



Liverpool John Moores University

Institutional audit

NOVEMBER 2009

Annex to the report

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Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Liverpool John Moores University (the University) from 9 to 13 November 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards the University offers.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

- limited confidence reasonably can be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its collaborative overseas 'recognition and validation' awards; for clarity, this relates to a concern about the alignment of awards with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2008) in just one aspect of one element of the University's overseas collaborative provision
- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its home (non-collaborative) awards and of its collaborative awards other than collaborative overseas 'recognition and validation' arrangements
- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

On this occasion the team carried out a hybrid Institutional audit. The hybrid process is used where QAA considers that it is not practicable to consider an institution's collaborative provision as part of standard Institutional audit, or that a separate audit activity focusing solely on this provision is not necessary.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit team found that the University takes deliberate actions at the institutional level to improve the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. The University's approach to quality enhancement is overseen by the Strategic Management Group. The core objectives contained within the University's Strategic Plan are expressed in terms of a clear commitment to the enhancement of the student learning experience. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, developed to support the implementation of the University's Strategic Plan goals for learning, teaching and assessment, has a strong enhancement focus. The audit team saw evidence of a rolling programme of strategic initiatives designed to improve the student experience.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The audit team concluded that the University's procedures for the support, assessment and supervision of research degrees meet the expectations of the precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, Section 1: *Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA. The development of the University Degree Regulations was found to provide a student-centred framework for postgraduate research provision. Institutional oversight is maintained by the

Academic Board, with clear reporting arrangements from faculty research committees through the University's Research Degrees Committee.

Published information

The audit team established that the University provides an extensive and accessible range of published information for prospective and current students both electronically and on paper. Arrangements exist to ensure that published information is legal, valid and up-to-date. The team found that students were satisfied with the information received both prior to and during their course. The team concluded that reliance can reasonably be placed in the integrity and reliability of the information that the University publishes about its educational provision.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the early and prolonged engagement of external advisers in the development of proposed programmes of study (paragraph 17)
- the use of electronic recording and performance indicators in the monitoring and review of students and in managing and enhancing the quality of their learning opportunities (paragraphs 36, 149)
- the introduction of Student Democracy Coordinators as a means of enhancing the effectiveness of the student voice (paragraph 53)
- the impact on the student experience of staff engagement with pedagogic research and development (paragraph 56)
- the support provided by the Centre for Staff Development and the Learning Development Unit, and the range of activities available for staff, including the staff of partners (paragraphs 78, 138)
- the University's support in collaborative provision of the student experience and of its partner institutions (paragraphs 102, 136)
- the detailed nature of the University's programme specifications and their ready and secure availability through the internet (paragraph 162).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the team considers essential:

- ensure that awards of the 'recognition and validation' type in overseas collaborative provision are aligned with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), published in 2008 (paragraph 115).

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- ensure that the University Standing Panel is clearly placed within the academic management structure, that its membership and terms of reference are reviewed, and that the Panel is clearly referenced in publications (paragraph 18).

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- work towards ensuring that external examiners' reports are seen consistently by all boards of studies and, thus, by student representatives (paragraphs 24, 166)

- ensure that there is a clearly communicated and consistently operated system of deadlines for the provision to students of feedback on assessment (paragraph 33)
- bring the practice of interim Personal Development and Performance Review into line with the formal expectation (paragraph 77)
- provide more guidance on how many postgraduate research students a supervisor might be expected to manage (paragraph 151)
- ensure that postgraduate research students undertaking teaching are provided with adequate guidance and support (paragraph 155).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 Liverpool John Moores University came into existence formally in 1992, but its origins extend considerably further back to the Liverpool Mechanics' School of Arts founded in 1825. The academic organisation of the University remains largely unchanged since the last audit, although schools have been replaced by different organisational structures in two faculties. The six faculties are: Business and Law; Education, Community and Leisure; Health and Applied Social Studies; Media, Arts and Social Science; Science and Technology; and the Environment. The University has over 24,000 students studying for credit-bearing awards, over 4,000 of whom are studying at postgraduate level on taught and research programmes. Students are based at three locations: City Campus and Mount Pleasant, close to the city centre, and Irene Mable (IM) Marsh, south of the city centre. The University also has two satellite buildings in Birkenhead.

2 The overall mission of the University states: 'Our mission is to serve and enrich our students, clients and community by providing opportunities for advancement through education, training, research and the transfer of knowledge'.

3 The Mission of the University is encapsulated in the following set of values:

- 'We put students and clients first
- We are committed to excellence in everything we do
- We respect and trust each other
- We work as one team
- We lead rather than follow; and defend independence of thought
- We recognise and celebrate success
- We take our work seriously, not ourselves'.

The information base for the audit

4 The University provided the audit team with a range of documents and information including:

- a helpful and informative Briefing Paper with hyperlinks to a range of supporting material
- intranet access to a wide range of internal and published documents
- audit trails of two recent programme-level reviews
- additional documentation requested by the audit team during the visit.

5 In advance, the information available to the audit team included the following documents:

- the Institutional audit report, published in 2004

- the Collaborative provision audit report, published in 2006
- the special review of postgraduate research programmes, published in 2006
- the Foundation Degrees Review in Public Services (Criminal Justice), published in 2005
- the Major Review of Nursing and Midwifery, published in 2005.

6 The audit was also informed by a student written submission, the findings of which were based on a range of information, the principal sources of which were the 2008 National Student Survey (2,189 respondents) and the University's 2008 Student Opinion Survey (7,521 respondents). The audit team was grateful to representatives of Liverpool Students' Union, who produced the student written submission.

Developments since the last audit

7 The previous Institutional audit in 2004 found that broad confidence could be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The report highlighted areas of good practice linked to staff development, the management of standards and the student experience. The report also identified four advisable and two desirable recommendations, which the University has considered. The Collaborative provision audit of 2006 reached a judgement of confidence regarding quality and standards, and made six advisable and three desirable recommendations.

8 The Briefing Paper details the actions taken to address the recommendations of both audits. While the audit team recognised that much had been done to address the issues raised at these audits, at the time of the audit there were some incomplete or inadequate areas of action. One incomplete area concerns differences between practice and published policies, procedures, and terms of reference of committees (see paragraphs below). An inadequate area of action concerns the proportion of credit given through a 'recognition and validation' overseas collaborative provision agreement (see Section 5: Collaborative arrangements). Since the previous audits the University has developed in ways that include: a revised Strategic Plan (2007-2012), which defines the core business processes of the University; four strategic initiatives, one of which includes revised arrangements for student recruitment and support; a new Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy; the continued expansion of collaborative partnerships within the UK and overseas; and the continued development of the estate, including the completion of a new Art and Design Academy and work on a campus for the School of Sport and Exercise Sciences and the School of Natural Sciences and Psychology.

Institutional framework for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities

9 The Vice Chancellor is supported by a Strategic Management Group. The Academic Board, chaired by the Vice Chancellor, is the ultimate academic body of the University responsible for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. The Academic Board devolves responsibility for the detailed oversight of academic standards, quality and enhancement to the Quality and Standards Committee. It is notable, despite repeated assurances over a substantial period of time, that the Quality and Standards Committee minutes did not go to the Academic Board until September 2009. The Partnerships Quality and Standards Panel, a subcommittee of the Quality and Standards Committee, has devolved responsibility for the management of standards and quality in collaborative provision. Faculty quality committees and the Partnerships Quality and Standards Panel are responsible for the appointment of external examiners, with University oversight exercised by the Quality and Standards Committee.

10 The Planning and Programme Development Committee is responsible for the oversight of all strategic and operational planning. It reports to the Strategic Management Group for resource issues and to the Academic Board for academic issues, as described in the Briefing Paper. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Panel, reporting to the Planning and Programme Development Committee, is responsible for the design and implementation of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, which is also reported to the Academic Board. Reporting arrangements have been strengthened since the last audit, and the role of the Academic Board has been enhanced.

11 The University's committee structure is partially mirrored at faculty level. Faculty quality committees exercise local responsibility for quality and standards, and report both to their faculty management teams and to the Quality and Standards Committee.

12 Following a two-year pilot, the University has implemented a new process for the validation and review of programmes. Features of the new process are early faculty-level consultation with both an internal and an external adviser, and the introduction of a University Standing Panel which checks that due processes have been followed. This process has not yet been extended to collaborative provision, where the older model of formal University validation panels has been retained. An annual report on programme review and validation is made to the Academic Board through the Quality and Standards Committee. In the documents shown to the audit team, the University Standing Panel is not an explicitly formal part of the University's committee structure overseeing quality and standards.

13 Outside the essential recommendation and advisable recommendations of this report, the audit team found that the structures, formal procedures and implemented processes supporting the management of quality and enhancement were strong for both home and collaborative provision.

