self–evaluation document

for
QAA Collaborative Provision Audit visit

November 2006

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FURTHER INFORMATION

ALSO ENCLOSED WITH THE SELF-EVALUATION DOCUMENT:

University Guide to Collaboration in the Provision of Programmes of Study, August 2005

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foreword

FOREWORD BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR

Collaborative, or partnership, provision has been a central part of the University's work since we were established in 1984. Why is this? There are two aspects to the answer to this question and these relate to our regional and international partnerships respectively. But the two aspects of the answer are linked by our strong sense of regional mission.

As a University with a strong regional mission we are not a University that happens to be located in Northern Ireland but could, in effect, operate elsewhere. Instead service to the region is a fundamental aspect of our *raison d'être*. Indeed it is mentioned in our Charter, where the objects of the University refer to the advancement of *'education through a variety of patterns, levels and modes of study and by a diversity of means by encouraging and developing learning and creativity, for the **benefit of the community in Northern Ireland** and elsewhere...'* [my emphasis].

In broad terms we interpret this part of the University's objects as ensuring that we contribute to the economic, social and cultural development of the region and, wherever possible, do so in such a way that promotes economic, social and cultural inclusion. It is for this reason that we see widening access to higher education to be such an important part of our work. But we recognise that this central part of our work is best achieved through working in partnership. It is in this context that we have developed our extensive network of regional partnerships, especially with local colleges/institutes of further and higher education, but also selectively with other local bodies, such as the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

With regard to our partnerships with local colleges/institutes the overall governmental policy context has been the subject of debate and change over recent years. The nature of this debate and change is explained in the body of this document. However, despite this policy debate, in which we have been active participants, at the operational level the maintenance of standards and quality of existing and pilot programmes has been our central concern. I am confident that we have been able to achieve this.

More recently we have developed selective international partnerships. As I mentioned above, this development is also linked to our regional mission. And this is the case in two senses. First, Northern Ireland as a region remains insular with a poor reputation internationally. We see the promotion of the region internationally as part of our mission and international partnerships help in this regard. Second, our student body is drawn predominantly from Northern Ireland and we seek to use international partnerships to bring greater diversity to our student body. It is for this reason that our preferred model of international partnership is one in which students undertake the early years of a programme at a partner institution and then come to the University of Ulster with advanced standing.

Whilst our regional and international partnerships are rooted in our strong regional mission, like all Universities we are seeking ways of diversifying our income base and international partnerships have a role to play in this regard also. We are, however, always mindful of the need to maintain standards and quality and have been willing to withdraw from partnerships, or not approve them in the first place, where the partner institution has not been able to meet our

requirements, or give us confidence that they will be able to do so.

Whilst it would not be fair to say that we welcome QAA audits, we do seek to use them as a learning experience and the following documentation sets out our objectives in this regard for the current exercise. In this context we look forward to engaging constructively with the audit team.

RICHARD BARNETT

A NOTE ON REFERENCING

Annexes cited within this Self-Evaluation Document (SED) are provided in a separate document – *Self-Evaluation Document, QAA Collaborative Provision Audit Visit Annexes.*

Numbers given in blue and in brackets refer to documents in the list of Evidence (Annex 15). A set of minutes and papers referenced in the footnotes to this document will be made available to the audit team (1).

Annex 13 sets out abbreviations used in the Document and Annex 14 lists useful University website addresses.

A number of sections in the SED refer to detailed procedures set out in the *Guide to Collaboration in the Provision of Programmes of Study, August 2005* which is referred to as the *Guide* within the text. A copy has been provided to the Auditors along with this SED. The 2006 version of the *Guide* will be available for auditors during the audit visit.

As the committee and administrative structures of the University were reviewed in 2005 and changes introduced with effect from 2005/06, titles of committees which no longer exist in their previous form are given in full. Titles of current committees are abbreviated after their first instance (see Annex 13 for the list of abbreviations). Information on previous and current committee and administrative structures is provided in Annexes 7 and 8.

university objectives
for collaborative provision
audit preparation

THE UNIVERSITY'S OBJECTIVES FOR COLLABORATIVE PROVISION AUDIT PREPARATION

Participation in major external reviews such as Collaborative Provision Audit is costly in terms of staff time and the University is committed to securing the maximum benefit from the effort necessarily devoted to this activity. It recognises that much of the value of such events lies in the self-learning achieved in the preparation period and has therefore set the following objectives, agreed by the senior staff of the University at their meeting on 16 January 2006, for this stage of the audit process:

- to secure the involvement of all relevant staff at senior management, faculty and departmental level, in preparatory activity;

- to ensure that all partner institutions are made aware of the audit, its remit and focus and the extent of their potential involvement in the exercise;

- to encourage all staff involved in contributing to the SED to adopt an analytical and self-evaluative approach based on available (preferably documentary) evidence, and taking account of all relevant sections of the academic infrastructure;

- to use SED preparation to contribute to the on-going monitoring, review and evaluation of the implementation and effectiveness of exiting processes related to collaborative activity;

- to engage with partner institutions during SED preparation and to take this opportunity to explore further their views and perceptions of the collaborative relationship;

- to use the preparatory activity to test further the effectiveness of communication both within the University and with partner organisations;

- to ensure that partner institutions selected to participate in the audit have all the information they require about the process and to provide support for them in order to minimise any requirements upon them while ensuring that all reasonable requests for information are met in full.

It was also considered that the SED would provide a useful additional vehicle for updating University and partner institution staff on key decisions affecting collaborative activity taken by the University over the past few years. In order to achieve this it was agreed that the SED would be printed and circulated to all relevant staff within the University and in partner institutions.

SED Preparation

The University adopted the following approach to SED preparation:

- the SED content and headings were agreed following circulation to relevant University committees for comment;

- initial discussions were held with relevant staff about the proposed SED contents;

- initial draft submissions for inclusion in the SED were received;

- submissions and the associated evidence base were discussed with staff in related departments;

- the first draft of the SED was considered by senior University committees;

- the revised draft of the SED was discussed in detail at meetings with faculty staff and the Faculty Heads of Collaborative Courses (FHCC);

- meetings were held with local and international partner institutions to discuss the draft SED in more detail and comments

received were collated and reported;

- further revisions were made in the light of all comments received and the final document was agreed by senior staff;

- printed copies* were distributed to all relevant academic and academic related staff and to staff in partner institutions.

In order to allow time for printing, the document was finalised in mid June 2006 and it has not, therefore, been possible to reflect committee decisions after that date.

section one

1   THE CONTEXT OF PARTNERSHIP

1.1   THE UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

1   The University of Ulster was established by Royal Charter on 1 October 1984, merging the New University of Ulster and the Ulster Polytechnic. It has four campuses at Belfast, Jordanstown, Coleraine and Magee in Londonderry. The University has also established a virtual campus, CampusOne, through which it offers a range of web-based distance learning programmes. On 1 August 2002 the Northern Ireland Hotel and Catering College at Portrush was amalgamated into the University and now forms part of the Coleraine campus, although it retains its existing and separate site nearby. Since its establishment the University has gone through a period of rapid growth in student intake and in its research and technology and knowledge transfer activities. It has also developed a substantial network of partner institutions (see Annex 5).

2   The University is characterised by a strong sense of regional mission, placing it at the forefront of social and economic development in Northern Ireland. Many programmes of study are strongly vocational. The University is consistently amongst the top universities in the United Kingdom in terms of applications for undergraduate places and participation by young full-time undergraduate entrants from socio-economic groups 4 – 7 is markedly higher than the national average, 48% against 29% for the United Kingdom as a whole, and 12% in excess of the University's benchmark. Over 90% of its 15,800 undergraduate students come from Northern Ireland; with the remainder from other parts of the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland and over 36 other countries around the world. In total over 24,500 students are currently registered for courses ranging from sub-degrees to PhDs, and a further 5,000 students are registered for University of Ulster qualifications at partner institutions.

3   The University, with nearly 4,000 members of staff, makes an important contribution not only to the educational and social life of Northern Ireland but also to the economy and it is estimated that the University, its staff and students, feed back nearly £265m into the local economy each year.

The University Vision and Mission

4   The University is currently reviewing its Vision statement. The revised draft statement and supporting core strategic aims will be considered for approval by the University Council at its meeting on 23 June 2006 in the context of the Draft Corporate Plan 2006/07 - 2010/11.

5   The revised draft version of the University is *'to be a University with a national and international reputation for excellence, innovation and regional engagement'.*

6   To achieve the Vision and to ensure that it is embedded in the day-to-day operations of the University five core strategic aims have been identified:

- *'Provide excellent learning opportunities which are student centred and client focussed;*
- *Undertake excellent research in selected areas of activity;*
- *Maintain the University's position as a sector leader in widening access to higher education;*
- *Establish the University as sector leader in*

promoting creativity and innovation;

- *Conduct business in line with the University's core values and to the highest standards of corporate governance.*

7 Following an internal communications survey conducted by Market and Opinion Research International (MORI), a Core Values Working Group was established in October 2003. Its main aim was to identify an agreed set of core values that would help inform the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour of staff of the University. The Core Values were developed in consultation with staff and approved by Senate on 30 November 2005.

8 The Core Values are to:

- *see each student and member of staff as an individual with their own needs;*
- *provide quality learning and development for students and staff;*
- *respect ourselves and those we deal with and be accountable for what we say and do;*
- *work together with trust, openness and honesty;*
- *value diversity and inclusiveness and see everyone as equals;*
- *be creative and adapt to the challenges of change; and*
- *take pride in how we do our work.*

9 The Core Values should underline all decisions, working practices and relationships within the University. Whilst it is recognised that it may take several years to embed the core values in all the University's procedures, this process has commenced and has been identified as a core strategic aim of the University **(2)**.

1.2 COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

10 In accordance with the objects of its Charter **(3)**, the University has worked particularly closely with colleges and institutes of Further and Higher Education in Northern Ireland to provide opportunities for participation in higher education. Provision is at Access, Certificate and Intermediate Higher Education levels, with progression routes to the University. Since 2001 this collaboration has focused on the development of new Foundation degrees (Fds) designed to address the key skills shortage areas identified by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL).

11 For certain of its programmes, the University agrees with partner colleges the use of the latter's resources to make available Level 2 (generally for bridging courses) and Level 3 of Honours degrees. This particular provision is deemed 'outcentre' provision and students are students of the University, not of the partner institution. The University's outcentre activity was addressed through the main Institutional Audit in April 2005.

1.2.1 MODELS OF COLLABORATION
Guide: Section E2

12 The University does not offer different models of collaboration but rather adopts a 'best fit' approach based on the specific nature of the provision. The University stipulates minimum requirements for standards assurance and quality monitoring arrangements for its collaborative provision. These are the same for all programmes and are described in sections 4 and 5.

13 The University does not differentiate between 'validated' and 'franchised' provision as two distinct models of operation. In

approving and reviewing courses, it considers the appropriateness of arrangements for the link being considered. An explanation of the use of the terms 'validated' and 'franchised', as used by the University, is included in the *Guide* at Section E2.

14   In QAA terminology, the majority of the University's collaborative provision is 'validated' provision. A potential or existing partner institution is responsible for the design, delivery and assessment of the programme, although advice on curriculum development and University regulations is provided by the University. The University evaluates and approves the course as suitable to lead to an award of the University. It appoints external examiners and the monitoring of delivery, compliance with University regulations and procedures and oversight of assessment is undertaken by the FHCC with, where necessary, the input of an additional member of University staff with subject expertise (see section 3.2).

15   There is a minority of provision which, using QAA terminology, would be deemed 'franchised'. Whole courses or individual levels of University honours degrees have been franchised to partner institutions and are the same as the University degree. In these cases, whilst some local variation may be permitted, the curriculum and assessment is determined and coordinated by the University. In addition to arrangements summarized above, the University Course Committee exercises oversight of the assessment process.

16   Often a 'validated' course has evolved from a course originally 'franchised', in whole or in part, from the University and 'franchised' courses often develop into distinct ('validated') courses. This is the case,

for example, where the University has ceased to offer the course, such as in its transfer of intermediate provision to partner institutions.

17   In some instances, the same course is offered by more than one partner. University requirements for standards assurance and quality management remain the same for all programmes but faculties have developed additional arrangements to provide enhanced management of these networks with the aim of increasing efficiency and facilitating sharing of resources and good practice.

18   Edexcel courses are provided under the terms of the University's Licence Agreement. It is University policy to withdraw from the provision or supervision of Edexcel awards in the medium term and partners are encouraged to withdraw or replace them[1]. In this commentary, references to the University's awards should be read to include the Edexcel award where applicable. Institutions which are approved are, under Edexcel terminology, termed 'franchised centres' although in general the programme is not also offered by the University.

1.2.2   Extent of Collaboration

19   The University has extensive links with a range of partner institutions. At the time of the 1994 Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) collaborative audit, 3,200 students were enrolled on 76 different courses with 24 partners. In 2005/06, 4,840 students enrolled on 164 programmes of study leading to awards of the University or of the Edexcel Foundation offered by 26 partners (Annexes 9 and 10).

20   The vast majority of the University's collaborative provision is with the 16 colleges of Further and Higher Education in Northern

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1 TLC mins 03.175 and 04.82

Ireland. Colleges vary considerably in size. The largest are the Belfast Institute, Newry and Kilkeel Institute and the North West Institute. The largest, the Belfast Institute, has around 14,000 students including more than 2,000 at HE level. The smaller colleges include Omagh College, Limavady College and Lisburn Institute. Omagh College has over 7,000 students including approximately 250 on HE programmes.

21   Following the planned reorganisation of the Northern Ireland Further Education (FE) sector, the University is reviewing its arrangements for collaborative working with these colleges (see section 1.2.3).

22   A small number of other non-FE links exist with local public-sector institutions such as the Health and Social Services Trusts, the regional agricultural college and the PSNI.

23   While the vast majority of collaborative work is within Northern Ireland, the University has for some time had a small number of overseas partnerships in Hong Kong and China, currently with Hong Kong College of Technology (HKCT), the University of Hong Kong and South China Agricultural University (SCAU). An additional partner was added in 2004 with the School of International Hotel and Tourism Management (HTMi), Switzerland and a further opportunity for collaboration with the Cordia Institute of Hospitality Management, India is being considered.

24   A list of all currently approved programmes and partner institutions is provided at Annex 6.

1.2.3   Reorganisation of the Northern Ireland FE sector

25   DEL's recent review of the local FE sector resulted in plans for a reorganisation of the Northern Ireland Further and Higher Education colleges from the existing 16 to six new colleges[2].

26   The University recognises that major change of this nature can provide a valuable catalyst to generate a step change in its collaborative agenda. As a first stage in securing the full benefits from the proposed developments for all concerned, and in particular for the current and potential student population in the region, the University, with the support of DEL and the Association of Northern Ireland Colleges (ANIC), submitted a proposal to the Leadership Foundation Change Academy 2006.

27   The proposal **(4)**, which was successful, and at the time of publication of this document is in its early stages, focuses on the development of effective partnership models of collaborative provision with FE to facilitate the achievement of strategic regional HE objectives in Northern Ireland.

28   The project vision is to enhance current working practices and attitudes in relation to collaboration in course provision both within the University and the wider HE sector in Northern Ireland, with a view to implementing a new partnership model from 2007/08. This model would incorporate arrangements to secure an effective and coherent approach to sub-regional course planning to ensure sustainability of subject provision in key skills shortage areas, and to put in place an approach to long-term strategic management of collaborative

2 Future Size and Structure of the Further Education Sector for Northern Ireland. DEL, July 2005.

partnerships which takes account of the views of all stakeholders.

29   The project team includes senior staff from the University, DEL, ANIC and two of the largest FE providers of HE in the region. The University believes the project will result in innovative and enhanced structures of partnership working and a full update on progress will be provided to the audit team during the visit.

1.3   RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INSTITUTIONAL VISION AND COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

30   The objects of the University, as stated in its Charter are:

'to advance education through a variety of patterns, levels and modes of study and by a diversity of means by encouraging and developing learning and creativity, for the benefit of the community in Northern Ireland and elsewhere; to preserve, advance and disseminate knowledge and culture through teaching, scholarship and research, and to make available the results of such research; and to promote wisdom and understanding by the example and influence of corporate life' (Article 4).

31   To further these objects, the University is enabled to *'admit to the privileges of the University or to recognise for any purpose, and either in whole or in part, any college or other institution or the employees or students thereof, on such terms as may from time to time be prescribed in the Statutes or by Ordinance'* (Article 5(M)).

32   Collaboration with other educational bodies to provide courses at sites other than the University's four campuses, is one way in

which the University seeks to meet the objectives of the Charter. The University's Corporate Plan of 1993 stated the University's intention to consolidate and extend these arrangements. This point has been reiterated in successive planning statements.

33   The draft Corporate Plan 2006/07 - 2010/11 sets out the key supporting objectives related to each of the five core strategic aims detailed in para 6. These include;

'to continue to develop collaborative provision, regionally, nationally and internationally, and especially with local colleges/institutes of further and higher education'.

