Institutional audit

University of Manchester

April 2011

Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA's) mission is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. To this end, QAA carries out Institutional audits of higher education institutions.

In England and Northern Ireland QAA conducts Institutional audits on behalf of the higher education sector, to provide public information about the maintenance of academic standards and the assurance of the quality of learning opportunities provided for students. It also operates under contract to the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland to provide evidence to meet their statutory obligations to assure the quality and standards of academic programmes for which they disburse public funding. The audit method was developed in partnership with the funding councils and the higher education representative bodies, and agreed following consultation with higher education institutions and other interested organisations. The method was endorsed by the then Department for Education and Skills. It was revised in 2006 following recommendations from the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group, a representative group established to review the structures and processes of quality assurance in England and Northern Ireland, and to evaluate the work of QAA.

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

The aim of the Institutional audit process is to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges of higher education in England and Northern Ireland have effective means of:

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

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

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and the quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes

- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research
- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

If the audit includes the institution's collaborative provision the judgements and comments also apply unless the audit team considers that any of its judgements or comments in respect of the collaborative provision differ from those in respect of the institution's 'home' provision. Any such differences will be reflected in the form of words used to express a judgement or comment on the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, and about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards.

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

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

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

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

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Manchester (the University) from 4 to 8 April 2011 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 that the University offers.

To arrive at its conclusions, the audit team spoke to members of staff throughout the University and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the University manages the academic aspects of its provision.

In Institutional audit, the institution's management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are audited. The term 'academic standards' is used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the UK. The term 'quality of learning opportunities' is used to describe the support provided by an institution to enable students to achieve the awards. It is about the provision of appropriate teaching, support and assessment for the students.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

- **confidence** can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers
- **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, and that a separate audit activity focusing solely on this provision is not necessary.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit team concluded that the University's approach to quality enhancement has helped to develop an ethos that expects and encourages enhancement of learning opportunities.

Postgraduate research students

The audit team concluded that the University's management of its research degree programmes generally meets the expectations of the *Code of practice*, *Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

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

- the University's framework for non-academic student support
- the Peer Assisted Study Scheme
- opportunities for students to engage in personal development outside their academic discipline
- the development and implementation of eProg to support postgraduate research students.

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- implement measures designed to achieve greater response rates to internal student surveys
- clarify its approach to providing academic support and ensure this approach is understood by staff and students
- ensure that all research students are supervised by a supervisory team which includes a co-supervisor.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- share external examiner reports with student representatives at all levels in all faculties
- review its approach to linking teaching and research, with a view to developing an overarching institutional policy
- in the context of its collaborative provision, strengthen mechanisms for disseminating information and sharing good practice both between the University and its collaborative partners and among different schools within the University.

Reference points

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

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

The audit found that the University took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

Report

1   An Institutional audit of the University of Manchester (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 4 April 2011. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2   The audit team comprised Professor Paul Brunt, Professor Douglas Halliday, Professor David Lamburn, Professor Elisabeth Lillie, Mr Tobin Webb and Professor Denis Wright, auditors, and Ms Jenny Lyon, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mr Will Naylor, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3   The University of Manchester was founded on 1 October 2004 following the dissolution of the Victoria University of Manchester and the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology. It is the largest single-site higher education institution in the UK, with a mission 'To make The University of Manchester one of the top 25 universities in the world by 2015 and to remain thereafter a world-leader in the quality of higher education we offer, the excellence and impact of the research we undertake and the value of the contributions we make to the economic, social and cultural life and environmental sustainability of the wider society.'

4   As at 1 December 2009 the University had a student population of 39,438, of which 28,313 were undergraduate, 7,552 were postgraduate taught and 3,573 were postgraduate research students; 8,041 were overseas students.

5   Teaching takes place across a broad range of disciplines, which are organised into four faculties: Engineering and Physical Sciences, Humanities, Life Sciences, and Medical and Human Sciences. The faculties comprise a number of schools. The University also has numerous specialist research groups.