14 Similarly, the University has a good framework and procedures for the maintenance of standards, except for the lack of full definition of the University Standing Panel and except for procedures relating to overseas collaborative 'recognition and validation' provision, where the team had limited confidence that standards were assured. This latter theme is discussed in Section 5.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

15 The audit team tested the effectiveness of programme approval, monitoring and review. The Quality Support Team has overall responsibility for the design of quality management processes including programme validation and review, annual monitoring, internal academic audit, external examining, student surveys, and management of the relationship with QAA. Programme approval, monitoring and review are managed by faculty quality teams and report through a Faculty Quality Committee and the University's Quality and Standards Committee to the Academic Board.

16 The University's new approach to home-taught programme validation and review was introduced in 2009-10 following a two-year period of testing and review.

17 Quality management processes used for programme approval, validation and review are mapped to the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*. Peer review is used within the process of programme approval,

monitoring and review. In the new approach to validation and review, external advisers from other universities are brought earlier into programme design to assist the faculty academic programme development team. The programme academic development team is required to consult an experienced independent internal adviser from elsewhere in the University who is well informed about the University's requirements for validation and review, and an adviser external to the University who is a subject specialist. The audit team considered the nature and extent of externality in the programme development process to be good practice since it formally utilises external subject-specific expertise in the programme development process to a very considerable depth and extent, and is particularly helpful to the University.

18 Programme approval at school and faculty level leads to consideration of a proposal at the University Standing Panel, which includes further external advice. The University Standing Panel did not appear as part of the formal academic committee structures in the University committee structure diagrams supplied to the audit team. The University stated that the role of the University Standing Panel was to confirm whether process requirements have been met, and whether a faculty recommendation for approval can be confirmed on behalf of the Academic Board. The team found some inconsistency of view amongst staff, with regard to whether the University Standing Panel was merely a body making recommendations to the Academic Board or the final approving body for new programmes. The team recommends that it is advisable that the University ensure that the University Standing Panel is clearly placed within the academic management structure, that its membership and terms of reference are reviewed, and that the Panel is clearly referenced in publications.

19 The University stated that taught programme validation is normally followed every five years by programme review. The review process draws upon evidence from external examiners' reports, outcomes of any reviews by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, and evidence in annual monitoring. There has been slighter use of student feedback in programme review and in programme validation.

20 The audit team tested the effectiveness of the new system of annual monitoring introduced in 2008-09. Annual monitoring requires an annual monitoring report to be written using both qualitative and quantitative data. The University is redesigning the annual monitoring report to capture and utilise data on student satisfaction. The use of both qualitative and quantitative data in annual monitoring was evident in the documentation.

External examiners

21 Regulations governing the appointment, role and remit of external examiners are set out in the University Modular Framework. The University has formal appointment and induction procedures and documentation for external examining. Faculty quality committees appoint external examiners under devolved authority from the University Quality Standards Committee on behalf of the Academic Board.

22 The University operates a two-tier system of examination boards. External examiners are appointed to cover a Module Assessment Board or Programme Assessment Board. External examiners have the opportunity of a briefing. External examiners submit an annual external examiner's report. A sample of external examiners' reports and responses to these was scrutinised by the audit team and found to be, on the whole, a productive dialogue on standards and quality.

23 External examiners' reports are presented to boards of study for staff and student scrutiny; staff confirmed that, in general, they see such reports. However, the audit team found that the presentation of external examiners' reports to boards of study had not been complete across the University. The Director of Quality Support reviews all external

examiners' reports, and responds to the Strategic Management Group and Academic Board on institution-wide matters of importance.

24 An overview report goes to the University's Quality and Standards Committee, and the Academic Board disseminates across the University examples of good practice identified by external examiners in areas such as assessment. The audit team found that, overall, arrangements for external examining work effectively and that issues are addressed at both faculty and university level. However, the team found inconsistency in the presentation of external examiners' reports to boards of study, although it was University policy to require the presentation of external examiner reports to boards of study. It is desirable that the University ensures that all external examiners' reports are presented to the relevant board of study.

25 The audit team concluded that, with the exception of the area of the desirable recommendation, the University was making a strong and scrupulous use of external examiners.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

26 The audit team tested the effectiveness of the University's engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points. The University stated in its Briefing Paper that it was aware of and applied the Academic Infrastructure. The team saw evidence of reference to subject benchmarks within programme approval, monitoring and review. Overall, the University's use of the Academic Infrastructure was apparent, although the University had not taken proper account of the FHEQ in 'recognition and validation' overseas collaborative provision. A paper which considered the revised version of the FHEQ, published in August 2008, was received by both the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Panel and the University Modular Framework Management Group, providing assurance to both groups that the University modular framework was, in general, aligned with the principles of the revised FHEQ. However, in the view of the team this general test was not sufficient to overcome the difficulties identified in the operation of 'recognition and validation' overseas collaborative provision. This theme is discussed in detail in Section 5 below.

27 The University has relationships with a diverse range of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies for accreditation or recognition of academic taught programmes. Responsibility for managing engagements with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies is located in schools and faculties, with an overview maintained by the University's Quality and Standards Committee. There was evidence in the documentation and meetings with staff of faculties recognising and implementing professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements within programme approval, monitoring and review.

28 Overall, the audit team found that the University was effective in managing academic standards and using the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points, although this was not the case in collaborative overseas 'recognition and validation' awards.

Assessment policies and regulations

29 Assessment regulations and practices are outlined in the University Modular Framework and guides to assessment. The University stated that its assessment policies and practices met the requirements of the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*, and the audit team found evidence of this in practice.

30 The Student Policy and Regulation Team maintains regulatory oversight of policies and regulations on assessment. The work of the Team includes staff training, dealing with cases of suspected academic impropriety, and academic appeals. Information is published on webpages about these arrangements.

31 The University monitors and reports on matters of assessment. The University has a policy of anonymous marking of examinations and the Academic Board has approved a policy for future anonymous marking of coursework.

32 Each year the University monitors the number and nature of student appeals concerning assessment. With the exception of the theme of feedback for students (see paragraph 33), the audit team was satisfied with the effectiveness of assessment policies and regulations at faculty and university level, and the broad communication of policies and practices evident in module guides, courses guides and other University documentation.

33 The audit team found some student dissatisfaction with the timeliness and consistency of feedback on assessments. It is desirable for the University to ensure that there is a clearly communicated and consistently operated system of deadlines for the provision to students of feedback on assessment.

34 Overall, the audit team found that the University's assessment policies and regulations make an effective contribution to its management of standards, and that they are consistent with the precepts of Sections 4, 5 and 6 of the *Code of practice*.

Management information - statistics

35 The Academic Planning and Information Team produces institutional reports and presentations on admissions, student retention, student completion and achievement, and graduate destinations. These go to the Academic Board, the Strategic Management Group and the Programme Planning and Development Committee. The University stated that institutional statistical reports are also circulated to the Senior Manager's Forum.

36 There has been significant innovation in the use of statistical management information with the development in 2008 of the WebHUB. The WebHUB is used to provide detailed information on progression, retention and student satisfaction, and is used for analysis and decision-making, particularly in the cycle of programme monitoring and review. This has facilitated a more quantitative approach to quality assurance and monitoring arrangements. The audit team commends as good practice the use of electronic recording and performance indicators in the monitoring and review of students and in managing and enhancing the quality of their learning opportunities.

37 The audit team concluded that the University makes effective use of management information in its management of the academic standards of its awards.

38 In its consideration of the University's policies and procedures for the institutional management of the standards of its awards, the audit team concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its home (non-collaborative) awards and of its collaborative awards other than collaborative overseas 'recognition and validation' arrangements.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

39 The University reviewed the relationship between its procedures and the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review* after the introduction of new annual monitoring procedures in 2007-08 and further changes in 2008-09. The *Code of practice* is frequently referenced in course and award documentation.

40 Subject benchmark statements are employed in the development of new modules and programmes and in the review of existing provision. External advisers comment on the extent to which teaching reflects the content of benchmarks. Reports from and responses to professional, statutory and regulatory bodies are considered during annual monitoring and also at validation and review and included in revised programme specifications.

41 The audit team confirmed the University's view that institutional policies and processes have been developed in line with the requirements of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

42 Student learning opportunities are managed by the University's Quality and Standards Committee, reporting annually to the Academic Board. These opportunities are detailed in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Panel manages the development, implementation and review of the Strategy, coordinated by the Director of Teaching and Learning Development as Chair of the Panel. This ensures university-wide implementation. Detailed operational plans are prepared by faculties and service departments, coordinated by a subgroup of the Planning and Programme Development Committee.

43 The new processes for approval of programmes introduced in 2009-10 are discussed in Section 2 above. One of the stated aims of the University in developing these new processes was to 'foster closer engagement by academic staff with quality assurance policies'. The audit team saw evidence of this in the audit trail documentation, notably in responses by course teams to comments on the delivery of the curriculum from external subject advisers during the development of awards. Engagement can also be seen in the involvement of academic staff in the newly constituted course boards.