34   The core strategic aims identified in the draft Corporate Plan are underpinned by a number of cross cutting aims. These are to:

- *Contribute to the economic, social and cultural development of the region and to promote the University and the region internationally.*
- *Contribute to economic, social and cultural inclusion in the region.*
- *Recognise and reward staff who contribute to the achievement of excellence.*
- *Exploit the University's multi-campus and unitary structure to realise successfully its vision.*
- *Ensure financial sustainability and work towards the achievement of environmental sustainability.*

35   The Vision is realised through the Corporate Plan and a number of mutually supportive and reinforcing strategies. Those particularly relevant to this audit are the Teaching and Learning Strategy; the Widening Participation Strategy[3]; Strategy for

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3 TLC/03/74 (See Page 5, Activity 4) and min 01.246

Collaborative Provision and the International Strategy (see section 2.1).

36 The University's Teaching and Learning Strategy **(5)**, adopted in June 2004, has identified 'Partnership' as a key value as it reiterates the importance of collaborative work.

37 The University Charter contains a formal requirement for a review of its operations every seven years by a Committee external to the University. This review, which is unique in UK HE, examines whether the University has continued to fulfil the objects of its Charter and other areas identified by the University Council. The most recent review took place in the current academic year and reported in February 2006 **(6)**. The Review Committee was chaired by Sir Graeme Davies and had the opportunity to meet with individuals and representatives of bodies from the Northern Ireland community as well as with academic and administrative staff, postgraduate students, representatives of staff trade unions and the Students' Union (SU). In addition the Committee wrote to a broad spectrum of public and private organisations in Northern Ireland inviting written submissions.

38 In relation to collaborative activity the Committee reflected on the significant growth in this area and commented that *'the University's extensive network of relationships with the Further Education sector in Northern Ireland is among its cardinal assets, constituting a key element in its capacity to meet its regional objectives'.* The Committee recommended that the University *'...maintain the existing balance of degree and sub-degree opportunities both in-house and in collaboration with Colleges of Further and Higher Education in the Province'.* The

Committee also noted the close and multi-faceted relationships which had developed between the University and its local partners and the confidence which could be derived from this. The Committee therefore had *'...no hesitation in recommending that the University continues to treat the development of its relations with the Further Education sector as a matter of the highest priority'.*

1.4 THE ROLES OF THE DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING (DEL) AND THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT (DARD)

39 DEL and its predecessors, the Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (DHFETE) and the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI), provides funding for higher and further education in Northern Ireland.

40 Funding arrangements for collaborative provision in FE in Northern Ireland differ from those which apply in England, with income for teaching being directly allocated to the colleges by DEL. Consequently, the University considers it appropriate for partner colleges to be responsible for the resources required for programmes including library resources, something which is made explicit in advice to institutions and formal agreements (*Guide* Appendix 39). It is expected that colleges make this clear to their students on registration[4].

41 DEL is closely involved in setting the strategic direction for the FE sector and in approval of course proposals by colleges. In the recent Fd initiative, the Department invited proposals in four vocational areas where pilots would be conducted and these

4 FHCCF mins 04.85, 04.98, 04.122 and 05.13
5 TLC min 03.176

related to specific skills shortage areas in Northern Ireland (NI). Following the conclusion of the pilot period **(7)**[5], DEL has now extended permission for Fds to be developed in all vocational areas from 2006/07[6].

42   DEL operates a Maximum Aggregate Student Number (MaSN) in respect of full-time undergraduate HE provision at the two NI universities and those FE colleges permitted to offer full-time higher education courses.

43   In view of the specific remit of the sector, DEL requires colleges to obtain its approval for new HE courses, full-time or part-time. The small size of HE activity in some colleges and the question of critical mass are other factors in this scrutiny. In arriving at decisions in relation to the approval of new courses DEL seeks advice from the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) which provides this based on its detailed knowledge of college provision and capacity **(8)**.

44   A strategic review of the FE sector was initiated in 2002. The review concluded in early 2004 with the launch of a draft strategy *Further Education Means Business*[7] **(9)**. DEL has emphasised the vocational focus of the sector in support of regional economic development; its role as an agent of social cohesion and as a major promoter of lifelong learning.

45   The University aims to ensure a mutual understanding between itself and the Department and that the University's strategies and policies are in harmony with those of DEL. There are close working relations and senior University staff and DEL officials are in regular contact. The University's policy statement and

the specific principles for the University's collaboration with the FE sector, (*Guide*: Section B1 – 2) state that collaborative proposals should accord with DEL's strategy, and should not be beyond HE Intermediate level. DEL is supportive of the University's '2 + 2' model for Fd progression and is willing to consider FE colleges in NI using the University's Personal Development Planning (PDP) system[8].

46   In support of DEL's strategy and in accordance with its Mission, the University had agreed only to develop Fds in subject areas where colleges were unable to do so[9] and has now agreed to 'roll out' the majority of its Intermediate level provision to FE partners by 2008/9[10]. This will result in the withdrawal of a number of Associate Bachelor (AB) degrees, an HND and two Fds at the University, with the last intakes to those courses in 2006.

47   *FE Means Business* emphasises the vocational nature of provision in the FE sector. The Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC) has sought to clarify policy for funding of non-vocational Intermediate-level provision programmes and whether the Department would support AB degrees in areas where a Fd award is not appropriate[11]. A response is awaited.

48   DEL does not consider the academic standards of particular awards, which is the ultimate responsibility of the University, but through the ETI receives reports on standards and quality of provision in colleges. Operationally, the planning and approval timeframes of DEL and the University differ. The University expects outline proposals to be submitted at least 15 months in advance for September entry to allow time for completion of course planning and evaluation processes, whereas DEL invites proposals during the

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6 TLC min 05.11
7 TLC min 04.56
8 TLC mins 05.80 and 04.207

9   TLC min 05.11
10 TLC mins 05.125 and 05.80, Planning Committee min 05.116
11 TLC min 05.48

preceding academic year (currently end December, but previously Easter). Consequently while the University may give permission for planning and undertake evaluation, approval in terms of funding rests with DEL and a course may not be offered unless this is given.

49 While there is a risk to both the college and the University that they may waste resources in developing and validating a proposal which may not be offered because it is rejected by DEL, the understanding and collaboration between the three bodies mitigates this risk. In recent years only two courses have not been sanctioned by the Department subsequent to evaluation: FdSc Architectural Technology, Armagh College (2004) and DipHE/FdSc Working with Children and Young People, network of colleges (2005).

50 DEL is carrying out a review of policy and processes in relation to higher education course delivery in the FE sector, including its approval process. It has invited the University to comment on the planning timeframe and opportunities for harmonisation (10).

51 A further example of how the University and the Department have worked together is that, in 2001, in order to accommodate the short time for the introduction of pilot Fds, the University exceptionally used the DEL outline proposal forms in place of its own, as in this instance the form covered the type of information required by the University (forms received April 2001)[12].

52 In addition, senior staff from DEL have participated in University organised events for partner institutions (11). DEL has taken these opportunities to receive feedback from colleges and to provide updates on

policy development. There has also been engagement with the ETI on developing a common annual reporting form (see section 5.2) and other partnership approaches are being developed with a view to minimising the total burden on colleges.

53 Another government department, the Department of Agriculture and Regional Development (DARD), is responsible for the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) which operates on three campuses, following the merger of the local agricultural colleges. The University validates a number of courses offered by the College. These include a full degree in Equine Management. The College is not restricted in the academic level of provision in the same way as the FE colleges and it also offers courses at postgraduate level (one jointly with the University).

1.5 STATUS OF STUDENTS ON COLLABORATIVE COURSES

54 Students of partner institutions studying for University awards are not students of the University. This is clearly stated in a number of places in the *Guide* (Sections B1, E1, E8, E15.4) and in the legal agreement with institutions (Recognition Agreement, clause 8a). Partner institutions are expected to ensure that sufficient resources are in place for the successful delivery of a validated course, in accordance with the University's expectations for standards and quality. Consequently, such students enjoy no special privileges at the University although they would become alumni. The University has no contractual relationship or obligation to these students; this was confirmed by the University's solicitors in light of comments in the QAA Hong Kong audit report[13]. They may access

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12 CASC min 01.28
13 TLC mins 02.97 and 01.255

facilities (library, sports, SU) in the same way as any other members of the public, but have no particular entitlements.

55   The fact that these students are studying for University awards inevitably creates an association with the University, which it would wish to encourage and to be viewed positively. However, it has given rise to misapprehension in two areas:

- full use of University learning resources;
- right of appeal to the University.

Resources

56   Despite the basis on which approval of courses is granted, and the guidance on wording for students' course handbooks in this regard (*Guide*: Appendix 22), there has been an understandable expectation or desire on the part of some college staff and students that students might access the learning resources of the University, specifically in terms of acquiring borrowing rights from the University Library and, more recently, access to electronic journals. This has been a recurring topic in Annual Course Review reports. A number of factors have contributed to confusion in this regard:

- close liaison between colleges and the University;
- previous practice of issuing registration cards to partner institution students with the University's name (discontinued in 2003[14]);
- separate collection of University capitation charge from students by colleges (colleges were asked not to do this in 2003[15] and 2006);
- additional privileges previously paid for under Associate College arrangements (see section 2.5);

- Foyle shared library initiative (2004) between the University, NWIFHE and the Western Education and Library Board (it has been made clear to partner colleges that this mutual borrowing scheme is for the general reader and is not intended to replace local course resources);
- the fact that University students studying at the colleges as outcentres have entitlement to full access to University resources;
- sympathy of some University staff for the proposal.

57   This matter was most recently raised at TLC in June 2005 in discussion of matters arising from the Annual Review of Collaborative Courses (2003/04)[16] when it was noted that colleges were clear about the information provided to students regarding their relationship with the University; that there were software licensing implications for electronic journals; and that FE colleges are able to subscribe to online journals at a significantly lower price than that paid by the University[17].

58   There was further discussion in October and December 2005 in the context of the evaluation of a new course at HKCT. The Committee reaffirmed that in principle courses were expected to be self-sufficient and that, should access be granted to University resources, additional costs should be met by the college concerned[18]. Colleges were asked to ensure that students were aware of their position regarding access to resources.

Right of Appeal

59   Students of partner institutions have had no ultimate right of appeal to the University. This position was a matter of

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14 TLC mins 03.2 and 02.205
15 TLC min 03.85
16 TLC min 05.106 g
17 TLC mins 04.74 d, and 02.46
18 TLC mins 05.170 and 05.179

concern to the QAA team which conducted the overseas audit of HKCT (2001). Following legal advice, the University reaffirmed its position, as the students are not members of the University. Students of partner institutions may, of course, raise concerns with the University regarding the processes of their own institution and this was most recently confirmed as part of the University's review of policy and procedures against the updated section of the *QAA Code of Practice* (Precept A26) (12).

60   In the light of the Code of Practice, the Quality Management and Audit Unit (QMAU) has undertaken a Themed Audit of student complaints and appeals procedures within partner institutions (see section 5.3).

61   The audit noted that all partner institutions have student complaints procedures in place, the majority of which are broadly compatible with those adopted by the University. The audit also noted that while all partners have appeals processes in place there was considerable variation between institutions with only a small number adopting procedures similar to those of the University.

62   A recommendation from the audit report, which was approved by the TLC at its meeting on 12 April 2006[19], was that all partner institutions offering programmes leading to University awards or Edexcel awards under the University's auspices adopt procedures modelled on those of the University and following the same principles and timescales. The audit also recommended that the University provide appropriate documentation to partner institutions to facilitate this process. These revised procedures are to be in place by the start of the 2006/07 academic year at the latest.

63   Senior managers from partner institutions were advised of the outcomes of the audit at a seminar in Coleraine on 28 March 2006 (11). Guidance on model HE appeals procedures (13) has been developed and issued to partner institutions. The University is considering whether partner institution students should be afforded a further right of appeal to the University. This matter will be discussed at the June 2006 meeting of the Senate.

**1.6   EXTERNAL REVIEWS OF
          COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITY:
          OUTCOMES AND ACTION TAKEN**

64   The last full audit of the University's collaborative activity took place in 1992. However the University has had institutional audit visits in 2001 and 2005 and in addition has participated in two key reviews involving partner organisations.

**1.6.1   OVERSEAS AUDIT
          (HONG KONG) 2001**

65   In February – March 2001 the University's link with HKCT and SCAU in relation to the provision of the BSc Hons Computing Science was reviewed as part of a QAA audit of UK Higher Education Institution (HEI) partnerships in Hong Kong. The report of that audit was received in November 2001 (14).

66   The provision audited in 2001 comprised a two year level 3 top-up course delivered in HKCT and the same level 3 programme at SCAU, operating at that stage as an outcentre of HKCT. This programme is no longer offered.

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19 TLC min 06.117

67 The audit report contained a number of comments and recommendations and the University responded in detail to these in January 2003 **(15)** following careful consideration of the report by the then Faculty of Informatics[20], the TLC and the then Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee.

68 Significant developments since that date in relation to issues raised by the report have included:

- the development of a Protocol for the Approval of New Partner Institutions (see section 2.4);
- the introduction of separate institutional and course level agreements (see section 2.6);
- the appointment of an additional member of Academic Registry staff to enable the issue of transcripts to students completing University awards through 'validated' and 'franchised' agreements with partner institutions (see section 7.1);
- the review of appeals arrangements (see section 1.5).

1.6.2 Review of Fds 2003

69 During 2001 the University developed Fds in collaboration with FE partners in the skills shortage areas identified by DEL. In common with other UK universities involved in this development, the University participated in the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) commissioned review and evaluation of the first year of the pilot scheme. For universities in Northern Ireland this review was conducted as a joint exercise between QAA and the ETI and took place in May 2003. Prior to that review the University's then Quality Assurance and

Enhancement Committee had agreed[21] that, given the pilot nature of the Fd development, the University should conduct its own detailed evaluation so that desirable enhancements could be identified and implemented before the second group of Fds were considered for approval. An extensive report was provided[22] following the review exercise and the proposed action and enhancement plan was endorsed by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee which also received follow-up reports on this and the QAA/ETI review[23].

70 The University was commended in the QAA/ETI report **(7)** for its approach to the introduction, evaluation and enhancement of this new qualification type. As a direct consequence of the University's internal review and the QAA/ETI report the University amended the structure of its Fds and took steps to ensure that all new and proposed courses adopted the enhanced structure. In addition a number of developmental events were arranged to allow for discussion of enhancement of various aspects of Fd provision with partner institutions offering these awards **(16)**.

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20 Note the Faculty of Informatics merged with the Faculty of Engineering and Built Environment with effect from 1 August 2003 to form the Faculty of Engineering within which the current partnership link with SCAU is based.

21 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee min 02.40

22 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee Paper QAEC/03/04 and min 03.09

23 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee Paper QAEC/03/26 and min 03.56

section two

2 THE FRAMEWORK FOR PARTNERSHIP

2.1 UNIVERSITY COLLABORATIVE PROVISION STRATEGY AND CONTEXT

71 The University operates in a region which presents both social and economic challenges and, in particular, in a society which is still emerging from conflict[24]. The University, in delivering its regional mission and in its widening participation strategy, must take account of local educational and economic needs. This provides both opportunities for, and constraints on, collaboration. The University is well placed to engage in such regional development given its four, geographically dispersed campuses and the significant number of vocational courses it offers.

72 Since the early 1990s, the University has encouraged FE colleges within Northern Ireland to bring forward proposals for collaboration. The University has supported partner institutions in developing HE-level work and access provision, provided proposals were within broad areas of its expertise. This approach has proved successful in increasing collaborative provision throughout Northern Ireland. As a result of this approach the University has developed a partnership-style relationship with institutions with which it collaborates in which the University's role has been that of 'critical friend'.

73 One of the University's strategic objectives, as outlined in the Corporate Plan 2003/04 – 2007/08 **(2)**, has been to: *'Enhance the development of the region...by promoting and strengthening collaborative partnerships and relations with...other education providers...* [25] *'.*

74 In order to achieve this objective, the following strategies were identified as priorities:
- *'To further develop and validate Fds in consultation with DEL and partner organisations*
- *In partnership with local colleges and other appropriate agencies, to review access course provision* [26] *.'*

75 DEL's Strategic Plan for 2004-07 **(17)** also states that one *'important dimension to widening access is the development of stronger links between Further Education and Higher Education. This will give students clearer and more flexible progression pathways and will support the development of quality work-based programmes, including the new Fds* [27] *'.*

76 Since the joint QAA/ETI review of the five initial Fds offered by the University in the first pilot in 2003 (see section 1.6.2) the University has validated a total of 83 new Fds across all the Northern Ireland colleges in priority skill areas identified by DEL.