6   In the previous audit cycle the University had separate Institutional and collaborative provision audits in 2005 and 2006 respectively. Both resulted in judgements of broad confidence in the University's management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards. In aggregate the two audits identified nine features of good practice and generated seven recommendations where action was considered advisable and seven where action was considered desirable. An annex to the University's Briefing Paper described its responses to these recommendations. The annex highlighted the consideration by the Teaching and Learning Group of an annual review of teaching and learning that confirms the implementation of procedures aligned to the quality framework; a review of approval, monitoring and review procedures to check alignment with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ); an overhaul of the University's assessment framework; the development of the 'Clearspace' forum, bulletins, networks and the Teaching and Learning Conference to disseminate good practice; and regular updates from the Teaching and Learning Support Office to key users and the Staff Update to provide a formal means for communicating quality assurance information. The audit team regarded the University's response to the recommendations of the Institutional audit as satisfactory, notwithstanding those areas, such as assessment, where the response had yet to take full effect. The University's progress in addressing the recommendations of the collaborative provision audit was regarded by the team as less satisfactory. While acknowledging that it had had less time to respond, obstacles remained to the effective communication of information and dissemination of good practice to partner institutions. This is discussed in more detail in Section 5 below.

7   The University's framework for the management of academic standards and quality reflects the principle, set out in the Strategic Plan, that, except at the level of the Board of Governors, responsibility and accountability resides with designated individuals rather than committees. The role of University committees or groups is consultative and advisory. Thus, responsibility for the academic standards and quality of taught provision resides with the Vice-President (Teaching, Learning and Students). The Vice-President is advised by the Teaching and Learning Group, whose membership includes an Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning, from each faculty, to whom the Vice-President delegates day-to-day responsibility for standards and quality. The Teaching and Learning Group develops, promotes and monitors strategies, policies and procedures for the delivery and enhancement of undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision. It also advises on the operation and development of quality processes and creates temporary task and finish sub-groups where necessary.

8   The University's framework for managing research degrees reflects that for taught provision. Thus, the Associate Vice-President for Graduate Education bears overall responsibility, advised by the Graduate Education Group, whose membership includes the faculty associate deans for graduate education and senior administrative staff from the Research Office.

9   The committee structure in the four faculties reflects the separation of responsibility for taught and research programmes. Thus, each faculty has a Teaching and Learning Committee (or similar) and a Postgraduate Research Committee (or similar), chaired by the faculty associate deans for teaching and learning and graduate education respectively. This structure is mirrored in the schools, though some variation is permitted to reflect local requirements.

10   Overall, the audit team regarded the University's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities as robust and effective. The team's scrutiny of minutes of the relevant committees demonstrated effective reporting from schools to faculties and onward to university-level groups. The evidence also showed university-level decisions and initiatives being transmitted to, and discussed at, faculty, school and programme levels.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

11   The processes for programme approval, monitoring and review are outlined in the comprehensive Manual of Academic Procedures. Authority for programme approval is delegated to the committee responsible for teaching and learning in each faculty, with external advice and internal input from other schools within the University being integral to the process. Minor and major amendments to programmes are dealt with at school and faculty levels respectively.

12   The University's monitoring and review system functions through three interrelated processes: annual monitoring, periodic review (normally on a five-year cycle) and operational performance review. The latter is a wide-ranging annual consideration of each of its faculties and professional support services, chaired by the President, which includes teaching, learning and research within its remit.

13   Appropriate institutional oversight is exercised through the administrative input and monitoring undertaken by the Teaching and Learning Support Office on behalf of the Vice-President (Teaching, Learning and Students); by the regular reports to Senate on new programmes, programme amendments and withdrawals; and by the composite Annual

Teaching and Learning Report to the Teaching and Learning Group. Following discussion of the themes and issues arising from this report a summary document and an institutional action plan are produced.

14 The audit team viewed examples of the operation of these processes and found them to be appropriately conducted, with follow-up action and reviews of progress. The team concluded that the University's systems for approval, monitoring and review make an effective contribution to the assurance of academic standards.

15 The University appoints subject external examiners to all units contributing to a degree and also a Programme External Examiner to each degree programme or cognate group of programmes. Formal responsibility for the University's external examiners resides with the Vice-President (Teaching, Learning and Students). Nomination is devolved to schools, with faculty and University oversight to ensure conformity to University guidelines. Appropriate arrangements are in place for briefing and induction.

16 Serious consideration is given to the views of external examiners, with common themes and issues being included in the annual Teaching and Learning Report to the Teaching and Learning Group. The team noted that certain problems in the reception of reports and responses to them, highlighted in the course of periodic review, had led to improvements to the system for the submission of reports and the monitoring of responses.