44 The University has robust and effective procedures for ensuring the quality of students' learning opportunities through approval, monitoring and review. The audit team considered that these have been strengthened through the adoption of the new processes described in Section 2 above.

Management information - feedback from students

45 The University has robust and diverse methods for gathering student feedback, designed to minimise questionnaire fatigue. First-year undergraduates complete a questionnaire; second-year students participate in focus groups run by trained staff; third-year students are asked to complete the National Student Survey. In addition, there are electronic module feedback mechanisms which inform annual programme monitoring.

46 The audit team saw evidence of the use of student feedback at course boards of study, faculty management team meetings and the Quality and Standards Committee, and

noted that the data is also now available for wide dissemination and access on the management information pages of the University's intranet.

47 Findings from the National Student Survey are reported through the Academic Planning and Information Team and the management information web pages. Reports on survey results are considered by the Strategic Management Group and faculty management teams, and also by the Quality and Standards Committee and the Academic Board. Faculty management teams implement action plans in order to address areas of concern within each faculty. A new university-wide approach has been developed for dealing with the 2009 survey results, with the aim of producing more consistency in faculty procedures and report content. The audit team saw evidence in documentation from boards of study that actions resulting from the use of first-year and National Student Surveys in annual monitoring have been taken.

48 The University's internal quality audit, which reported earlier in 2009, recommended improvements in the use of this data, in particular that first-year questionnaire and National Student Survey data should be included in annual monitoring and discussed at boards of study. Consideration of outcomes, action planning and dissemination of best practice are now reported formally at faculty quality committees and the Quality and Standards Committee.

49 Overall, extensive management information is derived from feedback from students through questionnaires, focus groups and the National Student Survey, but see paragraph 19 for comment on the use of students in validation and review.

Role of students in quality assurance

50 Students are represented on all major committees, including the University Standing Panel and faculty committees. There is extensive evidence of student engagement at board of study level. There is good student attendance at boards of study. Many students seen by the audit team had also attended less formal staff-student liaison committees where student opinion was collected and acted on.

51 Since it is University policy that boards of study receive reports of external examiners, it is through membership of these bodies that student representatives would be expected to see external examiner reports. However, the audit team found inconsistency in the presentation of external examiners' reports to boards of study. The team recommends that it is desirable that the University works towards ensuring that external examiners' reports are seen consistently by boards of study, and thus by student representatives. However, at institutional level representation is by sabbatical Students' Union officers and attendance is less regular, except at, for example, the Academic Board and Quality and Standards Committee. Students are clear about their committee roles.

52 The task of providing feedback to students on actions taken on matters raised by students is devolved to schools and departments, and the audit team saw evidence that this occurs through programme boards, through staff-student liaison committees, through personal tutors and through email and web pages.

53 Student Democracy Coordinators have recently been appointed in all faculties to promote student participation and provide training for programme representatives. Both students and staff are very supportive of these new appointments, and the audit team saw evidence in programme board minutes of their role. The team considers that the introduction of Student Democracy Coordinators is an example of good practice as a means of increasing the effectiveness of the student voice.

54 The audit team found that student representation was working effectively in the University and that the recently introduced procedures and appointment of Student Democracy Coordinators were operating effectively, a view confirmed by students both in the student written submission and during meetings.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

55 The University's 2006 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy has as one of its key principles the promotion of teaching that is informed and enriched by research. The draft 2009 revised version maintains this commitment and states as one of its key objectives 'delivering a holistic integrated curriculum...that is informed and enriched by research and scholarly activity'. This commitment is carried through into faculty activities.

56 A Pedagogic Research Forum has been established and meets about 10 times each year to disseminate teaching-related research and provide research training. The Forum also hosts an online site in the virtual learning environment, the Research Informed Teaching Resources Site, containing a wide range of training resources and slideshows. Both the Forum and the resources site are supported by the Learning Development Unit. The Learning Development Unit also hosts an annual two-day learning and teaching conference, attended by many staff, which provides further opportunity to explore the relationship between teaching and research. All of these initiatives are supported by the staff, and the audit team noted the students' awareness of the impact of both discipline and pedagogic research on teaching and learning. The University has, until 2009, used Teaching Quality Enhancement funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England to support this initiative. The staff who met the audit team were not only aware of the resources available to them and the key objectives of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy but had engaged in their development. The team found that the University had a clear commitment to delivering teaching and learning informed by research and scholarship, and had created the mechanisms for achieving it. The impact on the student experience of staff engagement with pedagogic research and development was considered to be a feature of good practice.

Other modes of study

57 Distance learning is a small part of the provision delivered by the University. Guidance on distance learning is provided for staff, and provision of this type is subject to the same quality procedures as on-campus provision. The guidance is delivered through the Learning Development Unit and a Distance Learning Forum.

58 In its meetings with students, and through access to module materials, the audit team learnt of the use of the University's virtual learning environment. Parts of the University make use of this learning resource, and it was praised by the relevant students in meetings with the team.

59 The team tested the scope and effectiveness of the University's approach to flexible and distributed learning, and found that this learning style was understood by staff. Staff reported that, overall, it was a small aspect of the University's provision. The audit team concluded that the University has effective arrangements for managing the quality of students' learning opportunities where these involve other modes of study.

Resources for learning

60 These resources are supplied through Learning and Information Systems and Computing and Information Services. The audit team considered that these two service departments were working well together and delivered learning resources that were appreciated by students. There has been major investment in both departments, and this is planned to continue in 2009-10 in the delivery of a new service, Library and Student Support, that brings together many facets of learning resources and other support services. Students, however, had some reservations about the newly introduced Student Support Zones (see paragraph 69), while praising the facilities for easy search of electronic library resources, and the easy access to electronic journals from home. The team concluded from its meetings with staff and students, and from documentary evidence, that the University manages its learning resources effectively.

Admissions policy

61 The University's Briefing Paper states that it is moving towards the introduction of institution-wide standardised, transparent admissions procedures. There is a comprehensive admissions policy, approved by the University in May 2009, to support this claim. The revision of the admissions policy formed part of the work of the Student Experience Review Special Interest Group. The new University Admissions Policy and Admissions Code of Practice is informed by the QAA *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education*; the principles in the Schwartz Report on fair admissions; and the work of the association Supporting Professionalism in Admissions. It is applicable to all programmes and all types of students, including international students, and it includes the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and sponsors. Widening access to higher education is an important feature of its Admissions Policy.

62 The Policy introduces mandatory training for academic and administrative staff involved in admissions, with additional training provided for staff involved in international recruitment to ensure compliance with legalisation and UK Borders Agency requirements. The audit team confirmed that training takes place.

63 The Quality and Standards Committee has responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the Policy, and the audit team noted that an annual report will be prepared by the Director of Student Recruitment and Widening Access and submitted to the Quality and Standards Committee for consideration. The report will focus on the uptake of the mandatory training.

64 Six faculty admissions hubs are being created. Faculty admissions hubs will oversee all admissions for the faculty and will allow the operation of standardised and transparent admissions procedures. Three of the hubs are operational. The small international recruitment team will support faculty admissions staff. In addition, the Student Recruitment and Widening Access Team will monitor, promote and evaluate admissions practice at faculty level. Successful introduction of the new Admissions Policy was demonstrated to the audit team at both staff and student meetings.

65 The audit team noted that the University's Admissions Policy made reference to English language requirements, including a minimum requirement, but did not specify what the minimum requirement should be, although this was provided to the team on request by email.

66 The new Admissions Policy is designed to provide an enhanced level of service and transparency. Although it is too early to assess the effectiveness of the new arrangements, the audit team found that the students were generally satisfied with admissions process. The

team noted that the University plans to undertake a review of admissions practices in Spring 2011 to evaluate the effectiveness of the new Policy.

Student support

67 Student support is a core objective for the University. Strategic goals for learner support are articulated in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and the Strategic Plan. In addition, the Academic Board has agreed recommendations for learner support. These include the entitlement for students to a review of academic progress at least twice each academic year. The first such opportunity must be within the first six weeks of enrolment. In its Briefing Paper, the University stated that it was left to programme teams to define 'opportunity'. Staff engaged in student support confirmed that there are at least two opportunities each year for a progress review with the personal tutor, and in some cases substantially more. Some schools offer most opportunity in the first year, and re-emphasise opportunities in the final year. Students who met the audit team reported that they were aware of their entitlement.

68 Academic support and guidance are primarily provided at faculty level by students' lecturers and by staff acting as personal or year tutors. Staff reported that the University's expectations regarding the nature and the extent of academic support and guidance are clearly communicated to them through a series of guides on general and specialist learner support and personal tutoring. In addition, there is central training available to prepare them for the role. The audit team examined these guides and found them to be comprehensive and informative. Staff also reported that information available for staff new to teaching in higher education is provided as part of staff induction and through their mentors. In addition, regular updates are provided through the staff intranet and emails. Students confirmed that they all had a personal tutor, and, without exception, expressed the view that their personal tutor is readily accessible, very supportive and can be approached for academic and pastoral issues.

