

COLLABORATIVE PROVISION STRATEGY

1. Introduction

This paper summarises the University's collaborative portfolio as it has developed since the 2005 Collaborative Provision Strategy and the 2006 Collaborative Provision Audit. The background, rationale, nature, and strategic development of the University partnerships are reviewed. The overall number of off-campus students now exceeds 13,000 (as of January 1st 2010), and the University has recently decided to consolidate and build on this major portfolio as part of its discussions leading up to the renewal of the Corporate Plan until 2012.

The University greatly values its engagement with diverse external partners, and is committed to the further development of its collaborative provision strategy and portfolio in response to changing local, regional and international contexts. The paper outlines the proposed direction of travel for the different parts of collaborative provision and strategic plans for further strengthening its management over the next few years.

2. Background and context

The University engages with a range of external partners and agencies for the purposes of research and enterprise, work placements and work-based learning, access and progression compacts with feeder institutions, and student exchanges and study abroad programmes. However, ***this paper is concerned with the collaborative delivery of University of Greenwich awards by approved external institutions.***

The University has been involved in this form of collaborative provision for nearly 20 years and it is now a major dimension of the University's academic portfolio, with around one hundred regional, national and international institutions approved to deliver University of Greenwich (UoG) awards. Related components of collaborative provision are joint degrees with other UK HEIs, the external credit-rating of other organisations' provision, and the formal articulation arrangements which recognise a partner's programmes as entry routes to further study on UoG programmes.

The significance of the University's collaborative portfolio has been recognised by the separate QAA audit of its collaborative provision in March 2006, with another separate collaborative provision audit scheduled for March 2011. Since the 2006 CP audit, the number of approved external partners has increased in line with the Collaborative Strategy agreed by Academic Council in 2005.

3. Rationale

The rationale and purpose for developing the University's collaborative provision is that these academic partnerships aim to:

- meet regional and local demand for higher education in the UK and overseas through providing internationally recognised qualifications of a high standard, and to meet identified skill shortages and the needs of industry within the UK and the growing in-country demands for qualifications and professional updating

- increase, facilitate and widen access to higher education programmes that lead to an UoG award
- raise the University's international reputation, and thereby assist in meeting its international on-campus recruitment targets
- generate income for all partners, and support diversification of University income
- share good practice, enhance the student learning experience for the students of all partners, enrich the curriculum offered on campus and by partners, and broaden the experience and horizons of University and partner staff, and
- support staff development and staff exchange, and develop related collaborative activities, for example in research and consultancy

4. The University's current collaborative provision

The University's partners include UK institutions (mostly FE colleges) where the collaborative enterprise is publicly funded, and a range of providers in the UK and overseas where collaborative delivery is approved on a full-cost basis. At the start of 2010, programmes had been approved for collaborative delivery at:

- the regional **Partner College Network** of 9 FE and 2 specialist HEFCE-funded colleges in South East London, Kent and Medway (approximately 2700 students registered on UoG awards). This network has been the main vehicle for offering Foundation degrees within the local area.
- additional **FE and other colleges** that are outside of the Partner College Network, that aim to improve accessibility to learning, and provide award-bearing programmes in response to specific demands and needs (approximately 400).
- the national **Lifelong Learning Sector (LLS) Network** of 26 Linked Colleges across the UK, 3 of which are also in the Partner College Network (approx 1000 students). This network offers programmes which aim to help meet the national teacher training requirement for all FE teachers, and serves to enhance the University's national profile.
- **67 institutions approved for full-cost delivery** of UoG awards - 60 overseas plus 7 private colleges in the UK (approx 8000 students).
- 2 nearby **UK HEIs**, with whom the University has entered into partnership to develop jointly agreed and developed academic awards (approx 1500 students; pharmacy degrees and certificates with the University of Kent and health-related programmes with Canterbury Christ Church University).

Table 1 Student numbers on collaborative programmes

Type of collaboration	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	08/09 as a % of 05/06
Partner college network	1533	2272	2637	2794	182
FE and other colleges	20	101	166	273	1360
Full cost delivery	2139	3606	3808	6944	324
LLS Network	1475	1274	1166	978	66
Total	5167	7253	7777	10989	212

Thus, UoG has currently formal links with around 100 external partners, with more than 13,000 students registered on partnership programmes in the UK and overseas (excluding those covered by credit-rating and articulation agreements). These figures reflect a substantial increase over the last 4 years in the numbers of new partners, the range of programmes approved for delivery at both new and established partners, and the overall number of off-campus students. [See Table 1 for comparisons over time].