17 While student representatives on certain University committees and review panels have access to external examiner reports or a summary of their key points, the audit team did not find evidence of the systematic sharing of reports with students or their representatives throughout the University or in partner institutions. The University recognises that more remains to be done in this respect, and the team considers it desirable for the University to share external examiner reports with student representatives at all levels and across all faculties.

18 In its management of academic standards the University takes proper account of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points. Changes are noted and amendments to procedures made as necessary, with these being communicated to staff both within the University and in partner institutions. Programme specifications are drawn up for each programme, with the information contained in them being included in an accessible form in student handbooks. Unit specifications are also communicated to students. Programme and new and revised unit specifications are available to periodic review panels. Periodic review also monitors conformity to the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements and the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, as well as any requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

19 The University participates in the European Credit Transfer System and has implemented the Diploma Supplement. It is also a pilot institution for the Higher Education Achievement Record, and has, in this context, developed criteria for the inclusion of extra-curricular activities.

20 The University's full and informative assessment framework incorporates policies and procedures for the different phases of assessment within taught programmes, including guidelines for examination boards and the handling of marks. Policies also address the different categories of student and a range of needs. Appropriate definitions and advice are offered in respect of plagiarism and other academic malpractice. Guidelines and processes for the assessment of e-learning are in place.

21   A policy on feedback to students on assessment, an area of particular concern to the University, has been developed following extensive staff and student consultation. This was introduced from the beginning of the academic year 2010-11 and, although its implementation and effectiveness will require monitoring, the audit team noted that the student written submission had praised the role played by students in its elaboration.

22   While the University currently has a full set of degree regulations, experience of their operation revealed problems and inconsistencies in application across the University. Accordingly, a working group is taking forward a review of its regulations, with the development of principles as a first stage. At the time of the audit a revised set of principles had been circulated for comment within the University. The audit team recognises that the University is proceeding carefully with this review to ensure that the new regulatory framework for taught programmes will fully address current concerns and meet the needs of the different areas of the University.

23   Management information informs the processes for the monitoring and review of academic standards, in particular annual and periodic review, as well as operational performance review. The University acknowledged, however, in its Briefing Paper that it has more information in its record systems that may usefully be deployed in the management of award standards and that it is continuing to develop its approach in this area.

24   The University considers that its management of academic standards is appropriate and effective, while also recognising that in some areas work is still ongoing and that there is scope for further improvement. This is a view with which the audit team concurs and it would encourage the University to continue the ongoing consideration and development of its systems for monitoring and ensuring the management of academic standards. That being said, the audit team concludes that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and future management of academic standards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

25   The University's framework for managing the quality of students' learning opportunities is closely aligned to the *Code of practice* published by QAA. The Teaching and Learning Support Office is primarily responsible for keeping abreast of revisions to the *Code of practice* and recommending any concomitant changes in University policy. Staff in the University and partner institutions are notified of changes through regular bulletins.

26   The University's procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review expect University staff, and external experts wherever they are involved, to consider the availability of appropriate learning opportunities for students, alongside academic standards. The audit team's scrutiny of a range of documents associated with these processes confirmed that they were each contributing to the sound management of learning opportunities.

27   Feedback from students plays an important part in monitoring and reviewing the quality of students' learning opportunities. The University pays particularly close attention to its National Student Survey scores and has developed an institution-wide action plan to manage and improve them. It also administers unit evaluation questionnaires for the majority of undergraduate and postgraduate taught units, the results of which inform monitoring and review, as well as the performance review of teaching staff. However, few students respond to these questionnaires. The audit team was concerned that low response rates may prevent the University from detecting significant problems or examples of good practice. The team therefore considers it advisable for the University to implement measures designed to achieve greater response rates to internal student surveys.

28   The University's Student Academic Representation Policy and Guidelines, developed in concert with the Students' Union, describe the University's minimum expectations for student academic representation that each school or faculty may develop to suit their specific needs. Student representatives whom the audit team met were generally positive about their experiences and felt supported by the University in carrying out their role. The students did, however, raise concerns about communications between programme-level representatives and their counterparts on University committees. The University is aware of this issue and helping to remedy it.

29   Students participate in both operational performance review and periodic review as full panel members. Moreover, through their membership of academic committees, including the Teaching and Learning Group, members of the Students' Union Executive may consider the outcomes of quality assurance processes and contribute to policy development.

