



University of Manchester

Institutional audit

April 2011

Annex to the report

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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 the University offers.

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.

Institutional arrangements for 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 of good practice:

- the University's framework for non-academic student support (paragraph 69)
- the Peer Assisted Study Scheme (paragraph 80)
- opportunities for students to engage in personal development outside their academic discipline (paragraph 81)
- the development and implementation of eProg to support postgraduate research students (paragraph 109).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- implement measures designed to achieve greater response rates to internal student surveys (paragraphs 50 and 73)
- clarify its approach to providing academic support and ensure this approach is understood by staff and students (paragraph 71)
- ensure that all research students are supervised by a supervisory team which includes a co-supervisor (paragraph 106).

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- share external examiner reports with student representatives at all levels in all faculties (paragraphs 32 and 89)
- review its approach to linking teaching and research, with a view to developing an overarching institutional policy (paragraph 54)
- 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 92).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 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.'

2 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; 8,041 were overseas students.

3 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.

The information base for the audit

4 The University provided the audit team with a Briefing Paper and supporting documentation, including that related to the sampling trails selected by the team. The index to the Briefing Paper was referenced to sources of evidence to illustrate the institution's approach to managing the security of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its educational provision. The team had a hard copy of all documents referenced in the Briefing Paper; in addition, the team had access to the institution's intranet.

5 The Students' Union produced a student written submission setting out the students' views on the accuracy of the information provided to them, the experience of students as learners and their role in quality management.

6 In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the previous Institutional audit in 2005
- the report of the previous collaborative provision audit in 2006
- the report of the QAA review of research degree programmes in 2006
- the report on the mid-cycle follow-up to Institutional audit
- the institution's internal documents
- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.

Developments since the last audit

7 In the previous audit cycle the University had separate Institutional and collaborative provision audits in 2005 and 2006 respectively. The Institutional audit resulted in a judgement of broad confidence in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The report noted five features of good practice and made three recommendations where action was considered advisable and four where action was considered desirable. The advisable recommendations related to: the reviewing and development of institutional

oversight of quality and standards; alignment of the University's procedures with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ); and alignment of the University's approach to assessment, progression and award with the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*. The desirable recommendations related to: the development of corporate statistics systems and reporting tools; a more integrated institutional approach to the dissemination of good practice; the communication of information relating to quality assurance and enhancement to all levels of the institution; and the review of student feedback mechanisms.

8 The 2006 collaborative provision audit resulted in judgements of broad confidence in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements and in the present and likely future capacity of the University to satisfy itself that the learning opportunities offered to students through its collaborative arrangements are managed effectively and meet its requirements. It noted four features of good practice and made four recommendations where action was considered advisable and three where action was considered desirable. The advisable recommendations were concerned with: institutional oversight of, and consistency of, practice in faculty and school-level processes for assuring quality of provision and the maintenance of standards in collaborative provision; the communication of the University's strategy, policies and procedures to its own staff involved in collaborative provision and those of its partners; a review of procedures for ensuring the accuracy, clarity, and completeness of the information provided to students and prospective students on collaborative provision programmes; and the articulation of complaints and appeals procedures. The desirable recommendations related to: gathering and analysis of student feedback from collaborative partners; systematic feedback from graduates and employers to collaborative partners; and increasing attendance at collaboration conferences by its partners and evaluating the effectiveness of the dissemination of quality procedures and good practice by conferences and other means.

9 An annex to the Briefing Paper described the University's responses to each of these recommendations and to some of the other comments in the two reports. These responses included: 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 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 (TLSO) to key users and the Staff Update to provide a formal means for communicating quality assurance information.

10 The audit team regarded the University's response to the recommendations of the 2005 Institutional audit as satisfactory, notwithstanding those areas, such as assessment, where the response had yet to take full effect. Any particular comments on the areas touched on by the recommendations of the last audit appear in the relevant sections below. The team regarded the University's progress in addressing the recommendations of the collaborative provision audit as less satisfactory, while acknowledging that it had had less time to respond. In particular, obstacles remained to the effective communication of information and dissemination of good practice to partner institutions. Given the anticipated growth in collaborative activity, this may become problematic. This is discussed in more detail in Section 5 of this annex.