5. Partnership models

The University approves and operates several different types of collaborative programme

- **franchised provision** i.e. existing (or sometimes, modified) University of Greenwich programmes which have been approved for delivery on campus, and which may also be approved ('franchised') for delivery by an external partner.
- **validated provision** i.e. **new** programmes (or courses) designed by the partner, using the University's protocols, which are then approved ('validated') by the University as being of an appropriate quality and standard to lead to a UoG award for delivery by that partner.
- **externally validated provision** - occasionally, a programme devised by a partner to its own specifications can be externally validated as equivalent to a UoG award (sometimes leading to two awards i.e. local degree from the partner as well as one from UoG).
- **joint awards developed with other UK HEIs** – in the case of programmes developed with the University of Kent, these are delivered by a School shared between the two institutions; in the case of Canterbury Christ Church, the two institutions deliver a jointly developed curriculum.

The University's CP arrangements also include:

- the **external credit-rating** of UK organisations' courses and programmes (mainly undertaken by the Schools of Health and Social Care and Education & Training), and
- **articulation agreements** (i.e. progression arrangements) with a diverse range of institutions in the UK and overseas to support entry and advanced standing to UoG programmes.

6. The management of a growing collaborative portfolio

The quality assurance of collaborative provision within the University involves approval of the partner, authorisation, design and approval of programmes, quality assurance and enhancement of the student experience, and maintenance of the academic standards of the awards. The University keeps under review its processes for overseeing collaborative provision and the need to respond flexibly to relevant external and internal drivers. Developments in the past few years include:-

6.1 Restructuring to meet the needs of growth

A review of the Division of Learning, Enhancement, Access & Partnership (LEAP) towards the end of 2006 led to the current Partnership Division, with a new Director taking up post in Jan 2010. One of the Division's three sub-units, the Regional Academic and Partnership Unit (RAPU), has the role of supporting and co-ordinating regional and

academic partnerships at all levels through the facilitation of institutional tasks beyond the reach of any one school. It has a particular focus on the colleges within the Partner College Network. Supporting the enhancement of the HE experience for all students within the partnerships, as well as the encouragement of inter- and multi-school activities is also an important feature of the work of RPU. Strategic planning for the Partner College Network remains the remit of the Principals' Strategic Planning Meeting which is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor.

An International Partnerships Manager was also appointed and took up post in the autumn of 2009, based within the Partnership Division. This post, with associated administrative support, provides the central coordination of full-cost provision that was needed given the scale and scope of this element of the UoG's collaborative provision. In addition to providing a central point of contact and advice for external partners and School Link Tutors, the Manager has introduced regular cross-School meetings to discuss relations with and approaches to multi-school partners. The establishment of an International Forum, where School and Office representatives are working together to enhance the efficiency of collaborative provision management arrangements, is proving a valuable cross-institutional tool. Further enhancement has been achieved with the development of a new template for the Memorandum of Agreement that more clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of the University and Partner. This has been reinforced by the preparation of a handbook for full-cost collaborative provision setting out the responsibilities and rights of staff and of students that parallels similar guides that have been available for some years for the Partner College Network and the LLS Network.

Additional ways in which the administration and management of collaborative provision has been strengthened is by creating a designated team in the Office of Student Affairs that has responsibility for the registration, recording-keeping, production of transcripts and certificates for collaborative provision students. At School level, the number of academic and administrative staff with collaborative provision responsibilities has increased, often with a redefinition of roles to clarify and enhance the quality of support. The Information and Library Service (ILS) has successfully introduced a scheme which enables partner staff to have access to most of the electronic resources that are already available to students at partner institutions provided it is compatible with the licence agreements. It is anticipated that the new UG-Flex system will offer a more powerful and effective system for all aspects of central record-keeping, including the tracking of quality assurance activity.

6.2 Quality assurance procedures for collaborative provision

Until recently, the Academic Planning Sub-Committee (APSC) was responsible for the approval of new partnerships and the authorisation of all new collaborative programmes, both at established external partners and new partners. The University's central scrutiny of any new partner has now been strengthened by making a clear distinction between the approval of the partnership at the institutional level and the approval of a specific programme of study. The APSC has therefore been replaced by two separate committees, the Partner Scrutiny Panel (PSP) and the Academic Planning Committee (APC). The Partner Scrutiny Panel has been established to determine the suitability of external institutions which seek to enter formal partnership with the University for the purposes of collaborative delivery of one or more of the University's named awards.

Membership of the PSP is derived from senior managers with institutional level responsibility for external partnerships. The Panel makes recommendations to Academic

Council on whether the University should enter any such new partnership. The PSP also keeps all institutional partnerships under review.

This clearer separation of institutional-level scrutiny from programme-level matters brings the University's procedures more closely into line with the recommendations of the Council of Validating Universities (CVU). A new central Quality Manager has been appointed, whose responsibilities include overseeing the quality assurance processes relating to international collaborations. This Quality Manager also acts as the executive officer for the PSP.