69 Personal support is provided at faculty level and at institution level. For example, at faculty level there are faculty coordinators for disability support who assist students and liaise with central services as required. For other personal support issues, personal tutors refer students to central services. Central services can also be approached by students directly. In all referral cases, service staff will liaise with faculty staff and report on actions taken. At the time of the audit, the central student support arrangements had just undergone a reorganisation following a student experience review. One outcome of the review was that all core student support services, such as the library, student welfare and administrative services, were brought together in one campus location. Student Support Zones were established in learning resource centres. In these Student Support Zones, specialist support such as welfare and study support is available through Student Services by appointment or through referral. Students generally welcomed the new Student Support Zones but, in some cases, still had to familiarise themselves with the different way in which support can be accessed. Although students had not been consulted extensively in the design of the zones, an evaluation of their effectiveness is planned with student participation.

70 Study support is available and covers a wide range of study skills, including English language, numeracy and information technology (IT) skills, and research skills for different categories of students. Details of the services are available on the Student Services web pages. Student Services also provide information on specific academic services, such as examination and assessment. The range of welfare support services includes general and specialist international welfare advice; advice on financial support, a disability service, accommodation and mental health support. Students confirmed that they are generally aware of the services available (although the audit team heard that some part-time students found it more difficult to locate information about services), and that the services are

available to all students regardless of their mode of study within the institution. Entitlements and services available are communicated through handbooks, during induction and on the Student Services website. Students who had accessed central services reported that support is usually of good quality.

71 The Graduate Development Centre provides careers advice and guidance and support on skills development for employability. This includes Personal Development Planning and the World of Work scheme. Staff explained that World of Work is a unique offering, as it offers students the opportunity to obtain employer-certified employability skills, but acknowledged that student participation had been initially slow, but is rising and required more encouragement. The student written submission confirmed this, and stated that many students either did not fully understand the University's approach to Personal Development Planning and World of Work or had not yet engaged with them. Students who met the audit team reported that they value the scheme in principle, but would welcome more support in completing it. The audit team formed the view that the employer-certified part of the World of Work scheme had not yet made a significant impact.

72 The University maintains sufficient oversight of the operation and effectiveness of its student support arrangements through internal student surveys and the National Student Survey. Results are reported to relevant committees and to the Academic Board through Strategic Management Group members who lead strategic initiatives.

73 Overall, the audit team formed the view that the University provides for students effective support covering academic advice and personal support. It monitors the operation of the services through surveys and relevant committees. The various support services contribute positively to the quality of the students' learning experience.

Staff support (including staff development)

74 Responsibility for human resources and staff development in the University is within the portfolio of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Administration). The University has a Human Resources Strategy, which is structured around five key strategic aims. To aid the delivery of the Strategy, the University identified four broad themes and, within each theme, a number of strategic projects. These were reported upon in January 2008. The audit team confirmed that the Strategy was comprehensive and targeted key strategic areas.

75 Staff recruitment and selection are guided by clear job descriptions and person specifications. The University seeks to identify the development needs of staff prior to arrival through clear person specifications and interview processes and, upon arrival, provides a comprehensive induction process. All full-time lecturing staff with less than three years' experience of work in higher education (or equivalent) are required to take the full Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. Part one is compulsory for part-time staff. Usually, new staff are assigned a mentor during their first year. Currently, phase one of a mentoring project for new academic staff is being tested. Phases two and three will cover support of existing and promoted staff respectively. A guide has been produced for support staff taking part in the pilot. Human Resources policies and procedures are communicated to staff by Human Resources advisers, line managers and the Human Resources website, which includes an online staff handbook. Newly appointed staff, met by the audit team, were very complimentary about their induction, the Postgraduate Certificate, and the mentoring system.

76 The University has a comprehensive programme of support for staff, including those in partner institutions, provided through its Centre for Staff Development and the Learning and Development Unit. Primarily, the Centre for Staff Development provides training in management, personal development and leadership, while the Learning Development Unit

focuses on learning and teaching issues. The University has identified core development activities, which new staff undertake within their first year. Implementation was confirmed by staff. The University's Continuing Professional Development framework has been recognised by the Staff and Educational Development Association as part of its Professional Development Framework. The audit team met a range of staff, all of whom were very complimentary about the range of support offered through the Centre for Staff Development and the Learning Development Unit.

77 Staff appraisal is through an annual Personal Development and Performance Review. This is distinct from but linked to the reward systems. To monitor individual progress, interim reviews are to be conducted at regular intervals, with a minimum of one every six months. Staff confirmed that Personal Development and Performance Review was an annual process, but that interim reviews did not take place consistently. Neither were all staff aware that the interim review was a formal requirement of the policy. The Personal Development and Performance Review scheme was supported by staff and found to be an effective way of determining both individual and corporate needs. However, it is desirable that the University bring the practice of interim Personal Development and Performance Review into line with the formal expectation. The University has a well-defined route for promotion to both professors and readers, and discussions with staff found that they were clear about that process.

78 It was the view of the audit team that the way in which staff development is managed and delivered has a very positive impact on the student experience. The team considered as good practice the support provided by the Centre for Staff Development and the Learning Development Unit and the range of activities available for staff, including the staff of partner institutions.

79 Overall, the team found that the University has robust and effective procedures in place for ensuring the quality of students' learning opportunities through approval, monitoring and review; that the new student representation system was working well and that the University has a clear commitment to delivering teaching and learning informed by research and scholarship, and support for staff. The team also noted the recent introduction of Student Democracy Coordinators and the growing impact of student input to boards of study, and that the University provides effective support covering academic advice and personal support. The audit team found that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

80 The University uses the QAA's Institutional audit definition of enhancement. The audit team found evidence of deliberate steps being taken at institutional level to enhance the student experience. The core objectives contained within the University's Strategic Plan are expressed as a clear commitment within quality assurance to the enhancement of the student learning experience. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, developed to support the implementation of the University's Strategic Plan goals for learning, teaching and assessment, has undergone continuous improvement since 1995, and it has developed a strong enhancement focus over time. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy has been developed and implemented in an inclusive way involving staff across the University.

81 The European Foundation for Quality Management Excellence Model is also being used by the University as the framework for the improvement and enhancement of the overall management system, and is having a positive impact on the student experience. The University has achieved an Excellence Award from the Foundation.

82 The University is implementing an institutional-level rolling programme of strategic initiatives to improve the experience of students. These major change projects, led by the Strategic Management Group through special interest groups, include the Student Experience Review; the World of Work initiative (see paragraphs 83-84 for description); and the Estates and IT Systems Development.

83 The Student Experience Review has been led by the Director of Learning and Information Services, with a steering group reporting directly to the Vice-Chancellor. The Briefing Paper affirms that the main aim is to improve the quality of administrative services provided to students. Key principles include improved access, ease of use, flexibility, responsiveness, consistency, professionalism and general customer care. The audit team saw evidence to support this claim, with examples including the introduction of student administrative centres. These centres are located in learning resource centres and provide all student-facing administrative support services.

84 The University's World of Work initiative is intended to provide all students with enhanced opportunities to develop the attributes and skills most valued by employers. There is strategic employer engagement at local, regional and national level. While students welcomed the initiative, they had mixed views. Some felt that implications for programmes of study had not been communicated or implemented well.

85 In the Briefing Paper, the University indicated that there was an institutional commitment to replacing, renewing and enhancing the student and staff learning and work environment. Achievements include the creation of a network of social learning zones and general leisure zones adjacent to catering areas. Management of capital development is devolved by the Strategic Management Group to a Property Advisory Board chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Infrastructure), under which sit project boards. The audit team noted that students are now being invited to contribute to the estates development plans.

86 The University has adopted a strategic approach to the development of its IT systems through the IT Systems Development Programme, aimed at introducing an integrated approach to information management. The student experience has been enhanced, for example, through the introduction of an improved library management system which has been warmly welcomed by the students. The audit team also found examples of technology-enhanced learning projects seeking to promote the use of technology. Examples include software used to detect plagiarism; software that facilitates and promotes vocal instruction, collaboration, coaching, and assessment; Personal Response Systems in class; a virtual learning environment; and the online submission of coursework. The team also saw evidence of a range of support information on learning technologies for students and staff. Meetings with staff and students confirmed, however, that the student experience of the use of technology was variable across the faculties, for example, with some staff making little or no use of the virtual learning environment.

87 The Centre for Excellence in Leadership and Professional Learning, with a focus on employability, leadership and entrepreneurship, is based in two faculties, but is coordinated as an institutional learning and teaching initiative by the Learning Development Unit. The Centre is informing the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and the World of Work initiative. The audit team noted that outputs include the employability model, transitions to higher education, and the use of live employment projects in personal development plans. There are three national teaching fellows associated with the Centre.