30   The University seeks to link research and students' learning in two main ways: by encouraging staff to draw on their research interests in revising and developing new curricula; and by requiring undergraduates in most disciplines to undertake a research project or dissertation in their final year. Beyond these two activities, however, the University appeared to be doing little to bring the considerable strength and breadth of its research portfolio to bear on students' learning opportunities. The team regarded this as a lost opportunity, particularly given the evident interest in research-led teaching among the students it met. The team therefore regards it as desirable for the University to review its approach to links between the research environment and learning opportunities, with a view to developing an overarching institutional policy.

31   The University's policies and guidelines for other modes of study are described in the Manual of Academic Procedures, which includes a section on distance learning and a checklist for placement learning. Programmes featuring elements of distance, work-based and/or placement learning are subject to the University's normal quality assurance processes, including programme approval and periodic review. Students whom the audit team met gave positive accounts of their experience of placement learning, and student representatives also felt able to give feedback on problems they experienced while on placement. These experiences were also echoed by students studying at partner institutions.

32   The University is investing heavily in its estate, particularly so in the central library and the new 'Learning Commons', which promise to address students' concerns about the lack of personal study space and difficulties in accessing computers. It has recently upgraded its virtual learning environment and completed a strategy to embed e-learning within all curricula, which included a specification of minimum usage. Students were very positive about their experience of e-learning and noted a marked improvement with the expansion over recent years.

33   The University's admissions policy accords with its strategic goal of fair access and has evidently been informed by external guidance on good practice, including the *Code of practice*. It sets out clearly the principles and procedures through which the University assesses applications and offers places. The policy is reviewed and revised annually. Widening participation underpins the University's admissions activities and it has placed particular emphasis on broadening access for students at local schools and colleges.

34   Comprehensive information on student support services is provided online for both students and academic and support staff. Student administrative services, including the International Advice Team, are located in the 'one-stop' Student Services Centre. Confidential advice, independent of schools, is available to all students on any matter relating to their work or academic progress from the Student Guidance Service.

35   The audit team heard that all schools now had a trained 'Student Support Officer' or similar and their role in coordinating non-academic support was spoken of highly by students and staff. There is also close liaison between the Disability Support Office and schools. The audit team identified the University's framework for non-academic student support as a feature of good practice.

36   The University's academic adviser system within schools is central to its Personalised Learning Policy. Under this policy, all undergraduate and postgraduate taught students are required to have a member of academic staff as an academic adviser, who should make weekly contact with the students assigned to them. The University acknowledged that its personalised learning policy is not yet fully implemented in all parts of the institution, and comments in the student written submission, internal and external surveys, and meetings with staff and students indicated that the academic adviser system varied in its effectiveness within and between faculties. The team heard from staff and students that there was a lack of clarity in the role of the academic adviser following the move from a personal tutor system; joint honours and postgraduate taught programmes were two areas requiring particular attention. The team considers it advisable for the University to clarify its approach to providing academic support and ensure this approach is understood by staff and students.

37   The Staff Training and Development Unit provides a wide range of training opportunities for staff throughout the year, including the New Academics Programme, which is compulsory for new academic staff with no teaching experience. In addition, there is an annual Teaching and Learning Conference, as well as teaching enhancement workshops focusing on e-learning run throughout the year. Staff whom the audit team met were largely positive about the opportunities for development and progression at the University. Praise for the New Academics Programme was offered by staff who had experienced it and the emphasis now being given to excellence in teaching was welcomed.

38   Staff are regularly surveyed by the University and staff development needs are identified formally through a Personal Development Review process by the Head of School. Student feedback gathered through unit evaluation questionnaires is considered an important part of the evidence base for performance review, though the efficacy of this evidence is limited in some schools by a very low response rate. This contributed to the audit team's recommendation about raising response rates to student surveys.

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

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

40   The University's strategic commitment to quality enhancement is manifest in the second goal of its Strategic Plan. This goal is underpinned by strategies for higher learning, which touch on allowing all undergraduate students to develop non-discipline-specific skills; ensuring that all students have a high-quality personalised learning experience; placing Manchester in the vanguard in the use of online learning; and encouraging and rewarding excellence, innovation and creativity in teaching and learning.

41   The University pursues enhancement in part through its routine quality assurance functions. Common themes raised by external examiners are included in the University's Annual Review of Teaching and Learning. Programme approval, monitoring and review are also used to identify opportunities for quality enhancement, particularly where these processes draw on external expertise. Each faculty has an academic lead for quality

assurance and enhancement, and quality enhancement is considered at the relevant faculty committee.