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

11 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.

12 Within this context, responsibility for the academic standards and quality of taught provision ultimately rests 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 for 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, such as the Degree Regulations and Assessment Policies Group.

13 The Teaching and Learning Group is supported by the Teaching and Learning Management Group, which comprises staff from the TLSO, faculty teaching and learning managers (or equivalent) and e-learning managers, and other senior professional support services staff. The Group provides administrative oversight of the operation of teaching and learning policies and procedures and oversees a plan of work to improve the operation of teaching and learning policies and procedures to ensure a consistent and coordinated approach across the University.

14 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. More information is provided in Section 6 of this annex.

15 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.

16 The Manual of Academic Practice (MAP) is the University's central source of information about the policies and procedures underpinning the management of quality and standards. The audit team considered that the MAP, in both capturing the totality of the quality framework and communicating it to the University community as a whole, has become a key resource in quality management and enhancement.

17 Overall, the audit team regarded the components of the University's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities - that is, the principal policies and procedures, the responsible posts, the associated committees and groups and the supportive and professional role of the TLSO - 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. Good examples of the latter include the introduction of the Policy on

Feedback to Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Students and the establishment of academic advisers.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

Programme approval

18 There is a two-stage approval process for taught courses, with a full outline of procedures, pro formas and advice to be found in the Manual of Academic Procedures. The first stage entails approval in principle to ensure congruence with University, faculty and school strategies and principles. Following this, the content and structure of the programme are developed prior to final approval by the relevant faculty committee, with external advice and internal input from other schools within the University being integral to the process. At this stage, for undergraduate programmes, a statement to be included in the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) should be proposed.

19 Depending on their nature and scope, programme amendments are classed, following clear guidelines, as either major, which require approval by the faculty, or as minor and able to be considered by the school.

20 While these processes are managed by faculties or schools in accordance with the relevant guidelines, oversight is provided by the Teaching and Learning Support Office (TLSO) on behalf of the Vice-President (Teaching, Learning and Students). In addition, Senate receives regular reports of new programmes, programme amendments and withdrawals and a summary of these is also contained in the Annual Teaching and Learning Report presented to the Teaching and Learning Group.

Programme monitoring and review

21 The University has three interrelated processes for monitoring and review: annual monitoring, operational performance review and periodic review. Annual monitoring and operational performance review are carried out every year. Periodic review is normally held every five years.

22 The procedure for annual monitoring of undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes and non-credit-bearing continuing education is specified in the Manual of Academic Procedures. The first stage occurs at programme level, according to guidelines intended to promote reflection and forward planning in an open and 'non-confrontational' manner. Based on this a report goes to the relevant committee in the school dealing with teaching and learning whose discussions contribute to the school's Annual Monitoring Overview. This in turn leads to the faculty considerations and overview document. This document is, in the first instance, included in the faculty Operational Performance Review submission.

23 Operational Performance Review is an annual process led by a panel of senior executive officers and chaired by the President and Vice-Chancellor. It looks at the University as a whole through a review of each of its faculties and also of Professional Support Services and considers a wide range of operational areas including teaching, learning and research. There may also be further follow-up visits to the area concerned. Any new issues raised by the review panel in respect of teaching and learning in a faculty

are added to the faculty's overview report. This material contributes to the composite Annual Review of Teaching and Learning Evaluation report presented by the Head of the TLSO to the Teaching and Learning Group. Following the meeting at which faculty and institutional matters are discussed, a summary report and an institutional action plan are produced.

24 Periodic review of programmes occurs at school or discipline level with a view to considering and enhancing provision and the student experience. It is based on a self-evaluation document and organised by the faculty, which produces a report for the school, the faculty and the Vice-President (Teaching, Learning and Students).