88 The audit team found that the Learning Development Unit plays a significant role in enhancement activity. The Unit is responsible for the dissemination of good practice through its staff development activities, annual conference and a range of publications. The Learning Development Unit also coordinates the development, monitoring and review of institutional

and local plans funded by the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund of the funding council. Chairs of faculty learning, teaching and assessment committees and the Director of Learning and Teaching Development work together. There are plans to introduce the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy's prompts into performance review for all staff who teach or support learning. The audit team concluded that these features, in conjunction with established mechanisms and events at faculty level, maximise the dissemination of effective practice and the development of enhancement-led systems.

89 The audit team concluded that the University was taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the student learning experience through the special interest groups, the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, its Estates and IT strategies and the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

90 The University has 49 collaborative partners, with a total of 6,891 students in collaborative arrangements. The majority of partners and collaborative students (29 partners with 4,241 students) are in the United Kingdom. The remaining 20 partners are in South-East and East Asia and in other European countries. The University's strategy to maintain and develop partnerships focuses on selected partners and regions, the development of new partnerships in expanding subjects, and on partnerships that provide progression routes to the University. The University's approach to collaborative provision and its plans for future developments are described in the Strategic Plan and the International Strategy. The latter states that the strategic aim is to maintain focus on academic collaborative partnerships which enhance the University's reputation, meet its requirements for high academic standards, and deliver financial surplus to the University.

91 The University recognises seven categories of collaborative provision. In each case, it describes which party is to develop, validate, teach and own the curriculum. The University classifies collaborative arrangements by type of provision (franchised, validated, accredited, recognition) and study mode (flexible and distance learning, distance-taught). Six types of collaborative arrangements lead to University awards.

92 Franchised programmes, wherein the partner institution is authorised to deliver all or part of a programme, are developed and owned by the University. In the case of franchised programmes, the University offers identical programmes internally, and partner institutions have no discretion to make changes to the curriculum. For validated programmes, wherein the partner institution develops its own programme and delivers it, the partner may change the curriculum subject to the University's approval. The majority of partnerships fall into these first two categories.

93 Third, jointly-validated programmes are programmes validated by two institutions with degree awarding powers. Such programmes can be delivered at the partner institution, the University, or both. Neither partner may change the programme without the other's approval.

94 Accredited programmes are owned and developed by the partner institution and validated as University awards. They are offered by institutions approved as providing a learning experience equivalent to those provided by the University.

95 A fifth category is recognition. Recognition refers to external programmes owned by the partner institution, which are adjudged to provide learning appropriate to advanced entry to a University programme. Sixth, flexible and distributed learning programmes are delivered and supported by means that do not require attendance at particular times and locations. Some distance-taught programmes are delivered overseas, involving travelling University

staff. In these programmes, resources and local non-academic support are provided by a partner organisation.

96 The University also recognises arrangements which are hybrids of these categories; all of these are with overseas colleges. Arrangements designated as 'recognition and validation' provide access to a progression programme at the University, which leads to an honours degree award. In these arrangements, performance in the partner institution's award is recognised as part of the credits for the award of the University's degree. Other arrangements include 'recognition and franchise', 'accredited and franchise' 'franchise and distance-taught' and 'recognition and distance learning'.

97 Arrangements for managing collaborative arrangements and the distribution of authority for quality assurance between the University and its partners vary according to the type of provision described above. For example, the quality of provision and assurance of academic standards for franchised, validated, jointly-validated and distance-taught programmes are managed at faculty and school level under standard procedures which also apply to internal provision. However, in the case of accredited provision this responsibility is, subject to annual monitoring and institutional review by the University, devolved to partners. For all programmes leading to University awards, the University retains responsibility for academic standards. The audit team noted that the distribution of responsibility for quality assurance between the University and partner institutions is clearly described in the memorandum of cooperation which is part of the contractual agreement between the collaborating institutions.

98 The management of collaborative provision is undertaken at different levels of the University. At institutional level, collaborative arrangements are managed by the Collaborative Partnerships Team and the Quality Support Team. The former is responsible for institutional approval of partners and for the continuing management of partnerships through University committees. The Quality Support Team carries out the quality management of collaborative partnerships, including programme approval, monitoring, review and external examining. University committees such as the Programme Planning and Development Committee and the partnerships and partner colleges panels monitor various aspects of collaborative provision management. At faculty level, directors of schools or directorates manage the operation of partnerships. Themes include liaison with partners, annual monitoring, and the relationship with accredited institutions sustained through reciprocal attendance at quality committees.

99 All collaborative links have a designated person who has a key role in managing the link. For most partnerships this is a Link Tutor; for recognition agreements there is a School Contact Person, and for accredited institutions a Relationship Manager. Their role is to advise and to facilitate the link of the partner with roles and services in the University, and they are expected to maintain regular contact with the programme team and students at the partner institution through visits, email and telephone. They are also members of the boards of study and assessment boards, and provide mid-year and annual reports. Their roles and responsibilities are clearly specified in guidance documents. Training for the link role is provided centrally by the Collaborative Partnerships Team, and may be supplemented by faculty support and guidance arrangements. The audit team examined the guidance documents for link staff, and found them to be comprehensive and useful.

100 The audit team explored the theme of communication with staff from partner institutions, and formed the view that this is working effectively. University staff are in regular email contact with key personnel at partner institutions, and partners are invited to attend meetings of the Partnerships Forum and staff development events. There are regular visits at subject level by the Link Tutor; non-academic staff also visit partners and provide support as required. The Collaborative Partnerships Team makes an annual strategic visit to

overseas partners and to further education partners in the UK. There are plans to extend these visits to all partner institutions.

101 In the University's agreements, the operation of most elements of collaborative provision which bear directly on the student experience are the responsibility of partner institutions. The audit team found that partners had a clear understanding of their own institution's and the University's responsibilities. Although the University does not stipulate in detail procedures that partners are expected to have for managing the student experience, it scrutinises partner arrangements at partner approval and programme approval and review. The team can confirm that the University's expectations for the student experience are understood by partner institutions, and effectively monitored by the University.

102 Overall, the audit team found that the University approaches its collaborations in a developmental and supportive manner. The University communicates regularly, and consults partners in the development of its procedures and protocols for managing quality and standards. It also provides development opportunities for partner institution staff. The University's monitoring and management arrangements enable interaction at various levels between the University and partner institution staff and students. The audit team regards as good practice the University's support in collaborative provision of the student experience and of its partner institutions.

Academic Infrastructure

103 The University's strategy is to embed the Academic Infrastructure in internal regulations and procedures, just as it does for internal provision. In reviewing the use made of external reference points in collaborative provision, the audit team found the requirements of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* embedded in the University's procedures for the management of collaborative programmes. Recently the University also undertook a review to reconfirm that Section 2 of the *Code of practice* is fully integrated into procedures. The team found evidence of clearly written programme specifications which make reference to subject benchmark statements.

104 All programmes that lead to the University's awards are required to follow the University Modular Framework regulations. Any approved variance with regard to assessment has to be aligned with the principles of the University Modular Framework. The University affirms that this Framework is aligned with the FHEQ, published by QAA. However, the University Modular Framework makes incomplete recognition of the 2008 FHEQ, which replaced the 2001 edition, and still refers to previous level designations (see paragraph 114).

105 The University has three 'recognition and validation' arrangements with overseas partners, one of which the audit team considered in detail. The partnership has been operating for a significant number of years, and currently involves 12 programmes across a range of subject areas. Two different methods of recognition and validation are used with the partner. The first of the two versions involves the granting of advanced standing (recognition) of 300 credits upon the student's completion of an Advanced Diploma at the partner institution. This recognition includes acceptance of 60 of the 300 credits as being at level 6 of the UK's FHEQ, and provides for the student's entry to a 60-credit progression programme validated by the University as an internal programme. These last 60 credits are delivered by the University in the UK over fourteen weeks, on successful completion of which students obtain an honours degree from the University. This progression programme represents the 'validation' aspect of the arrangement.

106 The second version of 'recognition and validation' arrangements places all of the final-year (level 6) curriculum and its delivery firmly within the University's authority. Only 240 credits are awarded as advanced standing on completion of the partner's Advanced Diploma, and 60 level 6 credits are validated by the University as a combination of distance-taught and distance-learning provision delivered by University staff at the partner before students join the rest of the honours degree progression programme in the UK. However, the University intends to replace this version with the version described in paragraph 105.

107 The recognition part of the arrangement is an approved exception to the usual requirements of the University's own University Modular Framework for recognition agreements, which state that the maximum credit from prior learning that may normally count towards an undergraduate award is 75 per cent. In the current case it is 83 per cent.

108 A second licensed variation to the University Modular Framework regulations involves the honours degrees being classified on the basis of final-year credits only. In the arrangement scrutinised by the audit team, 60 credits earned by students from the final level of the partner college's qualification and 60 credits from the University's progression programme are used for the classification of the degree. Sixty credits from the partner provision must, therefore, be delivered at level 6 of the FHEQ. In addition, in line with University Modular Framework regulations, compensation is permitted for the failure of 12 credits on the University's 60-credit progression programmes. Therefore, it is possible for a student to obtain the University's honours degree having successfully completed only 48 credits studied at the University on one of the University's programmes.