42   The last Institutional audit recommended that the University develop a more integrated institutional approach to the dissemination of good practice in learning, teaching and assessment. The University acknowledges that challenges for 'horizontal' dissemination across faculties and schools remain, though there had been a number of initiatives, including the annual Teaching and Learning Conference. The student written submission acknowledged that progress had been made in this area but questioned the extent to which such dissemination activity reaches all staff.

43   Quality enhancement is also manifest in a wide range of University initiatives, including the 'Students as Partners' programme; developments in e-learning; programmes to enhance the personal development and employability of the University's students and graduates; and staff training and development opportunities and award schemes for academic and support staff. The 'Learning Commons', a multi-functional learning space, is due for completion in 2012, while the concept of a 'University College' as a vehicle for the delivery of 'transformational change within the curriculum' is under discussion. The audit team noted in particular the 'Students as Partners' programme, which aims to encourage students to take a broad approach to their learning and development. Salient features include peer mentoring and the 'Peer Assisted Study Scheme'. The quality of the Peer Assisted Study Scheme was illustrated by very positive comments in the student written submission and at audit, and by the national recognition of this programme. The team regards the Peer Assisted Study Scheme as a feature of good practice in enhancing the quality of students' learning experience. From discussions with students and staff and from documentation provided, the team also identifies as a feature of good practice the opportunities for students to engage in personal development outside their academic discipline, in particular the credit-rated Career Management Skills units, which are available in a wide range of disciplines.

44   The audit team concluded that the University's approach to quality enhancement has helped to develop an ethos that expects and encourages enhancement of learning opportunities.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

45   At the time of the audit there were about 3,000 students studying in the UK and overseas for University awards through a variety of collaborative links. Most links were in two schools: the School of Arts, Histories and Cultures and the Manchester Business School.

46   Future development of collaborative provision will align with the University's Internationalisation Strategy and policy on Transnational Education. Schools are expected to be proactive and strategic in developing collaborations, focusing on both income generation and longer-term strategic collaboration in research and teaching. Following a period of rationalisation, there is now an increase in the number of potential partnerships seeking institutional approval.

47   The approval of a new partnership entails securing strategic approval on the basis of a risk assessment and business case. Once this has been achieved, the processes of approving the prospective partner, negotiating the partnership agreement and securing academic approval of the collaborative programme(s) to be offered through the partnership are instigated. The audit team noted the University's diligence in considering new partner organisations.

48   The quality assurance of collaborative provision is devolved to schools. Ultimate responsibility for collaborative provision rests with the Vice-President (Teaching, Learning and Students). The procedures for approval, review and monitoring described in Section 2 and the key principles affecting the University's approach to collaborative provision are consonant with the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, published by QAA. Schools with significant collaborative activity maintain a validation office, which manages the administration of such provision.

49   Collaborative programmes are managed in accordance with a memorandum of agreement. Broadly standard processes are applied, including those for external examining, annual and periodic reviews, reapproval of programmes and student feedback and support. Partners are notified of any changes to policies and processes. Partner staff are invited to an annual Teaching and Learning Conference aimed at giving staff from partner institutions greater networking opportunities and encouraging greater integration with the University. However, since a relatively small number of staff from partner institutions attend, the University may wish to consider the development of alternative means of disseminating information and sharing good practice with collaborative partners.

50   Collaborative academic advisers are appointed to each collaborative programme and play an important role in the quality assurance of collaborative provision. Each adviser makes an annual report. The University has recently introduced greater institutional oversight of the reports, which was welcomed by the audit team.

51   Periodic reviews of collaborative provision are undertaken on a five-yearly cycle. Normally, such reviews involve a visit to a partner and are followed by institutional reviews of the partnership arrangements, which may be reapproved for a further period of five years. It was clear that the reviews were thorough and were followed by detailed and clear action plans covering matters needing attention. However, it was evident that opportunities to share and disseminate good practice in collaborative work were limited. Given the anticipated growth in collaborative activity, the audit team regards it as desirable for the University to strengthen mechanisms for disseminating information and sharing good practice both between the University and its collaborative partners and among different schools within the University.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

52   The University's framework for managing research degrees mirrors that for taught provision, with the Associate Vice-President for Graduate Education having overall responsibility, supported by the university-level Graduate Education Group. At faculty level there are faculty graduate education committees chaired by the relevant Associate Dean for Graduate Education, who is a member of the Graduate Education Group and has day-to-day responsibility for quality and standards in their respective faculty. A Graduate Administrators Group plays a significant role in supporting policy developments and their implementation. The University has a number of doctoral training centres; these are coordinated and overseen by the Manchester Doctoral College. At the time of the audit, the College's role was to ensure the sharing of good practice and promote exchange among the eight training centres. However, the University intends that it will replace the Graduate Education Group as the University's most senior advisory committee on research programmes.