25 The periodic review panel includes at least one external subject specialist, a representative from another faculty, a representative of the Students' Union and a representative from the TLSO. Interviews with students are an integral part of the process. The secretary to the panel is a member of the faculty administrative staff. On confirmation of the report, the school is asked to make an initial response to it and the action plan. A progress report is provided to the Review Secretary six months after the review and progress is also checked as part of the next annual monitoring review. The report, together with the initial response, is placed on the agenda of the next meeting of the relevant school and faculty committee and a copy of the report is sent to the Head of the TLSO, who will raise any issues with the Vice-President (Teaching, Learning and Students). An annual overview of themes and issues emerging from reviews is also compiled for consideration by the Teaching and Learning Group.

26 The audit team was able to view a range of evidence relating to programme approval, monitoring and review and saw examples of these processes in operation. The team concluded that the University's processes are robust and make an effective contribution to the assurance and management of academic standards.

External examiners

27 The University has a Code of Practice for External Examiners, available on the TLSO website, which indicates roles, procedures and duties. Recent amendments to this code are signalled in TLSO bulletins and are also advertised via a link on the TLSO's homepage.

28 Subject external examiners are appointed for a range of units (with all units contributing to a degree expected to have external examiner oversight). In addition, each degree programme or cognate group of programmes must appoint a Programme External Examiner (who may also be a Subject External Examiner) with specific responsibilities for the programme as a whole. Formal responsibility for all external examiners to the University resides with the Vice-President (Teaching, Learning and Students).

29 Schools are responsible for nominating external examiners, and the nomination forms must be approved by the Chair of the Examination Board and the Head of School. The nomination is checked against University criteria and approved on behalf of Senate by the relevant Associate Dean and reported to the relevant faculty committee. Approved nominations are forwarded to the TLSO for final checking and the details are held in a central database. Induction material is sent to the examiner by the TLSO. More specific briefing is the responsibility of schools, following University guidelines. For new programmes external examiners are appointed as part of the approval procedure.

30 Common themes and issues from the external examiners' reports are compiled by the TLSO and included in the Report of the Annual Review of Teaching and Learning presented to the Teaching and Learning Group.

31 The evidence available to the audit team confirmed that serious attention was given to the role and reports of external examiners. However, the team also noted that some schools had experienced both delays in receiving external examiner reports and problems in responding to them. These matters had been identified by periodic review and remedial action incorporated within the obligatory follow-up activity. All external examiner reports are now submitted initially to a central point in the TLSO, and in addition faculties report to the Teaching and Learning Group through the TLSO on actions taken to address external examiner issues.

32 While external examiner reports or summaries of key points are available to student representatives on certain University committees and in the context of reviews in which a student representative is involved, the audit team did not find evidence of the systematic sharing of reports with students or their representatives at all levels throughout the University or in partner institutions. The University recognises that it has more work to do in this respect and the team therefore considers it desirable for the University to share external examiner reports with student representatives at all levels and across all faculties.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

33 The University's management of academic standards takes account of the relevant elements of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points, including the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). The TLSO is responsible for monitoring the University's adherence to these reference points. The Teaching and Learning Group discusses any changes to the reference points and may direct the TLSO to revise the University's procedures in response. Staff in the University and partner institutions are notified of changes in the regular TLSO bulletins and via a hyperlink on the TLSO homepage. The comprehensive and informative TLSO bulletins also indicate other developments of relevance to standards and quality, such as recent consultations and publications.

34 Programme approval documentation is expected to contain a programme specification and unit specification for all core units and any new optional units. Programme amendment documentation includes, as appropriate, revised programme specifications and unit outlines. At periodic review, relevant curriculum documents including programme specifications are provided to the panel. In handbooks the areas covered in programme specifications are appropriately communicated to students, and in the examples provided to the audit team full unit outlines were also normally available either within the document or by hyperlink.

35 Periodic review documentation includes consideration of alignment with aspects of the Academic Infrastructure and relevant external reference points.