77 The Corporate Plan 2003/04 – 2007/08 also identified as an objective in support of these strategic developments: *'to review collaborative provision and implement institution-based audit processes* [28] *.'*

78 This review of collaborative provision has resulted in:
- the introduction of the FHCC role and the Faculty Heads of Collaborative Courses Forum (FHCCF) from 2003/04 (see section 3.1);
- the profiling of partner institutions (see section 3.3);
- the development of faculty strategies for collaborative provision giving rise to a new University Collaborative Provision Strategy and Context.

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24 DEL Strategic Plan 2004-2007, Introduction and page 13
25 University Corporate Plan 2003/04 – 2007/08, page 5

26 University Corporate Plan 2003/04 – 2007/08, page 6
27 DEL Strategic Plan 2004-2007, page 18
28 University Corporate Plan 2003/04 – 2007/08, page 7, 5.2 (a)

79 The draft Corporate Plan 2006/07 – 2010/11 **(2)** reaffirms the University's commitment to supporting all aspects of regional development. During the lifetime of this plan, there will be significant changes in the local FE sector consequent upon the DEL review of the sector and the publication in July 2005 of its plans for FE reorganisation (see section 1.2.3).

80 The then Pro-Vice-Chancellor (PVC) (Quality Assurance and Enhancement) met with faculties between January and April 2004 to discuss faculty objectives for collaborative activities. Following these meetings, faculties were asked to develop faculty strategies for collaborative provision (see section 3.1). The FHCCF provided guidance on the themes to be included in faculty strategies[29] and recommended that areas of commonality between these strategies be incorporated into an overarching University strategy. This 'bottom-up' approach to the development of the University's Collaborative Strategy enabled the University strategy to be based on the knowledge, expertise and experience of developing and monitoring collaboration across the University.

81 Draft faculty strategies were discussed at a further round of faculty meetings with the PVC (Quality Assurance and Enhancement) in September 2004 and were received by the FHCCF in October 2004[30]. The draft University strategy was considered by the then Acting PVC (Teaching and Learning) alongside other relevant strategies which were under review, namely the Widening Participation Strategy **(18)** and the International Strategy **(19)**. The draft Collaborative Provision Strategy was received by the FHCCF in June 2005[31]. The final Strategy **(20)** was considered and endorsed

by the Academic Development and Student Services Committee (ADSSC) at its first meeting in October 2005[32], together with the revised International Strategy, and was approved by Senate in November 2005[33].

82 The Strategy takes account of the University's Teaching and Learning Strategy **(5)**, in particular in relation to the emphasis on flexibility, variety and diversity, fulfilment of potential through learning and creativity, the advancement of knowledge and the promotion of understanding; and the University's policy and procedures as set out in the *Guide*. It also relates to the University's International Strategy **(19)** (see 2.2 below).

83 The Strategy is set within the context of the University's Vision and seeks to outline the context within which educational partnerships with institutions external to the University are developed. It also identifies the key strategic principles underpinning all collaborative activity, whether local or overseas, and a number of additional principles which apply to collaborative partnerships with overseas institutions, defined as those institutions outside Great Britain and Ireland.

84 With regard to the international dimension, the Strategy refers to the HEFCE document *International Strategy for HEFCE*[34] which recognises that UK higher education is operating in a global market where competition will continue to intensify, particularly given increased student mobility. International collaborations also bring benefits to the University's own student body from the internationalisation of the curriculum and the exchange of students between countries.

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29 FHCCF min 04.56
30 FHCCF min 04.116

31 FHCCF min 05.69
32 ADSSC min 05.26
33 Senate min 05.116
34 http://www.hefce.ac.uk/partners/world/strategy/strategy2003.doc

2.2   INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY

85   The University's International Strategy (19) defines the strategic goals in relation to its international activities during the period 2005 – 2010. The strategy identifies four key objectives:

'1   To maximise the number of high quality fee paying international students studying on University of Ulster programmes in accordance with agreed target countries and priorities.

2   To promote international excellence through academic and research collaboration using a range of strategic relationships regionally, nationally and internationally to accomplish this.

3   To promote best practice in the support of international students.

4   To develop an international dimension at the University both in terms of the environment, and through the provision of opportunities for local students to participate in international exchanges/study abroad/work placement.'

86   The draft International Strategy was considered at the first meeting of the ADSSC and approved as a broad outline by Senate in November 2005[35]. Senate asked that ADSSC bring forward more detailed proposals on actions to be taken to achieve the strategic objectives and it was noted at Senate on 1 February 2006 that these would be developed through the annual Academic Planning process.

2.3   GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

University

87   As with all University provision, programmes offered in collaboration with other HEIs are subject to scrutiny through relevant University committees. The two main governing bodies of the University are the Council and the Senate. The Council has general control of the conduct of the affairs of the University and is responsible for the strategic direction of the University as well as approval and oversight of its finances, all matters pertaining to resources and risk management. The Senate is responsible for ordering the academic affairs of the University, including collaborative provision. The respective roles and composition of these bodies are defined in Statutes XVI and XVII (21). Both the Council and the Senate operate through a number of committees which are responsible for specific functions and have defined terms of reference and membership (22).

88   The PVC portfolios were reviewed in 2005 and this resulted in a restructuring of the committees of Council and Senate which were revised to reflect the new portfolios. These changes were introduced during the first semester of 2005/06.   A chart setting out the former committee structures is provided at Annex 7 (b) and a chart setting out the current structure of committees with responsibilities for collaborative provision is provided at Annex 7 (a).

89   Academic planning, approval of the collaborative and international strategies and matters relating to the development of new partnerships are the responsibility of the ADSSC. Approval for new course proposals to proceed to course planning and evaluation is undertaken by the ADSSC through the

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35 ADSSC min 05.20 and Senate min 05.116

Academic Planning Sub-Committee (APSC). Standards assurance and quality management of collaborative provision are the responsibility of TLC. Validation and revalidation activities and approval of changes to existing courses are undertaken by TLC through the Course Approval Sub-Committee (CASC) (see sections 4.4, 4.6 and 4.7).   Both the TLC and ADSSC report recommendations to Senate (Annex 7 (a) and document 22).

90   Interaction between the ADSSC, TLC, the other Committees of Senate and their Sub-Committees is achieved by substantial common membership. In addition, committees establish working groups to consider specific issues in greater detail than would be possible in main committee meetings. This process is deemed beneficial as it enables involvement of a wider range of relevant staff to address particular issues in more detail. Currently, a Value for Money Working Group (VfMWG) is reviewing the costs of collaborative provision and is due to provide an interim report in July 2006 (23) and a final report in November 2006 (see section 2.7.4).

91   The FHCCF is a Sub-Committee of TLC (22). The FHCCF is required to *inter alia*:

'keep under review, advise and make recommendations to the TLC on the development, monitoring and enhancement of both local and overseas collaborative provision '.

92   All FHCCs (see section 3.2 for further detail on the role of the FHCC) are members of the FHCCF and, in order to facilitate communication, the Chair is a member of TLC and ADSSC.   The FHCCF is supported by staff in the QMAU. The introduction of the FHCCF

has ensured greater consistency in the development and communication of policies and procedures in relation to collaborative provision, more effective sharing of good practice and a more structured approach to support for faculty staff engaged in this area. More detail on monitoring and support arrangements and an evaluation of how effective these have been is included in section 5.

93   The Vice-Chancellor is the chief academic and administrative officer. The four PVCs and the Directors of Finance, Human Resources and Corporate Planning and Governance report directly to the Vice-Chancellor.   The Vice-Chancellor is responsible to the Council for maintaining and promoting the efficiency and order of the University. As chief academic officer, the Vice-Chancellor chairs the Senate. Each of the four PVCs has responsibility for a specified area of the work of the University namely, Academic Development and Student Services, Teaching and Learning, Research and Innovation and Communication and Institutional Development. Each PVC chairs the Committee of Senate relating to their portfolio. Each faculty is headed by a Dean, who has direct responsibility for the work of their faculty. PVCs and Deans are appointed for fixed terms, up to four years, and may be reappointed.

94   Charts setting out the current and former administrative structures are provided at Annex 8 (a) and (b) respectively.

Faculty

95   Each faculty has a Faculty Board which reports to the University Senate on all matters relating to the organisation of education and teaching in the subjects of the

faculty, including curricula and examinations and makes recommendations to the Senate for nominations for External Examiner appointments.

96 Faculty Boards are able to determine their own sub-committee structure for consideration of faculty business. All FHCCs are members of Faculty Boards and relevant faculty sub-committees. The University TLC asked faculties to confirm how collaborative matters are formally considered through their structures[36]. Faculties reported to the 14 June 2006 meeting of TLC and arrangements were considered satifactory

2.4 PROTOCOL FOR THE APPROVAL OF NEW PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

97 The University systematically reviews its arrangements in the light of national guidance and evidence of best practice. Reports on Section 2 of the QAA *Code of Practice* were considered in 2000 and 2005 (see section 2.6 and (12)). While the University had confidence in its processes, it had noted that an integrated institutional and programme approval process was not in keeping with the arrangements recommended by the QAA and this had been highlighted in the report of the overseas quality audit of HKCT in 2001, which was received by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee in February 2002. A commentary on the audit report was received by TLC in May 2002[37]. In 2002/03, the University reviewed procedures and introduced a formalised Protocol which incorporated separate initial strategic assessment and monitoring of proposed new partners. In addition, separate institutional and programme level agreements were introduced from 2004 (see 2.6). The Council of Validating Universities' (CVU) *Handbook for Practitioners* was a useful resource in

elaborating the new procedures for separate institutional approval.

98 The Protocol for the Approval of New Partner Institutions (24) was considered and approved by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement, Teaching and Learning, and Planning Committees. It was then received at the FHCCF[38].

99 Since the introduction of the Protocol, six proposals have been received in relation to potential new partner institutions and were considered by the former Planning Committee (to June 2005) or Senior Management Group (SMG) (from October 2005). Of these six proposals, four were proposals for validated course provision and these are summarised below (25).

- A proposal from the Faculty of Business and Management for a link with Vancouver Community College was approved in principle but did not proceed;
- East Asia School of Business, Singapore, approved by Planning Committee 10 May 2004. The University did not agree, however, to a request for a tight timescale for commencement of course delivery as it did not facilitate full consideration under the Protocol and the proposal, therefore, did not proceed;
- Lingnan University, Hong Kong, approved on 27 April 2005. Lingnan University has postponed submission of a CA2 form (course proposal) pending a further market survey;
- The consideration of a degree proposal from Cordia Institute of Hospitality Management, India has been deliberately cautious. A CA2 submitted to CASC in September 2005 was accompanied by a 'high risk' assessment from the Faculty. Consequently a two-stage, rather than

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36 TLC min 06.88
37 Paper TLC/02/32, mins 02.92 – 97

38 Planning Committee min 03.134, Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee min 04.24, TLC min 03.216 and FHCCF min 04.13.
39 CASC mins 05.107

parallel, process was agreed, so that an institutional supplementary document was to be confirmed as satisfactory before any decision was made on the CA2 course approval[39]. The University has had no experience of working with an institution with no history of educational delivery. It was noted that no permanent staff had been appointed with whom the Faculty might work. SMG has confirmed that the development with the Institute was in principle in the University's strategic interest[40] and the International Office is working with the Institute.

100   One monitoring visit has been undertaken in line with the Protocol. The course, (year 3 of BA Hons Travel and Tourism Management) at HTMi Switzerland, had been approved following an evaluation event on 30 March 2004, prior to approval of the Protocol and took its second intake in 2005/06. The monitoring visit took place in November 2005 and was chaired by the PVC (Teaching and Learning), with representatives from QMAU and the Faculty of Business and Management also present. The Panel met with senior management, staff and students, reviewed documentation and inspected resources. A report of the visit **(26)** was received by TLC on 8 February 2006[41] and provided to HTMi. The report will be considered by the revalidation panel at the revalidation scheduled for late May 2006.

Evaluation of Effectiveness of Protocol

101   A document-based review of the effectiveness of the Protocol was carried out in January 2006 and a report provided to SMG in February 2006 **(24)**.

102   The report concluded that overall the Protocol had proved useful in generating

greater internal debate and a more strategic approach to the development of links with new partner institutions and had ensured that proposals for such developments were considered at a senior level within the institution before any institutional commitments were entered upon.

103   However SMG recommended a number of changes in order to enhance further the effectiveness of the Protocol and a revised process is being drafted.

104   The experience from the first monitoring visit to HTMi would suggest that this is a valuable element of the Protocol and provided opportunities to review progress on the evaluation report recommendations, to obtain direct feedback from students and to provide staff with development sessions on University processes. It is the intention to maintain this aspect of the process.

2.5   ASSOCIATE COLLEGES

105   The arrangements for Associate Colleges are set out at Section F of the *Guide*. These arrangements were introduced in 1996 when the former Development Committee proposed a new form of relationship to respond to the marked growth in validated courses and the changes facing the FE sector as incorporation approached.

106   It was envisaged that the status and title of Associate College would be conferred on a small number of selected colleges which had an established relationship with the University and with which the University would work closely in future developments. A Memorandum of Association sets out the purpose, nature and operational arrangements for each Association. Through the Association, access to University facilities

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40 ADSSC Paper ADSSC/05/26
41 TLC min 06.39

(including the library, JANET and other communication networks, staff development courses and award-bearing courses) may be made available to Associate College staff and to students on University award-bearing courses (and mutually for University staff and students to college resources) at reduced rates. College staff are also able to enrol on the courses of the University at a substantially reduced fee.

107 The formal management arrangements for the associations fell into abeyance in 2000 at the time of re-organisation of PVC portfolios after the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor in 1999. The original arrangements envisaged in 1996, with meetings of biannual Management Committees comprising senior staff, cross-representation on Faculty Boards and attendance by the respective heads of institution at Senate or Boards of Governors for relevant discussions, by that time had proven cumbersome and inappropriate to the strategic planning required. The University's developing policy expected closer articulation between validated provision and its own courses to ensure progression opportunities. DEL was also taking a closer role in managing HE development in the FE sector, following a somewhat *laissez-faire* period immediately after incorporation.

108 The then Acting PVC (Teaching and Learning) reported to the TLC in October 2004 that he was undertaking a review of the Ordinance but that this had been necessarily delayed pending publication of the findings of DEL's Strategic Review[42]. The main outcome of the review has been the reduction of the 16 colleges to six new area-based colleges with effect from September 2007. The University is reconsidering Associate College status in the light of this development.

2.6   FORMAL AGREEMENTS

109 Ordinance 1984/8: Recognition of Institutions is the governing Ordinance by which the University formally approves an institution to offer a course of study leading to its award. As well as academic standards, the Ordinance addresses such matters as financial health and the permanent establishment of the institution.

110 The Memorandum of Recognition (*Guide*: Appendix 38) is an institutional-level agreement which was introduced from 2004/05 and signed with the first new partner after that date, HTMi, Switzerland. The development of the new agreement was in line with the guidance of the QAA *Code of Practice*. Until that date, the University had only had programme-level agreements. These provided adequate safeguards to the University. For example, the University was able to withdraw from its collaboration with two partners in 1996 by giving the due period of notice. However, the new Memorandum is intended to provide an additional level of security for the University and fits well with its new formalised procedures for scrutiny of prospective partners. A new Memorandum will be signed with each existing partner at the time of the next evaluation/revalidation or, in the case of the local colleges of FE in 2008, following completion of re-organisation unless there is evidence from Annual Course Review or other sources that the partnership is no longer working satisfactorily.

111 In addition, for each approved programme, a formal agreement is signed by the Vice-Chancellor and the head of the partner institution when the conditions specified in the evaluation or revalidation report are fulfilled. For University awards, the document is termed a Recognition Agreement. For Edexcel awards a

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42 TLC mins 04.128 and 05.47

Memorandum of Agreement is drawn up. Copies of these standard agreements are given at Appendices 39 and 40 in the *Guide*.

112   For University awards, institutions are formally approved under the terms of Ordinance 1984/8: Recognition of Institutions, which sets out the conditions under which the University may 'recognise' an institution to offer a course of study leading to its award. For Edexcel courses, as the award is not the University's own, the institution is not formally recognised and the wording in the Agreement is slightly varied, but the same conditions of approval apply.

113   In 2003, the University considered the matter of the 'permanency' required for recognition under the Ordinance (clause 3 b i) and sought advice from its solicitors. It was noted that no institution could be seen to exist in perpetuity and that the intention of the clause was to convey that an institution should be established on a basis which was continuing and enduring, and its status or condition could not be changed without approval of a relevant authority. The Ordinance was to be interpreted in this sense[43].

114   In the light of Section 2 of the QAA *Code of Practice* the University undertook a review of its standard course-level agreements in 1999/2000 in consultation with the University solicitors. This led to the introduction of clauses covering rights of third parties, intellectual property, sub-contracting, and the language of instruction and assessment (English), and explicitly stating that the partner institution students are not students of the University. In 2002, an additional clause was added to make explicit the partner institution's responsibility to provide adequate resources for courses offered in collaboration with the University[44].