53   The University's Code of Practice prescribes minimum standards for research students' academic environment. The Code conveys the important principle that research students and their supervisors have a shared responsibility for the success of students'

programmes. The University's regulations for research degrees give distinct assessment criteria for each different research award. The audit team noted that the assessment criteria were consistent with the FHEQ.

54   The research environment is monitored through the annual Research Profiling Exercise. Students are required to have access to appropriate facilities, designated study space, where possible, and an active participatory research environment where they are encouraged to participate in symposia and publish research results wherever possible. The team regarded the University as providing a strong and stimulating research environment in which to undertake postgraduate study.

55   The institution has a single comprehensive Student Admissions Policy for all levels. The 2006 QAA review of research degree programmes recommended that the University review the role of interviews in the admission of research students. The audit team noted that this recommendation had been endorsed by a meeting of the Graduate Education Group in 2010. The endorsement represents a full response to the recommendation, albeit four years after it was made.

56   The institution has a single policy on induction for all students, describing induction as a process rather than a single event and highlighting points of transition in student life. It seeks to foster a sense of community and belonging to academic, social and residential groupings. The policy acknowledges varying interdisciplinary requirements, part-time students and distance students. Faculties and schools are responsible for designing and operating induction processes consistent with the University's policy.

57   The supervision of research students is governed by an overarching policy, part of the University's Code of Practice specifying essential responsibilities. The use of a supervisory team comprising a main supervisor and a co-supervisor, with an additional adviser/tutor to provide pastoral support, is a key element. The audit team noted, however, from documents and meetings with staff and students, that some research students were supervised by individuals, particularly in the most specialised fields. This practice is inconsistent with the guidance in the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes* published by QAA. The team regards it as advisable, therefore, for the University to ensure that all research students are supervised by a supervisory team which includes a co-supervisor.

58   Each faculty runs supervisor training and development programmes; in some cases these are integrated into the New Academics Programme. Faculties also run regular supervisor awareness courses, which tend to use case studies based on real issues. Staff whom the audit team met confirmed that the supervisor training was appropriate and effective.

59   The University's Code of Practice has a comprehensive Progress and Review Policy, which includes the requirement for an independent annual progress review. The audit team saw evidence of the institution ensuring that this policy was applied in all schools. The research students whom the audit team met indicated that progress reviews were undertaken according to the policy and were very thorough.

60   The University has developed an online system for supporting research students called eProg. eProg originated in one of the faculties, and through careful and incremental development and testing under the auspices of the Graduate Education Group and the Graduate Administrators Group it has evolved to include all aspects of the research students' experience, including management and reporting, progression, skills development and submission and examination. The first stage of eProg was launched in 2010, focusing on progress and monitoring. Meetings with staff and students confirmed that eProg was in

operation and has been used effectively to monitor meetings between research students and their supervisory teams. The eProg project has, in the audit team's view, already achieved considerable success and is well placed to deliver a significant enhancement to the experience of research students and give the University additional valuable data to monitor and manage its research degree provision. The team therefore regards the development and implementation of eProg as a feature of good practice.

61   The University has a wide-ranging programme of skills development, within which each faculty delivers their own programme, with additional training available from a range of central departments. The University's Skills Coordinators Group, comprising training staff from all four faculties, meets regularly to share good practice and stimulate ongoing developments in the provision. Some training events are cross-faculty; one example is an annual careers event for researchers, 'Pathways', which was commended by representatives of Research Councils UK in 2010. A key feature for all students is a mandatory skills assessment at the start of the programme and regular updates throughout. The audit team considered the opportunities available to research students to develop both research and personal transferable skills as comprehensive and substantial.

62   Feedback mechanisms are provided for in the University's Student Representation Policy for Postgraduate Research Students. All schools and doctoral training centres are required to say how this is implemented through the annual monitoring process. Regular meetings between nominated student representatives and academic and administrative staff are mandatory.