36 The University has taken cognisance of the Bologna Process, participates in the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) (with all new units from 2009-10 being expected to state the ECTS credit as well as the UK credit) and has implemented the Diploma Supplement. Development of the latter also informed work on the HEAR, with the University of Manchester being one of the institutions chosen for the pilot. As part of its pilot, the University has developed criteria for the addition of extra-curricular activities, approved according to 'the Manchester protocols', and the Teaching and Learning Group is responsible for approving non-credit-bearing activities as suitable for inclusion in the HEAR.

37 Relationships with professional bodies are managed at school level with oversight by the faculty concerned. Evidence from annual monitoring and periodic reviews confirmed

that this arrangement was operating effectively. The TLSO maintains a list of accredited programmes (of which there are over 200) and is notified of successful accreditations and reaccreditations.

Assessment policies and regulations

38 The University has a fully developed assessment framework incorporating policies and procedures for the different phases of assessment within undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes, which takes account of the needs of different categories of student. Material on policy and practice also covers matters relating to examinations, examination boards and the handling of marks. The guide offers advice and definitions of plagiarism (noted as a problem particularly for international students in the student written submission) and on other academic malpractice (including collusion) to both staff and students. It stresses the need for appropriate introductions to proper academic practice for undergraduate and postgraduate international students. The University has also developed comprehensive advice and processes for the assessment of e-learning, which are available on the TLSO website.

39 A particular area of concern to the University has been that of feedback to students, highlighted by National Student Survey (NSS) results. Accordingly, in September 2009 a working group was formed including membership from the different University faculties, professional support services and the Students' Union. The final policy was elaborated following extensive student and staff consultation and passed by Senate in April 2010 to take effect from the beginning of the 2010-11 academic year. While the student written submission stressed the need for this policy and the importance of ongoing monitoring of its implementation by the University, it also commended the involvement of students in its development.

40 Following a discussion in the Teaching and Learning Group in 2009 and in line with national debate on award attainment and minority and ethnic students, a working group was established with a view to understanding the position of such students in the University. The findings of this group, showing that University of Manchester students mirrored the national picture, were discussed by Senate in April 2010 and led to recommendations for further action and data analysis. This activity was ongoing at the time of the audit visit.

41 In response to a recommendation from the previous Institutional audit, the University has developed a full set of degree regulations, published on the TLSO website. However, both the 2008 Undergraduate Education Review and experience of operation of the regulations have led to an awareness of problems and inconsistencies in application at school level, such as the use of different weightings to determine degree classifications or differential practice due to a lack of clarity. Following a preliminary review of implementation presented to the Teaching and Learning Group, the committee agreed to establish a working group to oversee a 'root and branch review' of the regulations. In October 2009 the membership and the co-chairs of the group were confirmed by the Teaching and Learning Group, including representation from all faculties, the Students' Union and professional support services. A timeline for the work was also established. The working group has undertaken visits to other universities and makes regular reports to the Teaching and Learning Group on the progress of the group. Principles for the policy were presented to Senate in June 2010; Senate asked for their revision in the light of discussion at the meeting. In addition, to ensure ongoing effectiveness of procedures, Senate accepted two amendments for implementation within the existing degree regulations. The draft principles and a further one were the subject of discussion by the Teaching and Learning Group in March 2011 and have now been sent out for comment within the University. The audit team recognises that this reform of the regulations is an important issue and that the University in

its processes is taking careful steps to develop a new regulatory framework for taught courses which will fully address current concerns and meet the needs of the University as a whole.

Management information - statistics

42 The University uses management information systematically in the monitoring and review of award standards. Annual monitoring draws on information about recruitment, retention, progression and achievement and comments on trends. It also considers unit evaluation questionnaire results, although the value of this data is limited by low response rates in various areas. This is considered in more detail in Section 3. Operational performance review also uses a range of quantitative data in its analysis of the overall performance of the faculty concerned, including indicators of student satisfaction. In addition, the Self Evaluation Document for periodic review is expected to include five years' data on entry qualifications, progression, retention, achievement, degree classifications, first employment destinations and, since September 2010, unit evaluation questionnaire feedback analysis forms, NSS scores and league table performance. The sampling trails confirmed to the audit team that due regard was paid to this information by periodic review teams.