The University's commentary on A10 and A11 of the revised section of the QAA *Code of Practice* (2005) is set out in paper TLC/05/26 (12)[45]. No further revisions were made to the Agreements.

115   The University approach in regard to agreements is to provide standard general documents. It deliberately avoids too much detail for practical reasons. University procedures and course delivery are subject to regular review, with changes being introduced during the period of approval of a course. The University does not wish a cumbersome process whereby such developments require changes to the legal agreements. Instead it ensures that the agreements reference both the approved course document and the University's current procedures for standards assurance and quality management and administration which are thus part of the contract with the institution. Hence, for example, there is no detail on the role of External Examiners (bullet b, A10, *Code of Practice on External Examining)* (27), as this is covered in detail in the *Guide* and the *External Examiner's Handbook* (34), which are issued to partner institutions.

116   The University's Ordinance and the detailed guidance do not require partner institutions to follow the University's arrangements in every regard but they are expected to have equivalent processes in place. Students are not University students and partner colleges, which may offer courses from a range of awarding bodies, must organise their affairs efficiently. They have standard administrative procedures, e.g. for the enrolment of students or the printing of examination papers. The University does, however, prescribe certain policies and procedures which must be followed (e.g. qualifications and credit framework, conduct of boards of examiners).

43 TLC min 03.55
44 TLC min 02.46
45 TLC min 05.67

2.7   FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

117   The Recognition Agreement template **(28)** signed by the University and each partner institution outlines the agreement regarding payment of fees and other associated costs.

'The PARTNER shall pay to the UNIVERSITY on demand such monies expressed in terms of sterling as shall be determined by the UNIVERSITY from time to time in connection with the operation of this Agreement as follows:

(a) a licence fee for each approved course leading to an award of the UNIVERSITY;
(b) a fee expressed as so much for each student registered on the approved course for each year of the course;
(c) and such costs as the UNIVERSITY shall reasonably incur, in connection with the design evaluation, monitoring, review, examining, assessment and general supervision of each course.'

2.7.1   Student Fee setting

118   A fee is set for each student enrolled on a course at a institution outside the University for each year of the course. Each year these fees are re-assessed and are subject to inflationary rises. Once agreed by the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Group (Finance) the fees are reported to General Purposes and Finance Committee for Council approval, and are then published on the Finance website[46].

119   As students are registered as students of the recognised Institution, the Institution is responsible for paying the appropriate approved fees.

120   The 2005 Seven Year Review Committee **(6)** commented on the need to ensure that the costs of development, quality assurance and assessment of courses validated by the University in other institutions be kept under review and fully recovered[47]. The University is also in the process of moving toward full economic costing of all its activities, using the Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) methodology. In this context, a VfMWG has been established to review this for the University's collaborative activity. The Group will make a final report to the University's Value for Money Steering Group in November 2006.

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46 http://www.ulster.ac.uk/finance/fees/tuition_fees0506. html.

47 Recommendation 5.14, *Seven Year Review Report 1998–2005*, page 64

section three

3 SUPPORTING PARTNERSHIP

3.1 THE ROLE OF THE FACULTY HEAD OF COLLABORATIVE COURSES (FHCC)

121 The new role of FHCC was introduced in Autumn 2003 and resulted in the appointment of nine FHCCs to replace the 72 University Assessors who were previously involved in managing the collaborative activity between the University and its partner institutions. The new role was created as a consequence of a review of the University Assessor role initiated after inconsistencies in Assessor activity and purpose were identified during Annual Course Review in 2000/01. The QMAU commenced a Themed Audit in June 2001, a major element of which was the formation and operation of a Working Group to consider the role and responsibilities of the University Assessor, the purpose and format of Assessors' reports and the support provided to Assessors[48]. The report of the Working Group and the Themed Audit[49] recommended comprehensive changes to the role of the Assessor and, as a consequence, the FHCC role was defined and introduced in October 2003.

122 The primary purpose in establishing the new role of FHCC was to facilitate clearer and more consistent communication and reporting arrangements both within the University and between the University and its partner institutions. The University has sought direct feedback from partner institutions on the FHCC development. This has been obtained through telephone interviews with course directors (conducted by QMAU as part of the 2005 review of the role of the FHCC) and through discussions with other partner institution staff at various meetings, most

recently, in a series of meetings arranged to discuss the draft SED.

123 Feedback from staff at all levels has been that the introduction of the role of the FHCC has resulted in significant improvements in communication, provided a single expert point of contact for queries and enhanced the management of the partnership activity.

Duties and Responsibilities

124 The duties and responsibilities of the FHCC are set out in the *Guide*: Appendix 6. They focus on providing a high level view of collaborative activity, on streamlining the flows of information between collaborative partners and the University, and providing comprehensive but objective support for the development and management of collaborative programmes with partner institutions.

125 In adopting the recommendations of the report of the Themed Audit, faculties were given the freedom to adapt the new model for management of collaborative courses to their own needs. For example, the Faculty of Life and Health Sciences employs three half-time post holders, the Faculty of Engineering has two full-time post holders and the Faculty of Arts has one FHCC at 0.75 of a full-time post. These varied approaches reflect the diversity and different scale of collaborative activity within each faculty. All appointments to the FHCC role were however made at Senior Lecturer level and some post holders continue to undertake teaching. The decision to limit the numbers of individuals involved in providing advice to external partners and designating FHCCs in their place accords well with the risk-based approach to

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48 Quality Assurance and Enhancement
   Committee min 02.21
49 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee/03/17

management increasingly being adopted by the University, since it encourages a more consistent approach to the management of collaborative provision. The new role has been supported by the establishment of the FHCCF **(22 and 29)** which facilitates the exchange of views and development of consistent practice amongst the FHCCs. Representatives from the QMAU and the PVCs for Academic Development and Student Services and Teaching and Learning also participate.

126 As part of the introduction of this new approach and to facilitate the embedding of the new structures, a commitment was given to review the effectiveness of the role after a period of 18 months. The method of review was agreed by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee[50] and those involved or consulted during the exercise included Deans, Heads of School, representatives from central departments, and Principals, Directors and course directors from partner institutions. FHCCs were also consulted.

127 At its meeting on 7 December 2005 TLC approved the recommendations of the Working Group reviewing the effectiveness of the role of the FHCC[51]. The Working Group concluded that, from the feedback received from both internal and external sources, the new arrangements for the management of the University's collaborative partnerships were working effectively. A number of refinements were made to include, *inter alia*, minor revisions to the role and responsibilities of the FHCC, clearer channels of communication within faculties and the provision of cultural awareness training for those members of staff involved in overseas collaborations.

3.2 SUBJECT LIAISON

128 FHCCs, whilst managing the overall arrangements for collaborative provision, are not expert in all fields represented within their faculty's collaborative portfolio and therefore the new arrangements for contact between partner institutions and the University require ongoing support at subject level. Subject expertise may be sought for example on course planning, the design and content of examination papers, preparation of assessment schemes, curriculum issues, professional development and work-based learning/placement. Initial access to subject support is negotiated by FHCCs through Heads of Schools.

129 The type of involvement of subject experts varies according to need. For example, the Faculty of Arts held a number of workshops in General Humanities assisting FE college staff with preparation for revalidation. One of these, in June 2004, focussed particularly on subject development and offered opportunities for interaction in subject groups with subject experts from within the University.

130 The review of the role of the FHCC considered the variability in these subject-based arrangements and the need for formal recognition of the input by other academics to collaborative course development. With the change in role there was a potential for a decrease in the support available to course teams in partner institutions but the investigations conducted as part of the review indicated that this has, in the main, not been the case.

131 The review concluded that considerable progress had been made in

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50 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee paper QAEC/04/69 and min 04.166
51 TLC paper TLC/05/89 and min 05.191

improving the working relationship between the FHCC and subject leaders within each faculty which resulted in partner organisation benefiting from the new arrangements for managing collaborative activity.

132 The Working Group agreed that Deans must ensure that proper recognition be given to all staff, but in particular, subject experts who support the work undertaken by the FHCC.

133 The University has been anxious to ensure that the introduction of the FHCC role did not result in a reduction in the quality of the subject-level advice provided to partners. As indicated in section 3.1, the University has taken a variety of opportunities to obtain feedback from partners and the issue of subject-level liaison has been discussed. It is clear from responses received that partners consider that the total support package provided by the University is both responsive and appropriate. It is recognised that in some cases the FHCC will be the subject expert and will therefore be able to provide comprehensive advice, while in other cases the FHCC may advise on course approval and management and other generic issues related to University policies and procedures, with the subject-level input provided by other faculty staff. In either case the process appears to work well and to the satisfaction of partners.

3.3 TEACHING QUALITY ENHANCEMENT FUND (TQEF) PROJECTS

134 The University applied for funding for a number of enhancement-focussed projects under the HEFCE/DEL TQEF funding arrangements 2002-2006. When considering what areas of activity to put forward for

support through this scheme the University identified a number of projects in relation to the management of its collaborative partnerships. Funding to support the proposed activities was secured and as a consequence an experienced administrator was seconded to the QMAU for a period of three years. The value of this role and of the work undertaken has been recognised by the University and the post has been made permanent.

135 A major activity undertaken during the year was the development of Institutional Profiles. To facilitate this initiative, all partner institutions in NI and overseas were visited in order to review the arrangements which support course delivery including resources and administrative processes. Other initiatives undertaken included developing procedures for approving new partner institutions; enhancing the quality of provision through implementation of Themed Audit outcomes; supporting and enhancing internal monitoring and review procedures; liaising with external partners with particular emphasis on staff development activities; and supporting the FHCCs. The scope and level of engagement in these activities is described in other sections of the SED.

136 Under the terms of the TQEF funding agreement the University is required to provide an annual report to DEL on progress against targets and to identify targets for the following year **(30)**.

137 A report on the outcomes from the visits to partner institutions conducted during 2003/04 was considered by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee at its meeting on 16 June 2004 **(31)**. An enhancement arising from the visits was the development of a new self-evaluation report

form, in partnership with the ETI, the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA)[52] and partner institutions, to address concerns regarding the high level of formal reporting required to support quality management processes both by the University, the ETI and partner institutions' own internal management arrangements.

138   At the conclusion of the full round of visits a composite report was considered by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee on 13 June 2005 (32). This report identified a number of areas for staff development in partner institutions including conduct of Boards of Examiners, obtaining and acting on student feedback and module monitoring. These matters were all addressed at the annual staff development event for course directors. Details of this and other development activity are provided in section 8.

139   Institutional Profiles have been completed for all partner institutions. They are available to all staff within the University on the QMAU's website.

3.4   LIAISON WITH OTHER AGENCIES

140   In order to improve the quality of service provided to partner institutions the University liaises with a number of external agencies who approve, support, monitor and review the activities undertaken by the FE sector.

141   A number of successful joint staff development initiatives with the ETI have taken place. Two FHCCs attended a staff development event for new ETI Associate Assessors organised by ETI to support their inspection regime. One FHCC also participated in an ETI follow-up inspection at

Newry and Kilkeel Institute. The inspection involved a number of activities and the FHCC attended a feedback meeting between ETI and senior managers.

142   A representative from ETI addressed a meeting of the FHCCF on 13 October 2004 to explain their arrangements for inspections in the FE sector. They were also in attendance at the evaluation of the Fd in Software Engineering at Belfast Institute. ETI was represented at the Annual Course Review Sub-Group meeting on 18 March 2005. Staff from ETI also attended a Staff Development Day for course directors in partner institutions in October 2005. The attendance at, and participation in, these events provides both organisations with a better understanding of each other's auditing and inspection regimes. Feedback from these events was very positive and it is envisaged that further similar initiatives will be undertaken in the future.

143   The University organised a seminar for senior managers in partner institutions on 24 March 2005 (11) which was supported by DEL. The seminar was addressed by the Deputy Secretary for the Department who focussed on the Government's perspective on further education and university collaboration.   DEL also addressed a Student Progression and Transfer workshop on 9th February 2004. This project was supported by the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL) (11). These events allow for key decision-makers within the University and the Department to come together with senior managers in the FE sector to consider areas of mutual interest.

144   The former LSDA, along with ETI, were involved in the development and review of the self-evaluation form used in Annual

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52 The LSDA has now evolved into two separate organisations: Learning and Skills Network and Quality Improvement Agency for Lifelong Learning.

Course Review. Feedback from the University's collaborative partners through Annual Course Review overwhelmingly supports the new reporting form and the significant reduction in the administrative burdens placed on them. The refinement of the self-evaluation form is ongoing and a meeting is held each year with representatives from partner organisations to review and revise the form as appropriate. A representative from the QMAU has attended LSDA organised events.

145 The University has also hosted a Higher Education Academy (HEA) Network Workshop for partner institutions delivering higher education programmes in Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism (see section 8.2).

146 In response to concerns raised by partner institutions concerning the further development of new Fds, the University organised a seminar on 13 June 2006 focussing on the involvement and role of the Sector Skills Councils in this area (11). The Sector Skills Development Agency and DEL participated in the event. As this is an issue which affects the majority of higher education providers within the Province, the University invited staff from all partner institutions to the seminar as well as representatives from the Queens University, Belfast, the Open University, Stranmillis University College, St Marys University College, ANIC, LSDA and Foundation Degree Forward. The feedback from the event was very positive with delegates gaining a better understanding of DEL's expectation with regard to the level of engagement required with the Sector Skills Councils in the development of Fds.

147 The University is also working with ANIC and DEL in a joint Leadership Foundation Change Academy project (see section 1.2.3).

section four

4 ASSURING THE STANDARDS OF AWARDS

148 The University's Principles of Standards Assurance and Quality Management are set out in section B2 of the *Guide*. The University aims to ensure that the academic standards of each course and the resources available to deliver it meet the criteria for the award in question, no matter where or by whom offered. The same standards apply to collaborative courses as to courses provided by the University itself. Processes for approval and monitoring and reference points are either the same as those used internally or have additional requirements to reflect the external nature of the provision. The QAA expressed its broad confidence in the soundness of the University's management of its standards in its *Institutional Audit Report*, April 2005 **(33)**. This commentary therefore does not reiterate the detailed statements included in the self–evaluation document for that Audit but considers their particular application to partner institutions, any specific variations, and any substantive developments since the Institutional Audit.

149 Various documents support the University's assurance of standards. This information, as used within the University or specifically designed for partner institutions, is fully available to staff in partner institutions in hard copy and electronically from the Academic Office website. The material is kept up-to-date and the *Guide* is re-issued annually, with a summary of the main changes. Other documents such as the *External Examiner's Handbook* **(34)** and the *Assessment Handbook* **(35)** are also provided in hard copy. New policy development is communicated directly to partners as required and is also available on the Academic Office website (under Policies). No restriction is applied to access to the site.

150 The University has in place a number of structures and processes which are designed to assure the standard of provision leading to its awards, by reference to the University's generic standards, and also to fulfil national generic and subject benchmarks. These include the responsibilities of committees, the regulatory framework, programme approval and monitoring arrangements, assessment rules, practice and conventions and the role of External Examiners.

4.1 NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK

151 The various elements of the QAA Academic Infrastructure, the *Code of Practice, FHEQ* (and the supplementary award benchmarks)*, Subject Benchmarks and Programme Specifications,* are embedded within the University's arrangements and apply equally to internal and external provision.

152 The University's review of Section 2 of the QAA *Code of Practice* in 1999/2000 **(12)**[53] concluded that it was broadly in compliance, and led to the introduction of refinements including those already referred to regarding the Agreement (see section 2.6), the requirement for a faculty Business Plan for non-UK proposals, the provision of a template for student handbooks, and an explicit requirement for a proactive investigation into the history of a prospective new partner and also of its arrangements for the conduct of examination and assessment. Particular matters where the University was out of step with the QAA *Code* were the issue of transcripts (see section 7.1.2) and the opportunity for partner institution students to make complaints or appeals to the University (see section 1.5).

153 The University's review of the updated section of the QAA *Code* in 2005 again

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53 SCTC mins 00.91 and 00.131

confirmed general compliance (12)[54] and the following actions were taken:

- for student award parchments, the phrase 'Northern Ireland' was added to the location of local institutions, to provide greater clarity to prospective employers or educational institutions outside the Province;

- an explicit statement was added to the template for course handbooks that students have no ultimate right of appeal to the University; further developments in this area are on-going (see section 1.5).

- the Committee reaffirmed that the University should provide all transcripts for students in partner institutions (see section 7.1.2);

- while noting the closer involvement of the Finance Department in reviewing business plans, it was urged to expedite the review of costing/pricing models (see section 2.7.1);

- the timing of the signing of the new institutional level agreement with existing partners was determined.

4.2   UNIVERSITY REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Qualifications and Credit Framework

154   In designing new courses partner institutions use the University's Qualifications and Credit Framework and follow its modular requirements to determine overall structure, module size and credit level. The University uses the generic level descriptors of the Northern Ireland Credit and Accumulation Transfer System (NICATS). As their development involved the NI FE sector, their formal adoption in 2002/03 was readily acceptable to partner institutions.