109 The University thus accepts students with an unusually high amount of recognised credit, with the degree-level part of it not entirely under the University's control and therefore within its ability to assure academic standards. It also allows the possibility of compensation for failure, leading to students being awarded University honours degrees with a very small amount of degree-level credit for which the University assures the standards. The audit team considered that this combination embodied significant risks.

110 The first version (paragraph 105) of the 'recognition and validation' has been operating with these credit arrangements for some years, and the Collaborative provision audit report of 2006 made the advisable recommendation that the University reconsider the proportion of credit which may be used in a 'recognition and validation' agreement. The University considered the recommendation in 2007. It noted that external examiner reports for the programmes were satisfactory, and decided to conduct a strategic review of the operation of the partnership, drawing upon evidence from programme reviews. This strategic overview took place in July 2009, having been deferred for some while in order to accommodate discussions with the partner about possible major changes to the nature of the partnership. In its Briefing Paper, the University stated that it had reconsidered the proportion of credit to be awarded against the standards specified in the FHEQ and the emerging qualifications framework of the partner's country. On the basis of these considerations and the outcomes of the University's review (which did not comment on the amount and level of credit recognition), the University decided to continue with its arrangements unchanged, that is, generally accepting the partner institution's award as representing 300 University credits. To summarise, in the first version of arrangements, the proportion and level of credit recognised have not changed since 2006.

111 The audit team examined the way in which the University reached the decision to recognise the partner's Advanced Diploma as worth 300 University credits, of which 60 are deemed to be at FHEQ level 6. More specifically, the team examined the way in which the University had mapped the partner's Advanced Diplomas against the University's honours programmes, and continued to monitor for curriculum match, academic levels and student academic performance. The University explained that it had undertaken curriculum mapping

based on module learning outcomes. The process for curriculum mapping is detailed in the validation and review manuals for recognition agreements. Mapping of learning outcomes can occur in two ways. Where there is a similar programme at the University, mapping of learning outcomes of the partner's award is carried out against modules from all levels of this programme. Where there is no such corresponding programme, partner module learning outcomes are mapped against expected learning outcomes, with the level of study taken into account. Levels are defined in the University Modular Framework. Further mapping occurs if the partner's or the University's curriculum is changed at programme review.

112 Since the partnership arrangements had been established at the time of the previous FHEQ, the audit team explored how the University had satisfied itself that its credit recognition arrangements meet the requirements of the 2008 FHEQ. In the University's mapping, 60 of the 300 recognised credits are deemed to be at the UK's FHEQ level 6, and it is on this basis that the University awards honours degree qualifications, in a credit calculation that includes adding these 60 final-year level 6 credits from the partner award to 60 level 6 credits of the University's validated progression programmes.

113 The University acknowledged to the audit team that it had not undertaken a mapping of the level of the Advanced Diploma awards of the partner by mapping the overseas qualifications framework against the FHEQ.

114 The audit team acknowledged that an alternate route to mapping the Advanced Diploma intended learning outcomes against the FHEQ could be followed by mapping Advanced Diploma learning outcomes against the University's own University Modular Framework, which the University affirms to be mapped against the FHEQ. However, the University Modular Framework which the team saw conflates the 2001 and 2008 FHEQs. This is significant since, whereas the 2001 FHEQ maps both Advanced Diploma and non-honours bachelor's degree to the Intermediate level, these qualifications have been separated into level 5 and level 6, respectively, in the 2008 FHEQ. The University Modular Framework, on the other hand continues to note that 'Foundation Degree level' (the term used in level 5 of the 2008 FHEQ) includes 'ordinary (non-Honours) degrees, the Foundation degree, Diploma of Higher Education, and other higher diplomas'. The University Modular Framework, taken at face value, gives inadequate assurance, therefore, that part of the Advanced Diploma is at the same level as the non-honours bachelor's degree. The team concluded that the University was not in a position to know that the partner qualification or award was at the correct level when expressed in terms of the 2008 UK FHEQ.

115 On the basis of the available evidence, the audit team concluded the University cannot be certain that it uses credits at the level required by the FHEQ and by its own regulations for awarding honours degrees and determining degree classifications for these partnership arrangements. The team was mindful that the *Code of practice* expects the academic standards of all awards made under collaborative arrangements to meet the expectations of the UK Academic Infrastructure. As the University has no direct control of the standards and quality of the overseas qualification, the team formed the view that it should have been more careful in the academic mapping that it undertook to assure itself that imported overseas credits correspond to the requirements of the FHEQ. It is therefore essential that the University ensure that awards of the 'recognition and validation' type in overseas collaborative provision are aligned with the FHEQ, published in 2008.

116 For the assurance of standards and monitoring of academic performance during the UK semester of the progression programmes, the University appoints external examiners, who, as well as reporting on the assessment of the validated programme, are expected to visit the partner, where they have the opportunity to meet students, observe assessment boards and view (but not moderate) work from the Advanced Diploma. Reports of the

external examiners expressed satisfaction with the standards of, and student achievement on, the progression programmes.

117 From the evidence it was clear, however, that not all of the external examiners had visited the partner. Not all external examiners had been able to observe on site and comment in visit reports to the University on the standards of the partner awards and the achievement of students on the Advanced Diploma programmes. The University's review of the partnership is addressing this issue.

118 Selection of students by the University for the progression programmes is by an interview, which must also establish the English-language competence of candidates. Formal English-language entry requirements are often waived for students of this partnership as the recognised qualification is taught and assessed in English and students have to pass a series of English-language modules. Given the language challenges that some students reported when undertaking the progression programmes, overall this approach is not always helpful for students. Evidence also suggests that progression selection interviews did not take place for all students, and those that were conducted did not all follow the same format. Variation of format fosters possible unequal treatment of applicants. The University is addressing this issue through the introduction of standardised interview sheets and a requirement that all students have to be interviewed.

119 For supporting the quality of the student experience at the partner, a range of visits and developmental opportunities exists to indicate that the University takes seriously its role of supporting the partner. Overview of the operation of progression programmes is achieved through programme team planning meetings, staff-student meetings and boards of study, as well as an annual review and evaluation meeting.

120 The student experience during the transition between institutions and during attendance at the University is assured through a tailored system of student academic and pastoral support. For example, University progression programme leaders provide briefings and an informative website for students that holds comprehensive, helpful information on academic and non-academic matters relevant for studying at the University and living in the UK. Detailed student handbooks with programme and assessment information are available, and student helpers provide pastoral and tutorial support.

Approval of partners

121 The audit team examined the University's partnership approval process, and confirms that the University has strong arrangements. The process includes a due diligence enquiry, an institutional visit and approval by University committees. It is generally thoroughly implemented. The Collaborative Partnership Team establishes the appropriateness and viability of proposed new partners on the basis of due diligence checks into matters which include academic standing, financial stability, and reputation. The University also appoints a project leader from the relevant school, and after further detailed scrutiny and financial costing a formal proposal is submitted for approval to a Partnerships Panel and subsequently to the Programme Planning and Development Committee. There are slight variations in the partner approval process depending on the funding source for programmes. For example, for partnerships with HEFCE-funded programmes there is no institutional visit.

122 All partnerships are governed by a contractual agreement, or, in the case of recognition agreements, by a memorandum of agreement following a template which meets the precepts of the *Code of practice*. The contract is signed following programme approval. Contractual agreements specify procedures for partnership termination, which can be triggered by quality concerns, financial insolvency or breach of contract. The process

includes a centrally approved and monitored exit strategy which takes account of the needs of students enrolled on programmes. The audit team studied the termination procedures and reviewed a small sample of closures, from which it found evidence of the University honouring its commitment to current students and making arrangements for their progression.

Programme approval and review

123 The University's approach to the approval, monitoring and review of collaborative programmes differs in large part from the processes for internal provision that have recently been introduced. At the time of the audit the University had not yet applied the trialled new process for validation and review to collaborative provision.

124 Like internal programmes, all new collaborative programmes, in both new and existing partner institutions, require initial planning approval. This does not involve consideration of the academic content of a programme, being primarily concerned with the integrity of the business case, resource requirements and alignment of the proposal with faculty and institutional planning. The procedures for the two-stage programme validation and review process are specified in procedures manuals specific to the categories of provision, and managed centrally with faculty involvement. There is some variability of emphasis for different types of collaboration. The requirements, including those for approval panel composition, which always involve external representation, are clearly stated. Following a pre-validation or pre-review meeting, at which the quality of event documentation is checked, a validation or review approval meeting takes place. The audit team explored the validation and review process for a small sample of collaborative programmes. The documentation demonstrated that the proper processes are followed, and that validation and review panels include the required external membership.