43 The current use of management information notwithstanding, the University acknowledged in its Briefing Paper that it has more information in its records systems that may usefully be deployed in the management of award standards. It is, therefore, continuing to develop its approach in this area.

Conclusion

44 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 enhancement of practice. The audit team concurs with this view and 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 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

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

45 The University's framework for managing the quality of students' learning opportunities is closely aligned to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*. The Teaching and Learning Group, with the support of the Teaching and Learning Support Office (TLSO), 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 in the regular TLSO bulletins and via a hyperlink on the TLSO homepage.

46 The audit team noted that the University's policy and guidelines on placement learning had not been revised since QAA had published a revised section of the *Code of practice* in 2007. However, an updated policy was provided during the audit visit, due to be considered at the subsequent meeting of the Teaching and Learning Group.

47 The University plays an active role in QAA consultations on changes to the *Code of practice*, including by attending round table events.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

48 The University's procedures for programme approval, monitoring, operational performance review and periodic review, described in Section 2, each expect University staff, and external experts where they are involved, to consider the availability of appropriate learning opportunities for students, alongside academic standards. Salient features of these processes include the requirement for new programme proposals to consider the additional learning resources required; the use of a range of quality indicators in annual monitoring, such as external examiner reports and the results of unit evaluation questionnaires; and the care taken to protect students' interests during programme closure.

49 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. However, the team had some concerns about response rates to unit evaluation questionnaires - one of the quality indicators employed in annual monitoring. These are described in more detail in paragraph 50.

Management information - feedback from students

50 Feedback from students plays an important part in monitoring and reviewing the quality of students' learning opportunities and in reviewing the performance of teaching staff. The University pays particularly close attention to its National Student Survey (NSS) 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, and are published on the University's intranet. 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.

Role of students in quality assurance

51 The University's Student Academic Representation Policy and Guidelines, developed in concert with the Students' Union, describes the University's minimum expectations for student academic representation, which each school or faculty may develop to suit their specific needs. The minimum expectations include that student representatives must always be invited to relevant meetings and that all schools must identify a member of staff to act as Student Representation Coordinator, responsible for being a focal point of contact for students and representatives on representation issues and coordinating student representation within the school. There should be a democratic process to select student representatives, and this is outlined in the published Guidelines. The representative positions on faculty and university-level committees tend to be taken by members of the Students' Union Executive. The Executive also interacts with the University's senior management through regular bilateral meetings.

52 Student representatives whom the audit team met were generally positive about their experiences and felt supported by the University in carrying out their role. They were particularly complimentary about the role of the student representation coordinators, and the team noted how coordinators in different schools were able to share good practice with one

another through a dedicated and active forum. 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.

53 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. The perception of the Teaching and Learning Group among the student representatives whom the audit team met was mixed. There were some positive examples of the group acting decisively on issues raised by students, yet also some others of the group simply endorsing new policy proposals which the student members had not the opportunity to inform.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

54 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 some kind of research project or dissertation in their final year. The audit team noted that the former was reflected to some extent in the training for probationary academic staff, which provided opportunities for staff to consider the interaction between research and teaching, albeit not in all faculties. The requirement for students to undertake a research project was apparent in all faculties, and the team noted one example of a school that offered a series of seminars describing research methods to undergraduates in all years of study, which had been commended in a recent periodic review. 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, considers it 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.

Other modes of study

55 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. The latter is currently being revised to incorporate the latest guidance from QAA. The audit team saw the final draft of the new policy, which includes guidance for staff on the support of learners within the workplace.

56 Programmes featuring elements of distance, work-based and/or placement learning are subject to the University's normal quality assurance processes. The audit team saw evidence of the University paying particular attention to these elements during programme approval and of issues relating to them being identified and dealt with through periodic review. The School of Languages, Linguistics and Cultures has a dedicated work placement coordinator who provides support and advice before, during and after placements. The University intends to roll out this approach across all schools.