155   The University's Qualifications and Credit Framework was reviewed in the light of the FHEQ and a new Framework put in place from 2002 intake. Partner institutions were advised in December 2001 and changes were made in accordance with the course revision process (see section 4.6).

156   The most significant developments for FE partners at that time were the introduction of a new award at Certificate level, the Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) (previously a 'Diploma' award was used), and at Intermediate level the Fd for courses with work-based learning and the AB degree for those without, and the change of title for 120 credit point Access to Higher Education courses from Certificate to Diploma.

157   The use of the CertHE title encountered initial resistance in some quarters as it was unfamiliar in NI, and there was a perception that the word 'Diploma' signified a qualification of greater worth. In some instances, new students were not informed of the change in award by college staff. This omission required University staff to visit specific class groups and to correspond with individual students to explain the implications of the change.

158   At the time of the Fd initiative, the University introduced not only this new award, but also in the interests of parity another Intermediate level degree, the AB degree. The Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE) award was consequently removed from the Framework as superfluous. However, the DipHE was then re-introduced in May 2002[55], as DEL was at that time still restricting the vocational areas for Fds, pending the outcome of the pilot. Course proposals at this level, which met the Fd

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54 TLC min 05.67

55 TLC min 02.91

criteria in other areas (e.g. Counselling, Sports Studies, and Working with Children and Young People), were consequently validated as DipHE/FdSc with a view to conversion to Fd when the pilot was successfully concluded. In May 2005, the TLC agreed that DEL should be asked to clarify the process for approving the use of the Fd award title for these courses[56].   A response is awaited.

159   In June 2004, TLC also allowed the DipHE award to be used instead of the AB, as DEL would not permit the use of the latter title[57]. The retention of the DipHE award is a short-term measure, pending full articulation of DEL policy, which respects the University's right to determine its awards.

Fds

160   In the light of the University's review of the operation of the new Fd in 2002/03, adjustments were made to the parameters for Intermediate level awards to allow a greater volume of Level A modules (up to 40 credit points value rather than 30) and less at Level 2 (100 rather than 120). This was considered more appropriate for qualifications at this level, whose minimum entry standard was lower than that for an Honours degree (one A level equivalent). In addition, the model of articulation to Honours degrees was adjusted from 2.3 years + 1.3 years to '2 + 2', and a CertHE exit award permitted[58].

Access

161   The University seceded from the QAA Access Recognition Scheme from 2001/02 following the audit of December 1999[59]. No problems had been identified with standards, but the University was not prepared to adopt the recommended governance model. The University continued to maintain an Access

Courses Sub-Committee to oversee this area of work to June 2005 and it is now the responsibility of APSC and CASC.

162   Among developments has been the removal of a possible 60 credit point Access qualification in preference for the standard University model based on a two-year part-time (one year full-time) course[60].

163   In 2005/06, further clarity was brought to the University's Qualifications Framework when Access to HE level Diplomas had the term 'Access' formally incorporated into the award title and a new award of 'Access Diploma' was created[61].

164   This was one of the recommendations from a Working Group on the future development of Access Provision set up by the former Access Courses Sub-Committee. The Working Group, which included two representatives from FE, reported to TLC and ADSSC in December 2005[62].   At its February 2006 meeting, Senate approved changes to the programme/awards titles of Access awards[63]. The Working Group also formulated a generic Programme Specification, and made recommendations in relation to exemption from parts of Access courses, assessment of GCSE English and Mathematics equivalence for entry to higher education, and a common title for exit awards after one year of part-time study (Certificate in Adult Learning). (TLC had approved the concept of an exit award in January 2002, following discussion by the Access Courses Sub- Committee[64].)

HND/Cs

165   The University has stated its intention to withdraw in the medium term from the provision and oversight of HND/C awards of the Edexcel Foundation.   This was given a

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56 TLC min 05.48
57 TLC mins 04.82 and 04.56
58 TLC mins 03.67–69
59 TLC min 01.66

60 TLC min 05.58
61 TLC min 05.210
62 Appendix 1 to TLC/05/104, TLC mins 05.211–218 and ADSSC min 05.44
63 Senate min 06.15 b
64 TLC min 02.120 and Report at appendix to TLC/05/104 and mins 05.212 – 219

particular impetus by the introduction of Fds, and more recently the University's decision to withdraw direct delivery of its one remaining HND (Business and Related Studies – last intake 2006). The University has worked closely with FE and the agricultural colleges to provide flexible alternatives through Fd and CertHE awards and would not wish efforts to support these University awards to be undermined or diverted by the requirements for Edexcel awards. Increasingly as the University loses its own experience of delivery of Edexcel courses, it will be inappropriate to continue to supervise such awards. While DEL will not encourage the revalidation of HND and HNCs[65], it has not stated that it would not fund such courses, if some colleges choose to continue with them. The University will have to decide whether in such circumstances it will continue to support the partnership. Colleges may apply directly to Edexcel rather than working under the University's auspices.

4.3   REGULATIONS FOR AWARD

166   The University has standard regulations for each of its awards **(36)**. Templates are available from the Academic Office to support course teams in drawing up course regulations.

167   Partner institutions must meet the University's requirements for its awards and its modular framework. Recent examples of variations not being permitted include the denial of a request to exceed the maximum study load for part-time students[66], and, in 2004, a partner being asked to ensure that its arrangements for the late submission of coursework accorded with the University's practice[67].

168   HKCT was given exceptional

permission to offer, for the first cohort of a part-time course, one semester of study in full-time mode, following a delay in receiving the approval of the HK Council for Academic Accreditation, in order that this cohort could commence Year 2 as originally envisaged[68].

169   The University requires that courses at overseas institutions are taught and assessed in English. Applicants to these courses are required to meet the same English language standard as applicants to the University's own courses. This was affirmed as part of the University's consideration of Section 2 of the QAA *Code* in 2000[69].

170   Developments highlighted in the Institutional Audit SED which are of particular relevance to partner institutions are:

- the reduction of the minimum age requirement for Access courses to 19, in line with QAA development[70];
- replacement of Commendation award with Distinction award in postgraduate certificates and diplomas.

171   Since then, the template for Access courses has also been revised to reflect the varied size of modules used[71].

4.4   NEW PROGRAMME APPROVAL
Guide: Section E4 –9

172   In 2005/06 arrangements for initial approval for course planning and subsequent evaluation were changed to reflect the new PVC portfolios and committee structures introduced in summer 2005. The former Course Approval Sub-Committee considered both initial outline proposals (CA2 forms: *Guide*: Appendix 8) and the reports of evaluation panels. With the new PVC

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65 TLC/05/88, item 3
66 TLC min 04.212
67 TLC min 04.138

68 TLC min 03.157
69 Sub-Committee on Taught Courses 00.131
70 TLC min 04.99
71 TLC min 05.220

(Academic Development and Student Services) and the ADSSC having responsibility for academic planning, including developments with the University's partner institutions, CA2s are now reviewed by the APSC of the ADSSC. Its membership is the same as the former Course Approval Sub-Committee and it considers the 'fit' of the proposal with the University's Mission, strategic objectives and academic plan and the relevant faculty's assessment of the proposal. It makes a recommendation to ADSSC as to whether the proposal should proceed to planning (and consequent evaluation).

173 The former Access Courses Sub-Committee, which had acted as a parallel sub-committee to the former Course Approval Sub-Committee, was stood down in 2005/06. Consideration of reports from Access evaluation (and revalidation) panels is now undertaken by the new CASC along with reports for non-Access provision.

174 If a proposal from a partner is approved, the Academic Office, which is located within the Teaching and Learning portfolio, makes arrangements for an evaluation of the proposal by a panel comprising internal University members and external subject experts. Evaluation reports are considered by the CASC, which makes recommendations regarding approval to the TLC. The CASC comprises solely academic representatives from the faculties, and the PVC (Teaching and Learning), as it is concerned with matters of academic standards.

175 The University's processes integrate the quality assurance for external courses with the arrangements for its own provision as far as possible. Consequently both Sub-

Committees (and the former Course Approval Sub Committee) consider internal and external business. There are no separate University-level committees for partner institutions, with the exception of the FHCCF, a sub-committee of the TLC.

176 The CA2 form used for initial consideration of proposals allows faculties and the APSC to make a clear and transparent assessment of the proposal and its likely viability. In most instances the form is completed by the partner institution in consultation with the relevant faculty and is therefore usually supported by it. University representatives also provide their comments on proposals, and the department most involved at this stage is the library, which uses a checklist for assessment of the proposal (*Guide*: Appendix 10). A report is made to the APSC by the Assistant Director of Information Services at the meeting and a supplementary report is made to the evaluation panel.

177 A proposal for an Access-level Certificate in Nursing was not supported in October 2003 in the light of the Faculty Assessment[72] and the Faculty worked with the institution concerned to develop it further. A new model was considered at revalidation in December 2005. A similarly cautious approach has been taken in respect of the proposed degree from Cordia Institute of Hospitality Management (see section 2.4).

178 A new proposal may be made by a network of local colleges, who join in common planning. Recent examples include DipHE/FdSc Counselling and Certificate in Counselling Studies (2005/06) where a condition of the evaluation was that two of the Institutes submit a detailed resourcing plan, to include staffing and library provision,

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72 TLC min 03.164

to the Faculty to be approved by the Faculty and the University prior to any intake to the course at these Colleges. The plans were submitted to the FHCC and copied for full comment to the Head of School and Subject Advisor. Both plans contained detailed reference to staffing and library resourcing issues and were signed off by the Faculty as appropriate for meeting the requirements for the delivery of the programme at both venues.

179   The process for evaluation is described in Section E9 of the *Guide*. The procedures vary from those for internal proposals in that:

- the panel is expected to give particular attention to institution-related topics (the *Aide-Memoire* provides prompts in this regard);
- a report is provided by the FHCC, who is in attendance throughout the meeting (the role of the FHCC at an evaluation and revalidation was clarified in October 2004[73]);
- a faculty representative is a member of the evaluation panel;
- a recommendation is made in relation to the approved cohort size;
- there is a requirement for partner institutions to describe arrangements for dealing with cheating and plagiarism[74].

180   A supplement to the *Aide-Memoire* **(37)** for use when considering proposals for Fds was developed by the FHCCF and introduced in 2005/06[75].

181   Chairs of course planning committees are invited to an annual briefing seminar organised by the Academic Office.

182   The level of scrutiny given at the evaluation meeting to institutional and course management topics, as distinct from curriculum and academic standards, may vary, depending on such factors as the experience of the institution in HE delivery, in the subject area, in working with the University, and also in the light of any internal and external reports, and, for overseas proposals, the culture of the country.

183   Where a proposal replicates the curriculum at the University, the panel is not expected to focus on the syllabus as this has already been approved, although members may comment if they choose. (This is explained to external panel members by telephone and in the letter of invitation.) The panel must, however, be assured that the course team has a clear understanding of the programme and its objectives and is capable of delivering it to the requisite standard.

184   Courses are expected to be self-sufficient and rely solely on an institution's own resources for delivery. For the University's overseas partners in particular, panels pay special attention to the arrangements for staff development, including liaison with the relevant University faculty.

185   The TLC receives an annual summary report on generic matters arising from the year's evaluation and revalidation events. The 2004/05 review led to a requirement for FHCCs to provide confirmation of the faculty's recommendations for maximum cohort size; and that the associated faculty's support for a proposal be confirmed by Dean's signature on the title page; emphasis on close liaison between faculties and colleges in preparing initial and final documentation; and revisions to Access panel composition[76].

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73 TLC min 04.157
74 TLC min 02.170
75 TLC min 05.188

76 TLC min 05.105 b, c, e and paper TLC/05/42

186   Particular college matters highlighted related to articulation of progression routes to the University, work-based learning arrangements, staff development, reading lists, and student support arrangements. These generic issues were drawn to the attention of partner institutions and faculties through the FHCC Annual Reports and staff development days for course directors of partner institutions (see section 8.1).

187   The 2003/04 review identified a need to clarify and take account of the new role of FHCC[77]. Key matters identified for attention, in relation to non-NI evaluation and revalidation events (three took place in that year), were: 'localisation' of modules; mapping of prior learning and the Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL); assessment and moderation; quality assurance; research project supervision; learning resources; staff development; and student induction.

188   The Annual Course Review may also identify topics for consideration at University committee level. Issues raised in the past have included courses with small numbers or no intake, and student access to University resources (see section 1.5). With regard to the former, the TLC has identified how viability is scrutinised and the context for the development of provision[78]. It is expected that college proposals are likely to be more realistic in future with the finalisation of DEL's strategy[79].

189   The level of recruitment to new courses was also monitored by the former Course Approval Sub-Committee which, as part of its own review of self-effectiveness, received an annual report on this matter.

190   A long-standing concern about lateness of submission of CA2 proposals and the course planning timeframe which had been identified in annual reports on evaluations and revalidations and in Annual Course Reviews[80] has been largely addressed and very few proposals are now submitted after the 15 month deadline.

191   In addition, the former Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee undertook a special critical evaluation of the first year of the Fd pilot, and made comments in relation to the evaluation process about timing, resource matters, employer commitment, progression arrangements and contingencies for students unable to undertake work-based learning. The TLC addressed these points in detail at its meeting in December 2002[81].

4.5   **PROGRAMME SPECIFICATIONS**
        Guide: Section E7 and Appendix 12, annex B and Appendix 35

192   The Programme Specification is an integral part of the evaluation and revalidation documentation. Partner institutions are required to use the University's template for this purpose. The template for the student course handbook includes the specification.

193   While the University's policy (from 2004/05) is to publish specifications for its own courses on its website, in accordance with the QAA's expectations, it does not have the power to compel partner institutions to do the same. The students and the courses belong to the institution and, with regard to local colleges, DEL has not clarified the extent to which it requires FE providers of HE to comply fully with this aspect of the QAA Academic Infrastructure. With regard to the University's overseas partners, the Programme

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77 TLC/04/47 and min 04.115
78 TLC min 05.106 a, c, d
79 TLC min 05.19

80 TLC mins 01.155, 02.157, 02.234, 03.84
81 TLC mins 02.233-6

Specification is not a familiar concept. Moreover the debate on the use and purpose of the Programme Specification continues. It is the University's view that the Programme Specification is of most use in defining content and standards for internal purposes and that, in this format, it would be of limited value to prospective applicants. It is University policy to provide all enrolled students with a copy of the Programme Specification as an integral part of their course handbook.

194   In view of the common aims of Access courses, the former Access Courses Sub-Committee established a working group which, *inter alia*, drew up a generic Programme Specification for Access Diplomas. The new template built on an existing generic statement and took account of the QAA Access Report *Recognising Achievement on Access to HE Programmes 2005*. It was approved by the TLC in December 2005 for introduction from 2006/07[82].

4.6   PROGRAMME REVISIONS
Guide: Section E11

195   The process for the consideration and approval of revisions to courses in partner institutions is based on those used in the University. The vast majority of changes are approved by the associated faculty, through its own arrangements. A copy of the CA3 (course revision) form and attachments is 'lodged' in the official course file held in the Academic Office. Revisions are reported to CASC.

196   As with internal University provision, certain changes require approval at University level. For example, a proposed change to the location or title, or initial offer standard or cohort size must be submitted to APSC.

197   Until the end of 2004/05 all course revisions in Access courses were considered by the Access Courses Sub-Committee. This has now been changed to follow the standard approach for all other validated courses. For Edexcel HND/Cs, copies of approved revisions are provided to the Edexcel Foundation.

4.7   REVALIDATION
Guide: Section E14

198   The new unit-based revalidation process, introduced in 2002/03, includes collaborative provision (38). The first cycle of revalidations will be completed in 2006/07 (39). When there is limited collaborative provision in a particular subject unit or it has been developed jointly (with a University course), it may be included with the relevant faculty unit as in, respectively, Unit 15A and the FdSc Culinary Arts at the Belfast Institute and Unit 26F BSc Hons Social Work (with four colleges). More generally, the units comprise courses from a range of colleges. The courses may have been jointly developed with a common curriculum in a network (e.g. FdSc Architectural Technology). In other cases the individual courses are distinctive within the broad subject area (e.g. 10B Engineering, 13A General Humanities and 15E Leisure). The scale of provision within Access has led to additional sub-divisions according to geography and location to ensure units are of a manageable size.

199   As part of their documentation panels may receive relevant reports from the University's central service departments on resource matters, in particular from the library.

200   Where provision within a unit extends across a number of colleges, the Subject Unit Co-ordinator (40) is usually appointed from

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82 TLC min 05.212

the associated University faculty. These co-ordinators are invited to the annual briefing seminar on the process organised by the Academic Office. The revalidation of a number of courses at the same time allows the panel to compare standards at different institutions and make recommendations accordingly. The preparation process also assists providers in the development of the courses, as they learn from other approaches and experiences.

201 Any course, which is not presented for revalidation, is deemed to have lapsed by default and is withdrawn from the University's record of currently approved courses.