The formation of the PSP allows the APC to concentrate on programme-level scrutiny and authorisation, which should provide added value to the subsequent programme approval process. Portfolio planning procedures have been revised to include firm deadlines for any conditions arising from the approval of collaborative programmes, with conditions met well in advance of initial delivery. Following approval for delivery, the University retains control over the outcome standards through staff visits, scrutiny of the curriculum vitae of new partner staff, the marking and/or moderation of assessment tasks and examinations (and sometimes the setting of assessment), the appointment of external examiners, and the requirement for annual monitoring reports and periodic reviews.

In 2010, the School Annual Reporting and Planning Document (ARPD) was replaced with a more tightly focussed School Monitoring Review Document (SMRD); the latter allows for a more risk-based approach to the monitoring of all provision (including collaborative provision), based upon clearly defined Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), including student performance, NSS survey results, and external examiner reports. The collaborative provision section of the SMRD requires each School to reflect on any issues that have arisen regarding its collaborative provision, how the School is addressing those issues in collaboration with the partners, and how the quality of provision at the partner organisation has been quality assured by the School. Following submission of the SMRDs, specific scrutiny groups have been formed to provide a report to the Academic Collaborations Committee on the monitoring and evaluation of collaborative provision by the Schools.

The development of Business Objects, and improved access to these data for internal and partner staff, plus earlier access to interim datasets for the purposes of annual monitoring and the pre-population with data of Partner College and multi-school Annual Institutional Reports, have all been important steps forward. In addition, the new incoming Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development) has requested data on the progression rates of students and the distribution of degree classifications, where these exist, on the different collaborative programmes, for consideration by the Academic Collaboration Committee to inform the management of quality and standards. The University will review the operational aspects of SMRDs during the summer of 2010 to enhance the process in the light of the experience gathered in the first year of the operation of the new annual review procedures.

6.3 Enhancement activity

Both the Learning and Quality Unit and Schools have supported the FE colleges in the Partner College Network and the LLS Network as they undertake their IQER Developmental Engagements and Summative Reviews. The University continues to engage with these processes and to ensure that any necessary follow-up action is taken with dissemination of good practice recommendations across the university.

To strengthen the sharing of good practice across the institution still further, the introduction of an informal electronic “collaborative forum” will be investigated. This would be additional to the regular meetings of the Partner College Link Tutors and the International Partners’ Link Tutors. The possibility of forming a network of multi-School full-cost partners will also be explored by the International Partnerships Office.

7. Future developments

a) Scale and scope

As indicated earlier, collaborative provision is a major element of the University’s business and it plans to consolidate and build on this provision in the following ways:-

Partner College Network The University values the regional strength of its Partner College Network, but given the current cap on contract numbers and new entrant over recruitment penalty, and HEFCE funding reductions, it will be more important than ever to ensure that Partner College recruitment is contained within the agreed target numbers. There is likely to be the need for greater selectivity of programmes offered, in the light of recruitment patterns, student performance, retention rates and our drive to improve the overall student experience, as well as any comments on network membership arising from the ‘Value for Money’ review of the Partner College Network commissioned by the Court Audit Committee and the internal auditors’ study on collaborative provision. General agreement on the way forward was reached at the April 2010 meeting of the Principals’ Strategic Planning Meeting about the new fee structure to be charged to students studying on UoG programmes across the Network and the viability of programmes. Moreover, it was agreed that the Network needs to adopt a shared vision on the purpose of the Network partnership and what it is seeking to achieve, which will shape future strategic development. The vision is currently being developed, but will involve more than just a consideration of student numbers and programmes.

LLS Network The School of Education and Training has for many years been involved in developing programmes that meet the national teacher training requirements for all FE teachers. In 2008-09, five new colleges joined the network bringing the total to 26 but despite the addition of new colleges the overall numbers of students have fallen by ~33% since 2005/06. Partnership management has been tightened up and improved over the last two years and the roles and responsibilities of each party within the framework of collaboration have been more firmly delineated. Close monitoring of the numbers of students and the quality of provision in all colleges takes place to ensure that the financial return is sufficient to support the necessary quality assurance by the School at that college, and that the numbers of students are sufficient to provide a satisfactory learning experience. Further growth in the number of partners and total number of students is not expected and some consolidation regarding the geographic clustering of the colleges may be carried out to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of the regional link tutors that attend cluster meetings and deliver staff development activities. Internal monitoring and evaluation of academic standards and the student experience, and the requirement for annual reporting to the TDA and the periodic Ofsted inspections, have confirmed an improvement in the quality of both provision and assurance.