57 Students whom the audit team met gave positive accounts of their experience of placement learning, indicating that they had been adequately supported by both their placement provider and home school. Student representatives also felt able to feed back problems they experienced while on placement to their school and were satisfied that action

was taken in response. These experiences were also echoed by students studying at partner colleges.

Resources for learning

58 The fourth 'enabling goal' of the University's Strategic Plan is to develop and maintain a world-class campus. At the time of the audit, this goal was reflected in a major investment in the University's central library and in the building of a new 'Learning Commons', which promises a significant increase in the provision of formal and informal learning spaces for students.

59 Students whom the audit team met gave mixed views of the University's learning resources. Their primary concerns were of a lack of personal study space and difficulty in accessing computers, two of the issues which the new Learning Commons has been specifically designed to address. On the other hand, students praised their access to online library resources, a facility which has been greatly enhanced by the expansion of wireless internet connectivity across the campuses.

60 The University has recently upgraded its virtual learning environment (VLE) and completed a strategy to embed e-learning within all curricula, which included a specification of minimum usage. A new strategy for e-learning is currently being devised. Notwithstanding some teething problems associated with the change to a new VLE package, students were very positive about their experience of e-learning and noted a marked improvement with the expansion over recent years. The audit team noted the systems used to monitor and review the use of e-learning through the roles of e-learning managers and the central oversight provided by the Teaching and Learning Management Group.

Admissions policy

61 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.

62 Responsibility for admissions to the University rests with the Intake Management Group, which, through the support of the Recruitment and Admissions Management Group and the Admissions and Qualifications Group, engages with admissions tutors across the institution to ensure that a consistent approach to admissions is followed.

63 All the students whom the audit team met, including those studying at partner institutions, indicated that their admissions experience was consistent with the University's published policy.

64 Widening participation underpins the University's admissions activities, and it has placed particular emphasis on broadening access for students at local schools and colleges. The Manchester Access Programme provides supported progression to underrepresented students from the Greater Manchester area.

Student support

65 The University's Briefing Paper states that its support structures are '...intended to facilitate flexibility of access, while at the same time ensuring that students are never more than one or two contact points away from the person or information which can help them resolve their issue.' 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 Centres: two offices open to all students during weekdays in different parts of the campus.

66 In its Strategic Plan, 'Advancing the Manchester 2015 Agenda', the University is committed to providing its students with opportunities to develop key employability skills. The Manchester Leadership Programme, Careers and Employability Division is accredited against the national Matrix Standard; its 'Statement of Service' outlines the services available, including bespoke careers provision for international and postgraduate students and students with disabilities.

67 A Director for the Student Experience was appointed in December 2010 to manage all central support services, reporting jointly to the Vice-President (Teaching, Learning and Students) and to the Registrar. The audit team was informed that the Director was in the process of bringing together all student support services within a new Directorate for the Student Experience. Support staff spoke positively about this development and of the integration between central support and the support provided for students within schools.

68 A review of personal support for taught students in 2006 recommended that student support should be recognised as a professional function at school level. The audit team heard that all schools now had a 'Student Support Officer' or similar (the precise title may vary) and their role in coordinating non-academic support was spoken of highly by students and staff. Student support officers attend a Support Guidance Training Course, accredited by the Staff and Educational Development Association, and liaise with other student support officers across schools. There is also close liaison between the Disability Support Office and schools through disability support advisers who work with designated disability support coordinators in each school. The Disability Support Office, Counselling Service and Student Occupational Health Service work together as required in specific cases.

69 The audit team considered the University's framework for non-academic student support to be a feature of good practice in the management of learning opportunities.

70 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. The University's academic adviser system within schools is central to its Personalised Learning Policy, which was approved by Senate in July 2008 following a Review of Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience in 2007-08. 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.