202 An annual report on evaluation and revalidation is considered by TLC (see section 4.4 for more detail).

4.8 EXTERNAL PARTICIPATION IN THE REVIEW PROCESS

203 Externality and independence are key aspects of the standards assurance process. For both evaluation and revalidation panels, two of the University members are staff who have not been closely associated with the provision. In addition a representative from the associated faculty is a member. Two external panel members are also present and must not be closely associated with the faculty or the partner institution(s). Subject experts are identified by the faculty through the FHCC, subject specialist or Head of School. Employer representatives are added where appropriate and are required for Fd proposals.

4.9 EXTERNAL REFERENCE POINTS

204 The University uses the same external reference points as for its internal provision in both the evaluation and revalidation processes, and for the ongoing maintenance of standards through the development of policy and procedures: the QAA *Code;* FHEQ; subject benchmark standards; and professional, statutory and regulatory body statements. In addition, the generic Benchmarks for Fds are used for courses leading to this award. Any appropriate material from external sources relating to specific institutions is also made available to panels, e.g. ETI reports.

205 The University also seeks to improve its processes by taking account of practice elsewhere. It is a member of the CVU. The CVU *Handbook for Practitioners* was used in the University's own review of arrangements[83] and the University contributed comments on the first and second editions. Copies of the *Handbook* have been issued to all FHCCs.

206 Other external resources used to inform the development of policy and procedures have included various reports/good practice guides from such bodies as QAA and HEFCE (e.g. *Learning from HE in FE Colleges in England* (QAA 2004)), Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body guidelines and criteria.

207 The Library made use of the HEFCE guidelines on *Library and Learning Resource Provision for Franchised and other Collaborative Courses* (1999) in developing its own checklist (*Guide:* Appendix 10)[84].

4.10 EMPLOYER INVOLVEMENT

208 The University expects all its provision to prepare students for future careers and that courses are relevant to these careers. Employer representatives may participate in

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83 TLC min 01.56
84 TLC min 02.46

evaluation and revalidation events and this is the normal practice for Fds, in view of the extent of collaboration expected between providers, employers and the University in their development.

209 It should be noted that the Northern Ireland economy is dependant to a large extent on small to medium size businesses and as such it can be problematic getting fully representative employer engagement in the development and on-going monitoring of programmes.

210 However, there are many examples of employer input into the development of course provision, and their on-going involvement in standards assurance and quality management:

• Involvement of staff from colleges in the LSDA Lecturers into Industry initiative whereby structured placements of between 6 and 12 weeks provide lecturers with the opportunity to update their knowledge and skills and embed new ideas into the curriculum;

• The creation of Business Development Units in some colleges to seek out new opportunities to generate, build and strengthen strategic partnerships in both the public and private sector;

• A number of collaborative partners have attained regional 'Centres of Excellence' status. For example, the North East Institute is recognised as a Centre of Excellence in Manufacturing Engineering and in Construction and the Built Environment. This has resulted in close industrial links with, among others, Michelin and the Gallaher Group;

• Working with Sector Skills Councils in the development and review of Fds (11);

• The three Health Trusts act as employers of students on the Postgraduate Diploma in Health and Social Services Management programme and as such provide extensive feedback to the course team on employer needs;

• The North West Institute has an Industrial Liaison Committee for Hospitality and Tourism which formalises the relationship between industry and education.

4.11   ASSESSMENT

211 Course assessment arrangements are confirmed at evaluation and revalidation. These must accord with general University award regulations (e.g. proportion of examinations in Year 1/Level 1; pass marks; consequences of failure; application of condonement; basis for arriving at final result and its classification). A request for a network of courses to depart from the standard basis for determining the final award for a course was refused by the TLC in December 2004[85].

212 The University's *Assessment Handbook* provides guidance on the generic assessment criteria for each level, and these, together with generic level and qualification descriptors, are used to assist in ensuring standards (35). The *Assessment Handbook* is issued to partner institutions for members of staff involved in teaching on University award-bearing courses and is provided on the University website.

213 Information on intended learning outcomes, assessment strategies and performance criteria is contained in programme and module descriptions, and in the course/module handbooks which are required to be issued to students.

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85 TLC min 04.213

214 FHCCs and External Examiners work closely with course teams to ensure that assessment practices are appropriate. The TLC agreed in October 2004 that it was good practice for the FHCC (and the faculty's nominated subject expert if appropriate) to review draft examination papers before they were sent to the External Examiner, particularly where a network of colleges was involved and different papers were set[86].

4.12 EXAMINATION PROCESSES
Guide: Sections E10.4 and E15.6

215 The University is concerned that the security of assessment is adequately safeguarded and expects arrangements for the conduct of examinations to be comparable with those used at the University. The majority of the University's partners are experienced public sector educational institutions where the procedures for the conduct of examinations are well established. Advice is available to institutions from the University's Examinations Office. In addition, the new institutional approval process gives consideration to these arrangements.

216 Following a pilot exercise, the University introduced 'anonymous marking' of examination scripts for its own provision in 1999/2000. Partner institutions were encouraged to do likewise and subsequently required to do so with effect from 2002[87].

217 Boards of Examiners and progress review arrangements (*Guide*: Section E10.5) follow those at the University. Boards may be chaired by the (Associate) Dean or Head of School of the relevant University faculty or by a senior member of the partner institution. The final board for a network of courses with the same External Examiner, which may follow a two-stage process, may be held in

one location. Arrangements were clarified in November 2001[88].

218 In order to enhance further practice within and across partner institutions in relation to chairing of Examination Boards partners were asked in February 2006 to identify a small number of senior staff within each institution who would undertake this role. The University organised a training event on 17 May 2006 for these staff **(11)**. The event outlined a typical agenda for an examination board and explained the role of the various parties involved as well as looking at University regulations, dealing with extenuating circumstances and the minuting of the meeting. To conclude the event, attendees were split into a number of small groups and a mock examination board was held, with particular 'student profiles' being used to highlight key points and confirm attendees' understanding of University protocols.

219 A total of 57 staff from partner institutions attended and informal feedback indicated that the event was beneficial. All materials used are available on the University's website and hence accessible to overseas partners.

220 While it is likely that the University will run a similar event in the future, in the short-term, attendees from partner institutions that have a large number of courses linked to the University have been asked to use the materials to train other staff in their own institution. It was agreed that only those who have been trained in this way will be permitted to chair examination boards in future.

221 FHCCs assist institutions unfamiliar with the procedures. Either the FHCC or an

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86 TLC min 04.134
87 TLC min 02.166

88 TLC min 01.271

experienced member of faculty staff attends each Board of Examiners meeting[89].

4.13 EXTERNAL EXAMINERS
Guide: Sections E10.5, E12.2

222   The External Examiner plays a key role in the ongoing assurance of the standards of the University awards offered through partner institutions as for the University's own provision. An External Examiner is appointed for each approved course by the University in accordance with its *Code of Practice*, on the recommendation of the associated faculty. An External Examiner may have responsibility for a number of courses. To ensure their independence, appointees are not closely associated with either the University or the partner institution.

223   All new External Examiners are invited, along with the relevant course director from the partner institution, to a University and faculty induction session **(41)**. Other local induction takes place in accordance with the University's expectations as set out in the *External Examiner's Handbook* **(34)** (copies of this document are available to staff in partner institutions).

224   The External Examiner's annual report is made to the University, which distributes it to the relevant faculty and partner institution for consideration and response. This is monitored through the Annual Course Review process. For networks, composite reports may be provided but the need for appropriate details in relation to each provider is emphasised at induction[90]. A response may be required from the faculty and/or the University; the PVC (Teaching and Learning) addresses any University-level issues. This was clarified in 2002[91]. The PVC (Teaching and Learning) provides an annual overview

report to the TLC, on the reports of External Examiners. This covers both internal and external provision and identifies general issues for attention. No specific partner institution matters have been identified in the last three years.

225   The Annual Course Review 2003/04 had identified a concern about the provision of composite reports when an External Examiner was responsible for a number of colleges. The TLC confirmed that External Examiners should continue to provide composite reports if appropriate. The need for detail in relation to individual providers and of confidentiality should be addressed at External Examiner induction sessions[92].

226   The Annual Course Review 2004/05 again raised concerns that some External Examiner reports did not differentiate between partner institutions within networked partnerships. There was also concern at the wide variation in practice in responding to External Examiner reports, with some partners responding directly to the External Examiner while others relied on a composite response from the University. A number of issues regarding how the University manages subject networks at Annual Course Review were identified and the FHCCF was asked to review the management of subject networks, to include use of External Examiner reports. This review is ongoing[93].

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89 TLC min 06.87
90 TLC min 03.87
91 TLC min 02.168

92 TLC min 05.106 e
93 FHCCF min 06.67 d

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section five

5   MANAGING THE QUALITY OF THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

5.1   THE FRAMEWORK FOR QUALITY MANAGEMENT

227   The University has stated its commitment to developing *'a national and international reputation for excellence'*. To achieve this requires a commitment to quality which permeates all aspects of the University's structures.

228   The University believes that, in relation both to provision on its own campuses and that offered through partner institutions, the development, delivery and monitoring of quality can only be secured where providers recognise their primary responsibilities in this area. The emphasis is therefore on a devolved and distributed approach to quality management, supported by appropriate reporting and monitoring arrangements and underpinned by an evidence-based methodology which recognises and distinguishes between areas of good practice and those requiring further attention and which directs the focus of enquiries accordingly.

229   However, while seeking always to emphasise the responsibility of the provider for delivery of high quality programmes, the University is more prescriptive in terms of required reporting from its partner institutions than for internal programmes.

230   For example, partner institutions must return an Annual Course Review report for each collaborative programme offered and this report must follow a standard format. In relation to internal programmes, responsibility for determining the format and extent of annual programme level review and reporting has been devolved to faculties. This difference of approach recognises that the risks associated with provision of programmes through external partners are potentially higher and there is less scope for extensive devolution of responsibility for quality monitoring.

231   This approach was endorsed by the Seven Year Review Committee's report **(6)**. In the course of its work the Committee received representations from the FE sector that partner institutions should be trusted to be responsible for quality assurance to a greater extent. The Committee commented: *'Periodic change and adjustment in the light of developments is in the nature of healthy relationships. On the other hand, where the integrity of the University's qualifications is at stake, complete confidence in quality assurance arrangements is essential'.* The Committee therefore concluded that *'each case for devolution of further responsibility of quality assurance work should be judged on its merits and in the light of experience'.*

232   That said, the University seeks wherever possible to develop quality monitoring processes in discussion with partners to ensure that they are meaningful and useful in the context of partner institutions' own management systems, while continuing to meet the University's requirements. A detailed example of this approach and its effectiveness is provided in section 5.2.

233   The University's approach to quality emphasises the value of critical self-reflection and evaluation in the context of continuous improvement. This approach is evident in both its internal quality monitoring processes and those it applies to programmes offered in

collaboration with external partners.

234 In relation to management, the governance structures described in section 2.3, augmented by focused faculty support and oversight through the role of the FHCC **(42)** and the reporting arrangements in place to ensure appropriate communication of issues and good practice throughout the system, provide a high overall level of assurance.

235 The key monitoring process is Annual Course Review and this is described in detail and its effectiveness evaluated in section 5.2. This process provides for the review of a significant amount of information and allows the University to take an annual overview of the collaborative area of its activity, and of the performance of individual partner institutions.

236 Of equal importance in securing quality and enhancement is the commitment of partner institutions to have in place appropriate procedures. The University requires its partners to establish a Course Committee and a Staff/Student Consultative Committee (SSCC) for each programme offered in collaboration with the University. Partner institutions may of course have a range of other processes, including internally administered questionnaires, in place to satisfy their own management requirements and may use information from these in completing Annual Course Review submissions or in the provision of other information to the University. Such additional evidence is often very useful and can provide an indication that the partner is actively engaged in the robust management of the quality and standards of its provision.

237 As for internal programme monitoring, the University expects partner

institutions to take full account of and respond appropriately to:

- External Review Reports including ETI or PSRB Reports;
- External Examiner Reports;
- Employer input (where relevant);
- FHCC Annual Reports;
- Student Feedback.

238 In addition to direct monitoring procedures the University conducts Themed Audits of aspects of its collaborative arrangements. This process is discussed in more detail in section 5.3 and such audits provide additional assurance and opportunities for establishing good practice and identifying and implementing enhancements.

5.2 ANNUAL COURSE REVIEW
Guide: Section E12.4

239 The annual review of collaborative provision is conducted centrally with course reports reviewed on an individual basis and also grouped by institution so that an institutional overview can be achieved. The main purposes of the annual review exercise are to monitor academic quality and student performance.

240 Course Teams complete a self-evaluation report (*Guide*: Appendix 31) for each programme of study. This report was developed in consultation with partner institutions, with input from ETI and LSDA and is designed to meet the University and partner institution monitoring needs and to contribute to the evidence base used during ETI inspections.

241   Senior managers within each partner institution conduct an institutional overview of all course submissions before they are forwarded to the University to ensure that they meet the requirements of the exercise and reflect adequately on the qualitative and quantitative data available. Senior managers are expected to provide an institutional overview statement commenting on any generic or institutional issues which arise and indicating how the institution plans to address these.

242   The QMAU reviews all submissions and prepares a summary report for each institution for consideration by a Sub-Group of TLC which undertakes a detailed scrutiny of all the information provided. The Sub-Group reviews all Annual Course Review documentation to determine whether partner institutions have taken an appropriate and effective approach to annual monitoring, critically reflected on all the quantitative and qualitative data available and that the University's expectations in respect of quality and standards are met. A copy of the Terms of Reference and membership of the Sub-Group is provided **(43)**.

243   A consolidated report on the outcomes of the exercise is considered by the TLC **(44)**. Issues requiring further action are referred to the relevant central department, University Committee, faculty, FHCCF or the partner institution itself. A further report summarising responses received on action taken or planned to address issues identified is considered by the TLC at a later meeting.

Evaluation of Effectiveness of Annual Course Review

244   Feedback from our collaborative partners indicates that they find this annual exercise to be an effective process for monitoring the academic standard of the programme and the performance of students on it.

245   Feedback on the self-evaluation report form has also been very positive and this development has been welcomed by partners as providing a more useful vehicle for annual reporting activity. The majority of Further and Higher Education partners have adopted the self-evaluation report as their own internal reporting tool. The clear links to the ETI *Improving Quality: Raising Standards* documentation **(45)** has also been identified as a major strength of the new self-evaluation report.

246   In addition to providing assurance in terms of standards and quality, the University has found the Annual Course Review exercise valuable in other ways. It enables institutional-level issues and trends to be identified. Where these give rise to concern, visits to partner institutions are arranged so that further detailed discussions can be held with senior management and actions agreed.

247   In addition, the annual review process has enabled identification of areas where partner institution staff might require further support or development. This is discussed in more detail in section 8.1.

248   The University is currently considering how best it might manage 'subject network' arrangements at Annual Course Review, particularly where issues identified affect a number of institutions. A sub-group of the FHCCF has been asked to consider this issue with a view to implementation for the 2005/06 review[94].

249   Self-evaluation reports from partner institutions involved in the Strategic and Long Term Strategy (SALTS) Consortium (Hospitality

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94 FHCCF min 06.67 d

and Tourism) have commended the consortium arrangements for ensuring standardised modes of delivery of modules, assessments and grading criteria as well as double/cross marking staff development days.

250 The FHCC, in her annual report on the Counselling Network provision, reported that one of the successes of the programme was the *'professional, courteous and respectful manner adopted by all the network, which enabled full and reflective discussion of issues'.*

251 The following enhancements have been made to the process to improve the effectiveness of Annual Course Review:

- Self-Evaluation Report updated annually in consultation with partner institutions;
- FHCCs now sit on Sub-Groups to bring their expertise to the process;
- Partners asked to identify an outcome from the previous years Annual Course Review which they believe had the greatest impact on the quality of student learning;
- Electronic spreadsheets now provided to all partners to allow them to input data on student enrolments and progression;
- Partners explicitly asked to comment on specific strengths and provide examples of good practice.

252 Colleges are asked to provide feedback on the process in their institutional review and the vast majority have provided positive feedback. Feedback has related to: reduction in administrative burden placed on staff; simplification of the review process; harmonisation of UU, ETI and partners' internal QA processes.

5.3 THEMED AUDITS

253 Themed Audits are designed to review the effectiveness of processes and procedures in delivering and assuring quality in relation to an identified aspect of course provision and the student learning experience. Since the aim of a Themed Audit is to establish how effective existing processes and procedures are in achieving their aims in relation to quality management and assurance audits are based on existing documentation. In general therefore no additional documentary requirements are imposed on partner institutions.

254 In relation to collaborative partners the Themed Audits approved by the former Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee for 2005/06 were:

- The operation of SSCCs within partner institutions;
- The operation of student complaints and appeals procedures within partner institutions taking into account the QAA *Code* and the University's own policy in this area;
- Dissemination of good practice between partner institutions.