63   The framework for the assessment of research degrees is part of the University Code of Practice. Students whom the audit team met confirmed that they understood the guidance on plagiarism and other forms of academic malpractice. The policy on the nomination of examiners is comprehensive, covering the case for independent chairs when deemed appropriate. Examiners are approved by the relevant school or faculty Research Degrees Panel. Eligibility criteria for examiners and independent chairs are appropriate and consistent with the *Code of practice* published by QAA.

64   Examiners' reports are considered by the appropriate Faculty Research Degrees Panel, with regular reports being made to the relevant Faculty Graduate Education Committee. Substantive issues of policy arising from examiners' reports are referred to the faculty for further consideration. The audit team saw evidence of this process working properly.

65   Appeals by research students are permitted on four grounds: issues previously unknown to the complainant, a material defect in the process, prejudice or bias, and supervision or training that was unsatisfactory. The appeal is first tested against the grounds, then, if permitted, is considered by the relevant Faculty Dean and a senior administrative officer. These individuals can either refer the issue back to the examiners, reject the appeal, or refer it to an Appeal Panel. Appeal Panels' powers extend to revoking decisions and requiring some form of reconsideration. The audit team considered this process to be clearly documented and sound. Statistics on the numbers of appeals, their grounds and outcome were considered by the team; no concerns emerged.

66   The audit team concluded that the University's management of its research degree programmes generally meets the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA.

Section 7: Published information

67   Responsibility for publicity material lies with the Directorate of Communications, Media and Public Relations, and the University has written procedures for their publication. Heads of school and directors of professional support services are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the published information in their areas. Policies for published information in collaborative provision are set out in the Manual of Academic Practice.

68   The audit team examined a range of published information, including university-wide policy and procedural documentation, faculty, school and partner documentation, programme handbooks, regulations, the University's website and intranet, the undergraduate and postgraduate prospectus, and committee and group minutes. The team established that the University provides an extensive and accessible range of published information for prospective and current students and staff both electronically and in hard copy.

69   The University's electronic information provision and communication with students is mainly through its website and virtual learning environment. Students emphasised the efficacy of the virtual learning environment, particularly in allowing them to access their timetables, unit information, other learning materials, links to student support services and electronic library and learning resources. The audit team noted the efforts the University had made in raising student awareness of this information, particularly during induction.

70   Information about students' rights and obligations, academic regulations, facilities and support services is also included in programme handbooks, which are published electronically and in hard copy. The audit team reviewed a range of handbooks for undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses, and found them to be comprehensive. Programme handbooks are typically constructed by the Programme Leader and, to achieve consistency, are required to conform to a minimum specification described in the Manual of Academic Practice.

71   The audit team met student representatives at the University and in two partner colleges, who concurred with the student written submission's general satisfaction with the information provided in the University prospectus and on the website. The students also confirmed that they regarded the information as accurate and complete for their needs. Some part-time students were particularly complimentary about the information they were able to access remotely.

72   The University complies with all of the requirements of HEFCE 2006/45, *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes*. It provides full and accurate information for staff and for current and potential students and has developed robust systems and guidance for checking its accuracy and completeness. It also publishes relevant information via the Unistats website on entry qualifications, progression, degree classification and the National Student Survey.

73   The audit team found that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information the University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

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

- the University's framework for non-academic student support (paragraph 35)
- the Peer Assisted Study Scheme (paragraph 43)
- opportunities for students to engage in personal development outside their academic discipline (paragraph 43)
- the development and implementation of eProg to support postgraduate research students (paragraph 60).

Recommendations for action

75   Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- implement measures designed to achieve greater response rates to internal student surveys (paragraphs 27 and 38)
- clarify its approach to providing academic support and ensure this approach is understood by staff and students (paragraph 36)
- ensure that all research students are supervised by a supervisory team which includes a co-supervisor (paragraph 57).

76   Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- share external examiner reports with student representatives at all levels in all faculties (paragraph 17)
- review its approach to linking teaching and research, with a view to developing an overarching institutional policy (paragraph 30)
- in the context of its collaborative provision, strengthen mechanisms for disseminating information and sharing good practice both between the University and its collaborative partners and among different schools within the University (paragraph 51).

Appendix

The University of Manchester's response to the Institutional audit report

The University of Manchester welcomes the auditors' conclusion that confidence can be placed in the present and future management of the academic standards of our awards and in the quality of the learning opportunities available to our students. We acknowledge the recommendations of the audit team and find these helpful; most were anticipated in the briefing paper but all will be covered by an action plan which is currently under development.