71 The University acknowledged in its Briefing Paper that its personalised learning policy is not yet fully implemented in all parts of the institution, and implementation is being monitored through the annual monitoring process. Comments in the student written submission, internal and external surveys, and audit team 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 noted that the published guidelines for an academic adviser mention that this role might normally be expected to overlap with other roles, such as that of the academic tutor, and that the latter term is often used instead of academic adviser on postgraduate taught programmes. The student written submission recommended that the University '...issues clear guidance for staff and students on the respective roles of academic adviser and personal tutor, and schools make it very clear to staff and students who holds these roles'.

The Teaching and Learning Group Action Plan from the 2009-10 Annual Review of Teaching and Learning includes a review of the personalised learning policy, including the role of academic advisers and whether further institutional guidance (for instance for joint honours programmes) is required. Against this backdrop, 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.

Staff support (including staff development)

72 The first 'enabling goal' of the University's Strategic Plan is entitled 'Quality People' and one of the key performance indicators underlying this goal is to raise the proportion of academic promotions made primarily on the basis of teaching excellence. To facilitate this aim, 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. The programme was accredited by the Higher Education Academy in 2009. In addition, the TLSO organises an annual Teaching and Learning Conference for staff, which acts a forum for sharing best practice, training, and learning from external specialists and experts as well as the institution's own National Teaching Fellows. There are also teaching enhancement workshops focusing on e-learning running throughout the year.

73 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.

74 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. The audit team concluded that the University's approach to staff support and development was effective in supporting its management of learning opportunities.

Conclusion

75 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

76 The University's strategic commitment to quality enhancement is manifest in the second goal of its overall Strategic Plan, 'Advancing the Manchester 2015 Agenda'. This goal is underpinned by five 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 and frequent personal contact with academic staff; placing Manchester in the vanguard in the use of online learning; and encouraging and rewarding excellence, innovation and creativity in teaching and learning.

77 The University pursues enhancement in part using its routine quality assurance functions. Thus, the Teaching and Learning Support Office (TLSO) has oversight of external examiner reports and sends copies of the reports to the relevant schools, annotated with

suggested enhancements. Common themes raised by examiners are included in the Teaching and Learning Group's Annual Review of Teaching and Learning. Processes for programme approval, monitoring and review are also used in part to identify opportunities for quality enhancement, particularly where these processes draw on the expertise of external subject specialists and/or professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). The audit team saw evidence of these processes contributing to quality enhancement in schools and faculties. Each faculty has an academic lead for quality assurance and quality enhancement, and quality enhancement is considered at Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees (or similar).

78 The last QAA Institutional audit recommended that the University develop a more integrated institutional approach to the dissemination of good practice in learning, teaching and assessment. The Briefing Paper acknowledged that the University still faced challenges with 'horizontal' dissemination across faculties and schools, though there had been a number of initiatives including working groups, newsletters and bulletins and the annual Teaching and Learning Conference organised by the TLSO. The 2010 conference 'Learning from the Student Experience' included sessions on good practice in teaching and e-learning and updates on institutional projects, such as the 'HEARing students voices' project. 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.

79 The University's pursuit of quality enhancement is also manifest in a wide range of recent and current special initiatives, including the 'Students as Partners' programme; institution-led developments in e-learning, including teaching enhancement workshops; programmes to enhance the personal development and employability of the University's students and graduates; and a wide range of staff training and development opportunities and award schemes for academic and support staff. A current initiative is the 'Learning Commons', a multifunctional learning space due for completion in 2012. The concept of a 'University College' as a vehicle for wider skills development was under discussion at the time of the audit.

80 The audit team noted in particular the 'Students as Partners' programme, which is managed by the TLSO in liaison with the faculties. The programme supports and facilitates schemes across the University, encouraging students to take a broad approach to their learning and development. Salient features include peer mentoring and the 'Peer Assisted Study Scheme' (PASS), which are embedded within the University's Personalised Learning Policy. The quality of PASS was illustrated by very positive comments made by students in the student written submission and at the audit visit and by the establishment of the TLSO as the UK National Centre for PASS in 2009. PASS uses recent graduates as 'Sabbatical Interns' to be actively involved in the development of the programme. The audit regarded the Peer Assisted Study Scheme as a feature of good practice in enhancing the quality of students' learning experience.