Monitoring of programmes

125 Programme monitoring is a shared responsibility of the University and the partner institution. Programme monitoring for collaborative programmes varies from that for internal provision in the focus of the monitoring report and the level of consideration. The central monitoring tool is the annual Programme Assessment and Action Document (PSAAD), which specifies risk-weighted actions and items of effective practice, and includes an annual report by the link tutor. The PSAAD also includes consideration of admissions, progression, completion and achievement profiles; the effectiveness of approaches to learning, teaching and assessment and of learning resources; external examiners' reports and programme team commentaries on them; student feedback and response actions. In its Briefing Paper, the University explained that plans were being developed to move to continuous consideration of data as they emerge, as is already the case for internal provision. The audit team found the PSAADs to be a useful tool that generally enables adequate monitoring of collaborative programmes.

126 All partner institutions (or University programme teams in the case of recognition arrangements) are required to prepare and submit to the Quality Support Team a PSAAD for each programme for which they have responsibility. Extensive and helpful guidance on how to write an effective PSAAD is available to report authors.

127 Unlike internal reports, PSAADs are considered at two levels; centrally by the Quality Support Team for University issues and at faculty level for subject-specific issues. The Partnerships Quality and Standards Panel considers an annual overview report, and partners are given feedback on the quality of their PSAADs, and on issues raised. Faculties address matters within their control, identifying in exception reports to the relevant Faculty Quality Committee matters requiring resolution at faculty or institutional level. All significant

issues requiring attention at institutional level are reported to the Academic Board in an Annual Academic Quality Report. Analysis of a small sample of PSAADs led the audit team to the view that they are subject to thorough scrutiny with effective action following, and that they respond appropriately to issues raised by external examiners and students, and are effective in identifying good practice. The team confirms that the University effectively monitors its collaborative programmes at programme, faculty and institutional level.

128 Monitoring of other aspects of collaborative arrangements delegated to the partner, such as the provision of academic and pastoral support, learning resources and arrangements for obtaining feedback from students, is carried out by link tutors during partner visits. The team found evidence of monitoring in mid-year and annual link tutor reports.

Assessment

129 The assessment process for collaborative provision, like that for internal provision, is governed by the University Modular Framework. Variations can be sought and are approved by the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Panel under delegated authority of the Planning and Programme Development Committee. Collaborative programmes, like internal provision, are assessed through a two-tier assessment board system of module and programme assessment boards. The collaborative provision manuals give details of the University's policy on the language of tuition and assessment, which is normally English. The Briefing Paper stated that any variations are considered by the Planning and Programme Development Committee. The audit team was informed that only one other institution operated under an agreed variation.

External examining

130 The appointment and role of external examiners for collaborative programmes are the same as for internal programmes. Appointment and briefing are undertaken in consultation with the partner institution. For franchised programmes, external examiners are usually the same as for internal programmes in order to ensure parity of standards. Reports for collaborative provision are received in the same way as for internal provision, and are addressed in a similar manner. The audit team was informed that reports are shared with the partner, and that recommendations are addressed in dialogue with the partner. Both the reports themselves and the formal written responses are included in the relevant PSAAD. In addition, an overview of issues to be addressed at institutional level, proposed actions from collaborative PSAADs, and difficulties and good practice identified by external examiners forms part of the Annual Academic Quality Report. A study of a small sample of collaborative external examiners' reports indicates that they express satisfaction with the standards and quality of programmes delivered by partner institutions. In cases where concerns were raised by external examiners, the team found evidence of decisive action taken to address the problems.

Transcripts

131 Responsibility for the provision of student transcripts lies with the University. The University issues diploma supplements which clearly state the language of tuition and the place of study.

Role of students in quality assurance

132 The University requires partner institutions to establish arrangements for student representation that match those operating for internal programmes. Some variations are permitted. All programmes are required to have a board of study, or equivalent, with student

representatives. It is usual practice for meetings of these boards to include as a standing item reports from student representatives. Student representation is also evident in programme review. The review reports seen by the audit team demonstrated that meetings with student representatives usually take place as part of programme reviews.

133 Student representation at programme level is well established and was valued by the students who met the audit team. They told the team that arrangements for student representation are generally effective. All students who met the team understood their status as students of the University and the collaborative nature of their programmes, confirmed that their views are adequately represented, and gave examples of how contacts with staff have enabled potentially difficult issues to be resolved at an early stage. They also reported regular contact with their link tutor, whose role they regarded as an additional means of ensuring that their views are represented to the University.

Feedback from students

134 Responsibility for capturing and using student feedback is devolved to partner institutions, and feedback mechanisms are usually checked at validation. Partners are expected to discuss a summary of student feedback and responses to it in their PSAADs. Scrutiny of a small sample of collaborative PSAADs demonstrated effective monitoring of student feedback at programme level. Annual monitoring reports, supplemented by link tutor mid-year and annual reports and boards of study minutes, are the primary means through which the University receives feedback from students in partner institutions. Actions for the University are followed up by the link tutor or are referred to University staff. The audit team was advised by students that they consider that their views are noted and acted upon.

Learning resources

135 The University has responsibility for the initial approval of the suitability of learning resources at partner institutions. Their suitability is first considered as part of the partner approval process. In addition, at validation learning resources are evaluated by the validation panel based on, amongst other evidence, a report from the Learning and Information Services Team and a tour of resources. The responsibility for the continued provision of learning resources is delegated to partner institutions. The University monitors this through link tutors. Partners are required to evaluate learning resources as part of annual monitoring. From the evidence available, the audit team confirms that the University and partners take their responsibilities seriously in this respect.

136 In addition to local learning resources, the majority of collaborative students also have access to the University's electronic learning resources. Access rights are defined in the contractual agreement. Students and staff at partner institutions confirmed that they had access to the University's electronic learning resources, and students were satisfied with what is provided in this way.

Staffing and staff development

137 Responsibility for staffing rests with the partner institution. The University has a policy on staff qualifications for collaborative partners. This is detailed in the Collaborative Partnerships Manual. Through faculty quality committees, the University checks partner staff qualifications and experience first at validation and then, in the case of staff changes, once the programme is running. The audit team was informed that these checks are thorough and on occasion have resulted in non-approval of proposed staff.

138 Although staff development of partner institution staff is a partner responsibility, the University gives practical support to the development of partner staff, both academic and

non-academic. For example, partner institution teaching staff are invited to the University's staff development activities. Bespoke training is available upon request. Partner staff are also encouraged to attend and present at the Learning and Teaching Conference, and some have taken up this opportunity. In addition, there is a Partnerships Forum which is held at the University several times each year for those partner and University staff with responsibility for the management of partnerships. The audit team considered as good practice the support provided by the Centre for Staff Development and the Learning Development Unit and the range of activities available for the staff of partners.

Student support

139 The provision of student support is delegated to partner institutions. The suitability of arrangements is checked at programme validation and review. It is monitored by link tutors through their reports. Link tutors provide additional support, if required, during their visits to partner institutions.

Information for students

140 The University retains overall control of publicity material relating to collaborative links issued by partners. The partnership agreement specifies the University's responsibility and the procedures for approval of marketing materials. Partners are required to submit marketing material to the Marketing Department, through the link tutor, for approval, including electronic material. The audit team ascertained that partner institutions are aware of these requirements and that checking was rigorous.

141 The University provides a comprehensive student handbook for students in UK partners, and a brief guide for collaborative students at overseas partner institutions. Both include information about complaints, academic appeals and misconduct. This is supplemented by information in student handbooks. Responsibility for the provision of programme and module information is delegated to partner institutions only after completion of the approval process. The degree of delegation is agreed at approval and varies according to the nature of the partnership. The University monitors the quality of information provided in handbooks at validation and review and in 2006 conducted an internal academic audit on the quality of student handbooks provided by partner institutions. The review led to the formulation of a list of desirable contents for handbooks, and this was incorporated in the validation and review procedures manuals. The audit team examined a small sample of current programme handbooks, and found them comprehensive, user-friendly and containing the information specified by the University. Students who met the team confirmed that the information that they received was clear, accurate and helpful.

142 The University requires partner institutions to have complaints, appeals and academic misconduct procedures consistent with those operating for internal programmes. It expects cases brought under these procedures to be dealt with in the first instance at partner level, but instigates an investigation using its own procedures where issues remain unresolved. This was confirmed by staff at partner institutions. The students who met the audit team were also aware of this.

143 On the basis of the available evidence, the audit team concluded that the University effectively manages the quality of learning opportunities in its collaborative provision and, with the exception of its 'recognition and validation' awards, has effective systems to safeguard the standards of its collaborative provision.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

144 The University operates a number of postgraduate research awards. Its MRes and Professional Doctorate operate under the University's Modular Framework, while its MPhil, MPhil with transfer to PhD, PhD direct and PhD by Publication (a staff-only award) operate under the University's Research Degrees Committee. The University is a member of the New Route PhD Consortium and is in the process of establishing this integrated award. The University also has the provision for dual awards with collaborative partners.