Full-cost collaborative programmes During the past 5 years, the University has been successful in expanding its overseas partnership work to a situation where there are currently 60 partners and ~8,000 students, registered primarily on undergraduate

programmes. To develop the global brand of the University, as well to continue to reduce our dependency on government funding, we aim to build on current successful networks and multi-school partners, within geographical 'nodes'. Where appropriate, Schools will be encouraged to extend the Greenwich offer within our existing multi-centre collaborations and to be open to further expanding the scope and range of new international collaborative partnerships that offer a high quality student experience. Where single School partnerships have already been established, we will seek to extend the collaboration to other Schools. Particular attention will be paid to developing a portfolio of strategic partnerships, including a range of different delivery models, partners and locations within India. In all cases, expansion of entrepreneurial trans-national educational activity will be carried out with a full appreciation of the need to balance growth and quality, and maintain alignment with the University's International Strategy. In addition, cost-benefit analyses of new and existing off-campus provision will be strengthened to ensure that the collaborative arrangements are self-supporting, offering adequate financial return for the time and effort involved and provide sufficient resource to allow the provision of administrative support for the efficient management and coordination of expansion in this activity.

The other major development that we will investigate is the possibility of working with an international/overseas partner jointly to badge an existing or newly developing campus. Given that India is one of the fastest growing economies of the world, has considerable numbers of young people that are likely to fill many of the gaps in highly skilled workforces in the developed world and has historic ties to the UK, our initial investigations for this will be focused on India. A comprehensive strategic business plan that covers the academic portfolio to be offered, market research, relationship-building, the mitigation of risk, and financial and legal matters will need to be developed to a level that stands up to scrutiny at both the executive as well as Board level.

b) The financial framework for collaborative provision

At present the University does not use a single financial forecasting template for the business plans that are submitted for new full-cost programme proposals. New draft models that attempt to capture all of the costs associated with collaborative provision have been drawn up. Further work on these models and cross-institutional adoption of the models against a series of standard guidelines for costs are required. Similar financial costings should be applied to all types of programmes offered by the University, both internally and externally.

Cost-benefit analyses of existing individual and multi-School partnerships, and across School-based networks, will be introduced to inform the price charged for full-cost provision when the financial memorandum is renewed. In some cases, financial memoranda relating to partnerships have not been regularly updated, resulting in the potential for fees to fail to cover the full costs. Thus, those partnerships where the evidence demonstrates that the financial viability is less than that originally anticipated are likely to be actively discontinued in the future. It is planned that all future financial contracts will also build in uplifts for annual inflation; this has not been the practice in the past.

The growth over the past five years and the magnitude of collaborative provision activity (estimated to be >£25m in 2009/10) represents the fastest growing element of the University's business. Nevertheless, there has been a delay in allocating resources derived from collaborative provision activity to Schools and Offices in recognition of the staffing costs involved in the effective management and support of collaborative

provision activity. In particular, a larger share of the current income needs to be directed to increase the staffing base of the International Partnership Office and Admissions/OSA and Finance, given the workload generated by full-cost collaborative provision internationally and within the UK. Failure to recognise the potential damage that is caused by offering a less than excellent customer service to our partners will in the medium/long term result in a significant loss of both existing and new business.

Whilst it is the considered view of the Academic Collaboration Committee and the International Forum, supported by the DVC (Academic Development), that the staffing base needs to be increased to improve the level of service to the partners, it is also recognised that the operational processes for collaborative provision need to be streamlined (e.g. through adoption of online registration), with a single common model across all of the partners and Schools. Additionally, the use of “account managers” for our large partnerships needs to be considered to ensure that we deliver a quality of service that our major partners expect in as efficient manner as possible.

8. Priorities to 2013

- i. The introduction of an informal electronic “collaborative forum” will be investigated in order to strengthen the sharing of good practice across the institution.
- ii. The possibility of forming a network of multi-School full-cost partners will be explored by the International Partnerships Office.
- iii. To inform the financial forecasting models, an assessment of the real cost of all collaborative provision activities, whether publicly funded or full-cost, will be undertaken.
- iv. Periodic cost-benefit analyses of specific partnerships/networks will be undertaken.
- v. The distribution of resources derived from collaborative provision activity will be reviewed to ensure that sufficient resource is distributed to the central offices to support the management of the activity (including admissions, registration, liaison, oversight of compliance with quality processes and development of the partnership), as well as providing sufficient resource to the Schools for them to perform their academic duties and to develop new partnerships.
- vi. The operational aspects and management structures related to collaborative provision will be reviewed to deliver a quality of service that is deemed to be excellent by the partners but is at the same time as efficient as possible.

Prof Simon Jarvis, June 2010