255 Reports on the outcomes of these audits were provided to TLC on 12 April 2006[95].

256 The results of the themed audit on SSCCs are discussed in more detail in the next section. The audit of student complaints and appeals procedures indicated that partner institutions had sound arrangements for dealing with student complaints but that there was more variability in their appeals procedures, with some lacking the necessary level of formality (see section 1.5). The

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95 TLC Papers TLC/06/32, TLC/06/33 and TLC/06/34

Themed Audit of the arrangements for the dissemination of good practice within and between partner institutions found much that was commendable but concluded that there was scope for further enhancement and that this should be coordinated through the FHCCF. In addition, some further reporting on good practice should be required through the Annual Course Review self-evaluation report.

Evaluation of Effectiveness of Themed Audit Method

257   Overall, the Themed Audit approach has proved very effective and has resulted in the identification of both good practice and matters requiring improvement in relation to each area reviewed using this method.

258   The fact that most audits are scheduled to last twelve months allows for careful collection and analysis of information and for discussion with relevant interest groups. The use of follow-up audits for collaborative activity in the same area as that previously audited within the University has facilitated awareness raising and sharing of good practice.

259   The main limitation of the Themed Audit approach is the modest number of audits which can be undertaken in any year and it is for this reason that TLC receives an annual report on planned audits so that new priorities can be taken into account and revisions made to the audit schedule if necessary (46).

5.4   STUDENT FEEDBACK AND REPRESENTATION
Guide: Section 10.3

260   The University expects all partner institutions to take account of student views in the development and operation of programmes of study. In this respect the University identifies only one formal requirement, namely that each collaborative programme establish a SSCC with appropriate representation from the various year groups on the course. SSCCs are required to meet at least once per semester and partner institutions must provide FHCCs with copies of the minutes of these meetings. Reports from SSCCs should be received by the next Course Committee meeting and any unresolved issues addressed or, where authority to do so does not reside with the Course Committee, should be passed on to more senior management groupings for consideration. Students should be informed of the action taken to resolve their concerns.

261   The University is not prescriptive about other forms of feedback used by partner institutions to secure student views but, as indicated in section 5.1, it does expect to see evidence in Annual Course Review reports that feedback received by whatever means has been taken into account and an appropriate response made by the course team. Many partner organisations do operate student questionnaires and make use of data from these in monitoring processes. For example Hong Kong University School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKO SPACE) uses a standard Learning Experience Survey for end of course evaluation and encourages staff to use the same form (or appropriate parts of it) at other critical stages in course delivery (47). The North West Institute obtains feedback from students via an online Student Perception of Course questionnaire. Completed questionnaires are forwarded to both the Head of Department and to the Student Services Department. Feedback on matters raised is given to students through the course director.

262 Colleges also obtain feedback from students through their module evaluation process. For example, at Armagh College students complete a questionnaire for each module. The module co-ordinator conducts an evaluation of the completed questionnaire which is then forwarded to the course director for action.

263 The Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust (PRRT) has a personal mentoring system in place whereby students are assigned to a mentor. The mentor is a full-time member of staff who is not involved in the delivery or assessment of modules but who deals with both academic and personal issues. Each mentor is assigned three students and monthly minuted meetings are held with each student and action points referred to the Course Director.

264 In general the University does not seek direct feedback from students enrolled on collaborative courses in recognition of the fact that they are students of the partner institution, not the University. However FHCCs often have the opportunity to hold discussions with students during their visits to partners or in the context of Boards of Examiners when External Examiners also meet with students, where practicable.

265 The exceptions to this approach are:

- during a major review, such as that conducted of pilot Fds, where the University Panel met with representative groups of students from partner institutions involved in the pilot;
- during interim monitoring visits to new partners where a meeting with students enrolled on the programme is a standard part of the visit agenda (see report of visit to HTMi **(26)**;

- during focused visits to partners. For example in December 2004 a delegation from the University visited SCAU to discuss a range of standards assurance and quality management and enhancement matters. During the visit the University team met with 10 students studying on Years 1 and 2 of the BSc Hons Mathematics with Computing course to discuss issues relating to teaching and learning, student support, assessment and feedback, induction and staff/student consultation **(48)**.

Evaluation of Effectiveness of Student Feedback

266 In general the evidence available to the University does not suggest that students enrolled on its collaborative courses have major concerns or dissatisfactions with their learning experience. Relationships between staff and students also appear robust with effective channels of communication which allow for the informal resolution of issues outwith SSCC meetings. In addition many programmes have relatively small class sizes which allows for more personal interaction between staff and students.

267 However there is some evidence to suggest that this informality may not always result in adequately structured student representation and feedback processes and the effectiveness of these may therefore be in question in relation to those issues not capable of easy resolution at local level.

268 The University had similar concerns about its own arrangements for SSCCs and, in order to establish if there was a significant problem and how it might best be addressed, the then Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee asked for a Themed Audit to be conducted in this area. This audit was

undertaken during 2003/04 and reported to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee in June 2004[96]. The audit identified areas of both good and poor practice and resulted in detailed guidelines being provided to University staff on the operation of SSCCs. These were also circulated to course directors in partner institutions. In further support of this area the University has developed a training programme for student representatives and has provided a handbook for their use. Recent evidence, which is being collected as part of a formal ongoing evaluation of the enhanced arrangements, suggests that this package of support has resulted in more effective SSCC arrangements. The University wrote to partner institutions in January 2006 offering to provide the same training package on site to groups of course representatives wishing to take up this opportunity. To date, three partner institutions have availed of this offer.

269　At its meeting in October 2004 the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee agreed that a follow-up audit of SSCCs in partner institutions should be conducted[97]. This involved a review of all SSCC minutes provided as part of the 2003/04 Annual Course Review exercise and a survey of partner institution course directors.

270　The report of the Themed Audit was received by TLC at its meeting on 12 April 2006[98]. The Committee noted the overall report conclusion that, while partner institutions provided opportunities for student comment, including SSCCs, and were responsive to this, there was some evidence of informality in the process and therefore some concern that not all issues raised might be reported to the appropriate point in the management structure for corrective action to be taken. TLC agreed that SSCCs should be

maintained for all courses, irrespective of cohort numbers, and further guidelines should be provided to partner institutions on minuting of meetings and the need to ensure evidence of issue resolution. The institutional overview documents considered as part of Annual Course Review should provide evidence of those issues raised at course level which required management actions and this would continue to be checked as part of the annual review exercise.

5.5　ASSURING THE QUALITY OF RESOURCES

271　The University is able to assure itself at different stages of its management of collaborative courses that resources in partner institutions are appropriate to the provision being delivered, that their quality is maintained and that any enhancement which proves necessary is clearly signalled to the partner in question.

272　At the time of initial consideration of a new collaborative partner, an assessment will have been completed, normally informed by a visit to the institution. This affords a first opportunity to the University to assure itself that the resources of the proposed partner are fit for purpose (*Guide*: Appendix 5). This procedure is relatively recent, having been approved by TLC on 10 December 2003[99] and its efficacy is subject to review.

273　As part of its submission to obtain approval to proceed with the planning of a new course, (*Guide*: Appendix 8), the faculty must complete a recommendation which draws on the views of the FHCC and, as appropriate, other subject experts, and this offers a further early opportunity to comment on resources for the programme.

96　Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee paper 04/40 and minute 04.103

97　Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee paper 04/62 and minute 04.142

98　TLC min 06.119

99　TLC min 03.216

Teaching staff

274   Appointments of staff to partner institutions in Northern Ireland are subject to Fair Employment and other equality legislation, as is the case for the University.

275   At the time of evaluation (or revalidation) of the programme, the submission document contains CVs for all those staff (full or part-time) who will be associated with the programme. The discussion with the course team which forms part of these events also provides an opportunity for the panel to assess the calibre of teaching staff. In addition, the partner institution's staff development policy is considered as are recent developmental activities undertaken by the staff concerned.

276   Staff in partner institutions may attend University staff development events and FHCCs may also offer training in partner institutions on specific issues within their competence (see section 8.1).

277   It is part of the role of FHCCs to assure themselves that the teaching team continues to be appropriate to the programme concerned and for this purpose they may request relevant CVs (*Guide*: Appendix 6; FHCC Annual Report form: Appendix 29) and may also offer advice on the criteria for the appointment of new staff to teach on a programme.

Library and IT

278   Prior to the evaluation or revalidation of a programme, the relevant University Librarian undertakes an assessment of provision in co-operation with the Librarian of the partner concerned following set guidelines (*Guide*: Appendix 10).

279   The visit to the institution includes an assessment of resources by the panel, in particular the subject specialist external members. This is guided by the categories specified in a standard form (*Guide*: Appendix 18a). Advice on the tour of resources is provided to the institution by the appropriate FHCC[100]. As part of the event, the visiting panel will normally view the Library in the institution and speak with library staff. likewise the evaluation/revalidation panel will make an assessment of the IT and other resources available to the programme.

280   Prior to the approval or reapproval of any collaborative provision, the University panel must be satisfied that the resources for the programme are adequate or there is a firm commitment from the partner institution to provide the required level of resource within a stipulated timescale, as identified by the panel.

281   During the review of Fds (see section 1.6.2), it was noted that one partner institution had reduced its library opening hours and students had raised complaints with the institution. The institution was advised of the implications and asked to confirm details and to identify whether it would be reviewing the position. The institution indicated that it was fully aware of the impact on students and that the college it was actively investigating ways of opening the library in the evening. Responses to the Annual Course Review received by TLC in September 2003 indicated that the problem had not been resolved and the PVC wrote again to the Principal of the institution in September 2003. A response was received in December 2003 indicating that opening hours had been extended on two evenings per week.

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100 FHCCF mins 05.19 and 05.33

Teaching Accommodation

282   Teaching accommodation is included as part of the resource assessment at evaluation/revalidation and is expected to be suitable for the students and programme to be offered.

Monitoring of Resources

283   Ongoing monitoring of the resources available to the course forms part of the duties of the FHCC who has the opportunity to report on provision as part of their Annual Report (*Guide*: Appendix 29). In this, s/he is guided by criteria developed by the FHCCF where there has been ongoing discussion of the nature of the FHCC role in this regard[101]. Visits to the institution, overview of SSCC and Course Committee minutes as well as discussions with students provide opportunities for the FHCC to form an opinion about the resources provided and student perception of them.

284   For new partner institutions the monitoring visit which takes place following the second intake to the programme is used to review resource provision and to seek reassurance that any issues raised by the evaluation panel in this regard have been addressed.

285   FHCCs have three routes for raising issues of concern regarding resources:

- immediate concerns relating to an individual partner institution are discussed with the relevant department in the partner institution;
- common issues are raised for discussion at the FHCCF;
- through the annual report form.

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101 FHCCF mins 05.53 and 05.115

section six

6   ACADEMIC AND SUPPPORT SERVICES

6.1   MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF ACADEMIC GUIDANCE AND PERSONAL SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS
Guide: Appendix 12

286   As part of the requirements for revalidation of a programme, the Course Document comments on the academic guidance and personal support services available to students. If inadequate support were being proposed (or if there was no reference to this aspect of the provision in the submitted documentation), a validation panel would impose suitable conditions on the course team and/or institution to make the necessary improvements before the programme was permitted to run. For example, for a proposed DipHE/FdSc Counselling network, detailed resourcing plans, including staffing and library provision, were required to be submitted from two of the eight colleges in the proposed network prior to any intake to the course at these colleges. These were submitted to the Faculty and considered by the FHCC, Head of School and subject advisor who deemed the plans appropriate for delivery of the programme at these colleges.

287   Where applicable, revalidation panels also receive publicly available reports on inspections carried out by the ETI, aspects of which will focus specifically on the support given to students within the partner institution. For example, see section 3.5 of the report on the Belfast Institute in June 2001 **(49)**. FHCCs also have access to these reports via the ETI website[102].

288   FHCCs monitor the arrangements for academic guidance and personal support services through discussions with course directors and students and also by reviewing the issues raised at SSCCs. Their findings are recorded as part of their annual report **(50)** which is then considered by the TLC Sub-Group established to conduct the Annual Course Review exercise. Partner institutions are also asked to reflect on student support issues in their self evaluation report submitted as part of the Annual Course Review documentation **(43, B6.2, Bullet 6 in the Guidance Notes)**.

289   In their institutional overview, Fermanagh College reported that tutorial support and the development of Individual Learner Agreements improved retention and participation rates on HE courses. At East Down Institute weekly tutorial sessions are held where students have the opportunity to raise any concerns they have about the course. East Down Institute has also developed a study skills module which is available to all HE students in the first year of their course.

290   In response to an issue raised at Annual Course Review regarding access to tutorial support, Lisburn Institute is piloting online tutorials within the subject area of Counselling. The feedback to date demonstrates a strong and positive response from both staff and students and a full review of the process will be completed by June 2006.

291   Within local FE partners, all full-time and part-time students (which include all those enrolled on approved University programmes) have Individual Student Learner Agreements. These are documents agreed between a personal tutor and an individual student at the outset of their study that

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102 http://www2.deni.gov.uk/inspection _services/

identify particular student needs and goals. Progress against these goals is formally recorded as an outcome of regular personal tutorials. The personal tutor is a member of academic staff and is also often a member of the course team delivering the academic content of the programme.

Evaluation

292 The nature of provision in the NI FE sector is typically based around much smaller student cohorts than within the University. This facilitates the development of stronger bonds between staff and students, which in turn often leads to guidance and support being provided informally on a one-to-one basis. This is far from being a criticism. In fact it can lead to issues being resolved much more quickly than a formal process allows and also generates a culture where staff can be much more responsive to student needs. In addition, all partner institutions have more formalised student guidance and support mechanisms that can be called upon where the informal approach is not appropriate or unable to resolve an issue.

293 Overseas partners typically have similar arrangements for student support which reflect local culture.

294 Examples of good practice in relation to student support in partner institutions include:

- Castlereagh College offers a weekly timetabled slot to all their HE students where both academic and personal matters can be discussed. Additional sessions can be arranged if required. A confidential counselling service is provided by Carecall. The College has a Careers Service offering advice and assistance on employment

opportunities as well as progression to university. Similar student support arrangements are in place in all FE colleges;

- Newry and Kilkeel Institute has refined its study skills workshops to facilitate 'surgery appointments' with individual students to address their specific learning needs. They have also introduced a compulsory Career Planning and Personal Development module in some programmes;

- Omagh College offers optional Mathematics classes during the summer for students who feel they require additional support in this area;

- Homefirst Community Health and Social Services Trust organises small workshops every fortnight to allow students to get to know each other and their tutors and this helps create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere for learning and discussions.

section seven

7	STUDENT ADMISSION, PROGRESSION AND ACHIEVEMENT

7.1   RECORD KEEPING

Academic Registry and Partner Institutions: Administrative Links with the University

295   The *Guide* establishes the framework for the administrative links between the University and partner institutions. The responsibilities of Academic Registry, i.e. Registry and Examinations Offices (Jordanstown) are set out in Section E14.3. Support for collaborative provision is maintained by:

- issue of detailed notes of guidance at appropriate points throughout the academic year;
- participation in seminars and workshops; and
- close liaison with FHCCs.

7.1.1   Registration of Students

296   During each summer the Academic Office provides the Registry Office with a list of new courses offered at partner institutions, with approved intakes for the new academic year. The Department of Corporate Planning and Governance provides course codes for these courses.

297   Activities related to the registration of students on courses validated by the University commence in August with the distribution of enrolment forms and other documentation being forwarded to the partner institution.

298   Partner institutions provide the University with the relevant information required as requested on the enrolment forms. This includes the students' personal details and course details and, for Edexcel courses, module information as required by the University's Licence Agreement with the Edexcel Foundation. New students complete blank forms and returning students check the information on pre-printed enrolment forms for confirmation of enrolment for the next academic year and also for any amendments.

299   Enrolment forms, other than for students on courses that commence in Semester Two, are then forwarded to the University's Finance Department by 31 October each year accompanied by payment of any fees due.

300   On receipt of enrolment forms from the Finance Department the Registry Office inputs student details on the University's Student Record System creating individual registration numbers for students.

301   One of the outcomes from the 2004/05 Annual Course Review process was that partner institutions would be reminded that University fees should not be charged separately to students as this had in the past caused confusion as to the student's status in relation to the University **(51)**. TLC agreed that all capitation fees should be paid in a single instalment by the partner institution and the VfMWG was asked to consider arrangements for the payment of capitation fees in a single instalment.

302   Class lists showing students' personal information and registration numbers are sent to each individual course director as confirmation of enrolment and for checking. Module lists are also sent for students on Edexcel courses. Class lists are sent again during the second semester to ensure that all

students at this stage are enrolled on the system or also on request at anytime throughout the academic year.

303 Course directors are required to notify the Registry Office of students who take leave of absence or withdraw from the course or any other relevant changes.

304 The member of Registry Office staff who deals with the registration also attends seminars/workshops on request from FHCCs to talk to course directors regarding registration procedures and answer any related queries.

