staff of assessed work and examination scripts, which in our view is a bedrock factor in securing academic standards.

The University has long-standing partnerships with institutions that have chosen to continue working with us after securing degree-awarding powers in their own right. We will continue to work with all our partners at home and abroad, ensuring that a high-quality Bradford education is widely available. We will work with our current and future partners to further embed quality assurance and enhancement within our processes.

**RG 667 09/10**

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