145 Under the leadership of the Research Degrees Committee institutional responsibility for research degree programmes lies with the Research Support Office. Academic standards are maintained and the quality of postgraduate research programmes is assured through the Research Degree Regulations, supplemented by the Code of Practice for Research Students and Supervisors. The Research Degrees Committee is accountable to the University's Quality and Standards Committee and the Academic Board, and there are clear reporting arrangements. The University Research Degrees Committee comprises representation from faculty research degree committees and now has student representation and is chaired by the Head of Research Programme Development. Some responsibilities are appropriately devolved to the University's faculties, which operate faculty-level research degrees committees.

146 The QAA special review of research degrees programmes reported in July 2006 with a judgement that, overall, the institution's ability to secure the standards and quality of its Research Degree Programmes was 'appropriate and satisfactory'. From the evidence which the audit team reviewed it is clear that the University has addressed matters which might have needed further consideration following the QAA review.

147 Admissions criteria are defined in the University's Research Degree Regulations, and the faculty research degrees committees have oversight of the admission of postgraduate research students. Students are primarily located in areas which were successfully submitted to the Research Assessment Exercise. The audit team noted that the minimum entry requirement has been amended to an upper second-class honours degree in keeping with the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*. Where students are admitted with non-traditional qualifications, detailed academic references are required. Admission to PhD direct is permitted only with a relevant existing master's-level qualification. Additional English language support for overseas students is provided by the International Study Centre.

148 The University acknowledges that there is a need to improve completion rates for postgraduate research students. The audit team noted that the main themes for the Research Degrees Committee 2007-08 were completion rates for postgraduate research students, ensuring that regulations and procedures are supportive of student progression and prompt completion rates. The team found that, where a student is required to revise and resubmit the thesis following an oral examination, the Research Support Office reviews and clarifies the supervisory arrangements to ensure adequate support during the revision period.

149 The audit team noted that the University operates an effective 'traffic light' system for reporting and overseeing the student experience, and makes recommendations to the Academic Board for the conduct and management of research degree programmes. The traffic light system, introduced in 2007-08, consists of electronic student milestone reports that assist in monitoring student progression against regulatory requirements, such as induction and ethical approval, and progression milestones such as registration, transfer and

thesis submission. Milestone reports are updated monthly and made available through a secure web portal to the Research Degrees Committee, faculty research degrees committee chairs and faculty research administrators. The team concluded that the use of electronic recording and performance indicators in the monitoring and review of students and in managing and enhancing the quality of their learning opportunities was a feature of good practice.

150 The University subscribes to and promotes the Higher Education Academy Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, has above-average levels of student participation, and obtains further feedback in an exit questionnaire and annual monitoring reports. All of these assist in identifying patterns and issues. The Research Support Office has recently moved from analysing annually completion rates of individual students to reviewing completion rates by cohorts of students (academic year of initial enrolment) and by faculty, in order to identify areas of concern and best practice.

151 Attendance at University induction programmes for research students is mandatory and normally expected within three to six months of enrolment. The audit team noted that there is a good uptake and that these induction programmes are supplemented at faculty level. The Research Degree Regulations require that a student shall have at least two and not more than three supervisors. One supervisor is designated the Director of Studies and is responsible for supervision on a 'regular and frequent basis'. Additional advisers are permitted where they are able to contribute specialised knowledge or provide a link to an external collaborating organisation. The audit team noted that faculty research degrees committees are charged with reviewing and assessing supervisory loads for individual staff members, and that supervisory arrangements are reviewed as part of annual monitoring. However, the audit team was of the view that, in the absence of a maximum number of supervisees for each supervisor, it is desirable that the University provide more guidance on how many postgraduate research students a supervisor might be expected to manage.

152 The university-wide complaints procedure is applicable to research students and includes arrangements for students unable to resolve a matter with their supervisory team.

153 New members of staff and inexperienced members of existing staff attend the University's research supervisors workshop before being approved as a supervisor.

154 A revised procedure has been introduced for transfer from MPhil to PhD. The revised process is intended to contribute to improvements in overall completion rates by providing a more structured process for transfer and transfer decisions, which requires the assessors and supervisory teams to reconsider the feasibility of research programmes to ensure timely completion. The audit team formed the view that it was premature to attribute improvements in completion rates to this revised system. The team found that students were familiar with these new arrangements.

155 There is a training framework for research students, which includes a student-led skills audit completed at induction and reviewed annually by the student and supervisor. The skills audit used by the University is informed by the national Roberts Skills Agenda, and is an aid to planning training needs. However, the audit team found that not all students were familiar with the skills audit. Postgraduate research students confirmed that they are able to access research and generic skills training in Master's in Research (MRes) programmes and personal development training arranged by the Centre for Staff Development. Individual schools and faculties run workshops for postgraduate students. Career advice is provided through the University's Graduate Development Centre and the team found evidence of individual supervisors providing effective career advice to supervisees, resulting in students being more proactive regarding future career aspirations. The team noted that the University is developing a framework to provide guidance at faculty level for supporting research

students who undertake teaching responsibilities. The team concluded that it is desirable for the University to ensure that postgraduate research students undertaking teaching are provided with adequate guidance and support.

156 Examining teams for all postgraduate programmes must demonstrate examining experience and subject expertise, and are recommended by faculty research degrees committees before approval by the University. Internal candidates require an additional external examiner. The Academic Board has approved amendments to the Research Degree Regulations which increase the range of recommendations that may be made by an examining team. These include a reduced timescale for the completion of minor amendments to improve completion rates. The audit team saw clear definitions of minor, moderate and major amendments.

157 A research misconduct policy has been approved by the Academic Board. This provides a procedure for dealing with allegations of research impropriety and is in line with national guidelines. Students are able to appeal through the University system against the decisions of examiners.

158 The arrangements for postgraduate research students have been subject to review and development informed by the *Code of practice* and the outcomes of the QAA special review of postgraduate research programmes, conducted in July 2006. The development of the University Degree Regulations provides a student-centred framework for all postgraduate research provision. Institutional oversight is maintained by the Academic Board, with clear reporting arrangements from faculty-level committees through the University's Research Degrees Committee. The audit team found evidence of concerted efforts being made by the University to ensure higher levels of completion.

159 The audit team concluded that the University's procedures for the support, assessment and supervision of research degrees align with the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Section 7: Published information

160 The audit team found that the accuracy of published information and the way in which the University manages information has been addressed since the last Institutional audit, and continues to be developed and improved. An example is the introduction of the Campus Solutions website. The Briefing Paper stated that all the information required by funding bodies is published and that the University has formal mechanisms to ensure the accuracy, legality and currency of its published information. The team found that this was the case. The team found that the University uses the web to convey most of the information required by applicants, students and staff, and maintains an archive of all copyrighted material. All corporate information published by the University is generated, designed and approved by the Corporate Communications Team, based upon submissions from faculties and service teams.

161 The University makes all information required under Annex F of the Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) document 06/45 publicly available, as well as uploading the required data onto the Unistats website. The audit team saw a range of handbooks and leaflets which were made available in hard copy to students.

162 Information at faculty level is generated and managed through the use of a content management system, and a workflow system is used to approve content in response to feedback following the last audit. The content management system ensures that information is accurate and accessible. Web authors are employed in each faculty. The production of collaborative provision publicity is governed by partnership agreements that detail the

partner's contractual responsibilities. The Corporate Communications Team approves publication materials. Programme specifications are approved within the validation process, with definitive versions being held in a special facility for managing version control. These definitive versions are then accessed to reproduce programme specifications in handbooks and on the web. The audit team concluded that the detailed nature of the University's programme specifications and their ready and secure availability through the internet were a feature of good practice.

163 The University produces an annual applicant guide for prospective students, and reviews its content to ensure that it meets applicants' needs. Students confirmed to the audit team that this pre-application information was helpful. Publication of course information is managed centrally, with every programme having to be approved and validated prior to production of any marketing materials.

164 The Briefing Paper stated that the Academic Planning and Information Team together with faculty staff check the accuracy and completeness of the Higher Education Statistics Agency student record. This work includes referring to previous returns and to planning assumptions made. The audit team saw evidence which supported this claim.

165 Results from the University's 2009 Student Opinion Survey indicate that 76.4 per cent of students were satisfied or very satisfied with the accuracy of programme information that they received before they commenced their studies. In this survey, 79.6 per cent were satisfied or very satisfied with the information that they received about their programme once on their course, for example the programme handbook, which provides signposts to the range of information available to students to support their studies.

166 External examiner reports are made available to students through boards of study. However, the audit team found that students were not always aware of this. It is desirable for the University to ensure that external examiners' reports are made more available to students.

167 To further improve communications to students and address current variations across the institution, a Student Communications Group has been established to provide a corporate and institution-wide approach to developing a coherent and consistent level of communication with students before, during and after their time at the University. The group's remit includes all modes of communication.

168 Overall, the audit team found that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

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