305 There are concerns relating to the late receipt of enrolment forms from partners and their accuracy. The Registry provides guidelines on the enrolment and checking procedures and works with staff in partner institutions to try to ensure the accuracy of enrolment data.

306 In an effort to tackle late receipt of enrolment forms a late enrolment fee was introduced in September 2005. This has led to a significant reduction in late forms. In 2005 634 enrolment forms were received late and this had dropped to 281 in 2006.

7.1.2 Examination and Assessment

307 Partner institutions generally follow the University's modular course structure and semester-based academic year. At the beginning of the academic year the Examinations Office issues a *Calendar of Examinations and Associated Activities* (52) which sets out dates by which core activities must be completed.

308 Course Committees meet following the Semester One assessment period to review student performance. The Examinations Office issues *Semester One Assessment Procedures* (53) which incorporates notes of guidance for the completion of course results sheets. The course results sheets are issued to partner institutions in mid-January. The use of electronic spreadsheets to facilitate the recording process is encouraged.

309 In May, the key document, *Examination Procedures: May to October* (54) is issued. This is a comprehensive document which provides detailed guidance for academic and administrative staff involved in Boards of Examiners' activities.

310 It is expected that the course results sheets used for January Course Committee meetings will be retained for use at the May/June Boards of Examiners.

311 The Examinations Office is responsible for post-Board activity:

- updating the University student record system by recording the progress and award decisions;
- checking pass lists against course results sheets;
- preparation of parchments and transcripts (Edexcel only) for successful students and forwarding these to partner institution contacts for checking and distribution to students;
- preparation and checking of conferment list;
- issue of course results sheets for recording marks and/or grades and decisions following the supplementary (resit) assessment period.

312   In order that these activities are completed in a timely manner each partner is required to send a copy of the course results sheet(s) signed by the chairperson and, where appropriate, the External Examiner(s) together with a copy of the pass list to the Examinations Office within one week of the meeting of the Board of Examiners.

313   In addition to the above activities, the Examinations Office and partner institutions maintain ongoing contact to share information and to resolve any issues which may arise. Among the issues of concern are:

- addition of names of students not previously notified to the Registry Office and so not registered on the programme;
- discrepancies between the course results sheets and the pass lists issued by partners;
- incorrect application of decision codes, usually due to a misunderstanding of which code is the most appropriate;
- omission of signature(s) of External Examiner(s).

314   The Examination Office works with staff in partner institutions to resolve these queries in a timely fashion and with a view to trying to ensure they do not recur. While this can be time consuming it does ensure accuracy and compliance with University policy and procedures. It is not possible to quantify the scale of these problems as no records are kept of errors; once resolved and corrected it would not always be possible to identify them by a retrospective trawl through the records.

Proposed Enhancements

315   In January 2006, the SMG approved the establishment of a unit within Academic Registry to be responsible for the administration of registration and examination records of students on courses in partner institutions. This unit increases the resource available from under 2.0 FTE to 3.5 FTE. The process of collecting information on the modules available and the rules linking these modules to programmes is underway and these data will be included within the Student Records System to enable students to be enrolled on modules from the start of the 2006/07 academic year. The new unit should be operational from 1 August 2006. Transcripts will, therefore, be provided by the University for all students in partner institutions and programmes leading to an award of the University who enter the first year of their programme in September 2006 and thereafter.

316   Section 8.1 provides details of staff development provided to partner institutions in relation to Boards of Examiners.

section eight

8 ENHANCEMENT

8.1 STAFF DEVELOPMENT

317 A number of successful staff development events have been organised for collaborative partners. The programme reflects quality assurance and enhancement matters identified during Annual Course Review and other monitoring activity undertaken by the University and through discussions with staff in partner institutions.

318 A meeting with senior managers and course directors was held on 24 October 2003 to discuss issues relating to the management of the University's collaborative activity **(11)**.

319 On 13 and 14 October 2004 a staff development event for all course directors in partner organisations focusing on assessment and moderation was organised by the FHCCs and supported by the QMAU. Over 100 staff attended the sessions which were offered at both the Jordanstown and Portrush campuses **(11)**. Overheads and notes from the event were made available to overseas partners via the QMAU website.

320 On 13 October 2005 a further staff development event for all course directors and quality assurance staff in partners was held in Jordanstown. A number of partner institutions gave presentations on good practice and enhancement within their institution **(11)**. Again the presentations and accompanying documentation was made available online. Informal feedback from this event was extremely positive.

321 Staff with responsibility for quality assurance in higher education in partner institutions were invited to an open meeting of the FHCCF on 18 January 2006 to discuss issues relating to collaborative activity and how best the University might assist collaborative partners in meeting its standards assurance and quality management requirements. As a consequence of these discussions, three additional development themes were agreed and events arranged.

Examination Boards

322 On 17 May 2006 HE co-ordinators and other appropriate staff identified by partner institutions attended a workshop on the conduct of Boards of Examiners. The event included a simulation of a Board of Examiners meeting and the feedback from participants confirmed that they had found this a useful and informative session.

Work-Based Learning

323 On 13 June 2006 representatives from DEL, the Sector Skills Councils and Foundation Degree Forward addressed a seminar which was facilitated by the University and attended by staff from partner institutions and other NI HE providers. The event also included discussion of work-based learning which was an area identified through Annual Course Review and other monitoring mechanisms as requiring all agencies involved in the development and approval of Fds to work together in partnership to provide meaningful, quality work-based learning opportunities to students (see section 3.4).

Working with the HEA to enhance practice

324 In December 2005 the Faculty of Business and Management hosted an HEA Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Network workshop for partner colleges delivering higher education programmes in the subject area. The workshop was designed

to introduce staff from partner colleges to the HEA and in particular to ways in which staff could access its resources and utilise these within the delivery of a number of University collaborative courses. The event was well supported with all partner colleges delivering programmes in this subject area represented. Each partner college has put arrangements in place for the dissemination of the information across course teams.

325   Feedback from staff who attended the event has been very positive and to date there has been direct and immediate benefit to two programmes which underwent recent revalidation. Some staff have been able to use the resources they were introduced to at the workshop to ensure coverage of relevant and up-to-date curriculum issues. This has been reflected in the design of both module content and learning resources in revised module descriptions. Staff have also been able to identify opportunities for professional development through association with a number of professional networking events which they have been introduced to through the HEA.

326   One of the outcomes of the workshop was that a follow-up event is to be held at the end of this academic year and this event will take place in Autumn 2006. The focus of the event will be on teaching, learning and assessment. The HEA has agreed to provide a subject expert to help staff from partner institutions design innovative assessments for future use and to become aware of best practice in assessment generally.

327   In addition to these formal institutional-level events FHCCs have engaged in a range of staff development activities in partner institutions. In the main these have focused on subject developments. For

example, Social Sciences organised an event to look at developments in Counselling courses **(55)**. A similar event was organised for Nursing provision **(56)**.

8.2   EXAMPLES OF ENHANCEMENT

328   The introduction of the role of the FHCC and subsequent review and evaluation of the effectiveness of this role is discussed in detail in section 3.1. As indicated, the review outcomes overwhelmingly supported this initiative which has resulted in an improvement in the quality of service provided to collaborative partners.

329   The FHCCF has had a role in identifying areas of good practice and enhancement and in disseminating these to collaborative partners. Examples include:

- The external panel members at a revalidation event commended Newry and Kilkeel Institute for their use of a virtual learning environment (VLE) to provide additional, supporting material for their programme, including additional reading. The students are able to log onto the VLE and thus access the material from any location via the internet. This facilitates students completing work from home or their place of employment. Newry and Kilkeel Institute gave a presentation on their VLE to other course directors at the staff development event on 13 October 2005;
- Faculty-specific collaborative handbooks **(57)** are being produced by some faculties to supplement the generic information produced centrally by the University;
- In many partner institutions, the decision as to whether or not particular extenuating circumstances are deemed acceptable is taken solely by the course director. Within

the programmes falling under the Faculty of Engineering at Newry and Kilkeel Institute, a panel has been established, consisting of a Head of School and the three course directors. Claims in relation to extenuating circumstances are submitted to this Panel where a collective decision is taken. This ensures consistency across programmes, not just within an individual programme;

- Many partner institutions provide excellent pastoral support. In particular circumstances, colleges formally schedule pastoral support sessions as part of the class timetable. This emphasises the importance of these sessions, effectively ranking them of equal standing to attending classes. East Antrim Institute and North East Institute gave examples of the pastoral support they provide at the staff development event on 13 October 2005.

330 In response to increased levels of activity, and to enhance its existing arrangements, the University approved a staged approval and monitoring process for new collaborative partners with clearly defined areas of responsibility and reporting arrangements (see section 2.4 for further details). The Protocol includes a monitoring visit to the partner institution after the second intake. One purpose of this visit is to provide development for staff in the application of University quality assurance procedures.

331 A further enhancement to the level of service provided to collaborative partners was the development of a collaborative provision website by the QMAU (see Annex 14). This provides information on a range of standards assurance and quality management matters.

332 A FHCC online Handbook was developed. This is updated on an on-going basis and is also available to partner institutions online. The Handbook contains information on course planning and approval, re-validation, admissions and enrolments, assessment, resources, Annual Course Review, and quality assurance and enhancement requirements.

333 In response to feedback from collaborative partners and to enhance existing arrangements the FHCCF agreed the minimum requirements for an examinations broadsheet **(58)** for partner institutions. An Excel broadsheet was developed in partnership with colleges. The electronic broadsheets were used at the June 2005 Examination Boards. This enhancement has led to a better understanding of RPT codes **(59)**.

334 As indicated in sections 4.12 and 8.1, additional development has been provided for Chairs of Examination Boards and it has been agreed that each partner institution will nominate a small number of senior staff to undertake this function. Taken together, these developments should ensure greater consistency of practice in this area and their efficacy will continue to be monitored by FHCCs and other University staff during attendance at Examination Board meetings for collaborative courses.

section nine

9 PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO STUDENTS

9.1 PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL FOR COURSES

335 The approval of promotional material was formerly part of the role of a University Assessor. However, with the change in management structures to FHCCs, this specific element was not initially included within the formal job description, but was added as a result of the review of the role.

336 In terms of overseas provision, there have been cases where publicity leaflets were produced in languages other than English. In these cases, the leaflets were translated into English by staff within the University and feedback provided to the partner institution.

337 Section 15.3(b) in the *Guide* clearly indicates that partner institutions are responsible for ensuring that publicity material and other information provided to students is accurate. However, they are expected to seek approval for statements in publicity material regarding the University. Advice can be obtained from the FHCC. In practice there is a limited amount of publicity material being forwarded to the University in advance of publication. This is partly due to a lack of awareness of the issue among partner institutions and the requirement has been emphasised both informally and through additional documentation (for example, see section B2 in the Faculty of Engineering's supplement to the *Guide*. Some other faculties have provided similar documentation) (60). In addition, material is often simply updated from the previous year's publication rather than new copy being provided.

338 Overall there is little evidence to suggest that misleading information is provided. The only example which has been noted occurred in SCAU. During a visit to China in July 2004, a leaflet containing the University logo but written in Chinese was discovered. Given this had not been formally approved, on return to the UK, the document was translated and consequently a number of serious concerns were identified. For example, the translation of the course title was found not to match the English, the advertised course content included material not included as part of the University of Ulster programme and there were claims regarding the use of dual language teaching which did not appear to align with the formal agreement.

339 All of the issues were immediately discussed with relevant senior staff within the University and subsequently a senior delegation, consisting of the then PVCs (Teaching and Learning) and (Quality Assurance and Enhancement), the relevant FHCC and a member of the QMAU, visited SCAU in November 2004 to discuss these.

340 The University met with a senior delegation from SCAU. During the meeting, it became apparent that many of the concerns reflected misinterpretation rather than a deliberate attempt to mislead. For example, in regard to the issue of the programme title, it was explained that in China there are a set of government defined programme titles, and only these can be used. Having examined these titles, it was agreed that the Chinese title selected was the one that most closely reflected the English title. However, it was agreed that in future if documentation is written in Chinese, the course title will always be presented in English immediately after any Chinese representation. With

regard to the course content, SCAU staff explained that much of the additional content identified was taught as part of a preparation year which students spent enhancing their English, and was done in order to give a subject focus to part of the student learning experience. Assurances were also given in terms of the amount of dual language teaching, with staff explaining that they only used their native language when it was clear a particular concept had not been understood by the student cohort. They also gave assurances that this was largely confined to year 1 modules. Finally, it was agreed that in future all publicity material would be sent to the University for comment and approval in advance of circulation.

9.2   INDUCTION ARRANGEMENTS

341   Partner institutions are responsible for running induction programmes that are appropriate to the level of the qualification and the needs of their student cohort. In line with the general policy of cooperation with the partner institution, FHCCs provide advice and guidance on induction if required and encourage the sharing of good practice. In addition the FHCC can monitor the arrangements for induction through discussions with students and course directors and from feedback from SSCC meetings.

9.3   INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

342   Guidance for partner institutions regarding the minimum contents of a course handbook is provided in Appendix 22 of the *Guide*.

343   Typically, course handbooks include key components such as the Programme Specification and module specifications for the programme. Faculties provide guidance on the preparation of these aspects of the document during the revalidation process. Handbooks also include contact details for staff and identify the purpose of SSCC meetings.

344   FHCCs monitor the information given to students through one or more of the following: minutes from SSCC meetings, direct meetings with students and review of the contents of the course handbook.

9.4   PROMOTING PROGRESSION OPPORTUNITIES

345   Provision in partner institutions is normally expected to be articulated to a progression route within the University (20, Section 2.2), something which is considered during evaluation/revalidation. Student progression is, where appropriate, facilitated by a tailored induction or bridging programme. Partner Institutions provide information to students on progression opportunities in consultation with the University.

346   As the University is still subject to the MaSN and consequent financial penalties, there has been considerable discussion in FHCCF about the levels at which progression may take place, a matter which is of particular concern for Fds[103]. Offers are made on a course by course basis, taking into account a range of factors such as the level of initial course offers, applicant attainment and suitability for the programme in question. In order to standardise practice in this area and ensure equity of treatment for all students, the University has located Fds in its table of equivalences[104]. This relates the level of performance required in level 2 Fd modules to the UCAS tariff.

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103 FHCCF mins 04.55, 04.73, 04.85, 04.97 04.121, 05.72, 05.108
104 ADSSC min 05.60

347   Generic issues relating to progression and transfer from partner institutions were discussed at a seminar held on 9 February 2004 to disseminate the results of a project led by the University of Plymouth in partnership with the University of Ulster (Student Progression and Transfer, an FDTL 3 Project). Representatives from the University's partner institutions in Northern Ireland participated in this seminar.

section ten

10 THE ACCURACY, COMPLETENESS AND RELIABILITY OF PUBLISHED INFORMATION

348   In accordance with the expectations for the publication of Teaching Quality Information (TQI), the University publishes summary External Examiner and revalidation reports on the TQI website. The University includes provision at partner institutions and identifies the institutions by name in the reports.

349   Partner institutions in Northern Ireland (and those abroad) do not make the same statutory returns to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) as universities and other bodies in receipt of public funding for higher education, nor do students participate in the National Student Survey. Consequently the information available to prospective students and other stakeholders about the standards and quality of HE in these institutions is partial.

350   The public reporting requirements for these institutions is a matter for DEL to consider, taking account of the arrangements for the roll-out of TQI to FE institutions in England.

Legend:
- University of Ulster campus
- Course(s) leading to UU award
- Course(s) leading to UU award (access course)
- Course(s) leading to Edexcel award
- CAFRE Sites

Where symbols are repeated in one town, different institutions provide courses

Map locations: Portrush, Coleraine, Limavady, Ballymoney, Londonderry, Strabane, Ballymena, Larne, Newtownabbey, Magherafelt, Antrim, Belfast, Jordanstown, Bangor, Castlereagh, Cookstown, Omagh, Dungannon, Lisburn, Portadown, Enniskillen, Armagh, Downpatrick, Darkley, Crossmaglen, Newry

10 0 10 20 Kilometres

LOCAL PARTNERS:

Armagh College

Beeches Management Centre

Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education

Castlereagh College

Causeway Institute of Further and Higher Education

College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise

East Antrim Institute of Further and Higher Education

East Down Institute of Further and Higher Education

East Tyrone College of Further and Higher Education

Fermanagh College

Homefirst Community Trust

Limavady College of Further and Higher Education

Lisburn Institute of Further and Higher Education

Newry and Kilkeel Institute of Further and Higher Education

North Down and Ards Institute

North East Institute of Further and Higher Education

North West Institute of Further and Higher Education

Omagh College

Police Service of Northern Ireland

Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust

Upper Bann Institute of Further and Higher Education

Westcare Business Services

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS:

Hong Kong College of Technology

HTMi, Switzerland

School of Professional and Continuing Education, The University of Hong Kong (HKU SPACE)

South China Agricultural University