81 From discussions with students and staff and from documentation available the audit team also identified 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 delivered by The Manchester Leadership Programme, Careers and Employability Division, which are available in a wide range of disciplines and taken by more than 1,500 students each year.

Conclusion

82 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

83 At the time of the audit visit there were about 3,000 students studying in the UK and overseas for University awards through collaborative links. These links were of several different types, including validation, joint programmes, consortium agreements, split-site PhDs, 'Flying Faculty', articulation agreements and hybrid arrangements. Most links were in two schools: the School of Arts, Histories and Cultures, and the Manchester Business School.

84 The University does not have a separate strategy for collaborative provision. It has, however, recently developed an Internationalisation Strategy and a Policy on Transnational Education relating to the development of overseas collaborations. The latter expects that schools will be proactive and strategic in developing collaborations, with a focus on both income generation and longer-term strategic collaboration in research and teaching. The Briefing Paper noted that, following a period of rationalisation, the University had begun to see an increase in the number of potential partnerships coming forward for institutional approval.

85 The quality assurance of collaborative provision has been devolved to schools since 2007. Schools are guided by a single framework document - Policies and Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Collaborative Provision - which highlights key points in the development of each type of provision and gives an overview of the relevant approval process. This is supplemented by additional documents providing guidelines for the periodic review of collaborative taught programmes and validated research degrees, procedures for approval of collaborative institutions and the annual monitoring arrangements of collaborative undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes.

86 The procedures for approval, review and monitoring are embedded in the teaching and learning structures described in Section 2. 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. In accordance with the *Code of practice*, the University publishes a register of its collaborative provision. Ultimate responsibility for collaborative provision rests with the Vice-President (Teaching, Learning and Students). Schools with significant collaborative activity maintain a validation office, which manages the administration of such provision. For example, in the School of Arts, Histories and Cultures, there is a dedicated validation officer to oversee its collaborative partnerships, provide administrative support, maintain effective communication and provide advice and guidance. It was clear from visiting partner institutions that such links were useful and effective.

87 The approval of a new partnership occurs in two stages. The first stage concerns the rationale for the collaboration, risk assessment, business case and alignment with the University's strategy. This process is managed through the Teaching and Learning Support Office (TLSO) with support, where appropriate, from the Directorate of International Development. The Vice-President (Teaching, Learning and Students) nominates a panel to consider giving institutional approval in principle. 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 academic approval process broadly mirrors that for on-campus provision, except that a collaborative academic adviser is involved in the development of the collaborative programmes. The audit team noted the University's diligence in considering new partner organisations.

88 Collaborative programmes are managed in accordance with a memorandum of agreement. The University applies its standard processes for external examining, annual and periodic reviews, reapproval of programmes, student feedback, student support and staff support. Partners are notified of any changes to policies and processes through the TLSO website, the TLSO bulletins and collaborative academic advisers. It was clear to the audit team that these updates were received and applied to relevant programmes.

89 Arrangements for external examining mirror those for on-campus provision. Partners are involved in the nomination of external examiners and respond to their reports. The audit team noted that the external examining arrangements for the Manchester Business School Worldwide programmes had been reviewed in the light of the periodic review report to ensure alignment with the University's policies. It was also evident to the team that external examiners' reports were not shared with student representatives on some collaborative programmes. This contributes to the team's recommendation on the sharing of external examiner reports with students.

90 The 2006 QAA collaborative provision audit regarded as good practice the extension of the Validation Conference to create a twice-yearly Collaboration Conference covering all forms of collaborative arrangement, increasing the scope for dissemination of information and sharing of good practice. The report also recommended that the University continue its efforts to increase attendance at Collaboration Conferences by its partners. Since 2006 the Collaboration Conference has been redeveloped as an annual Teaching and Learning Conference for both collaborative and on-campus provision, giving staff from partner institutions greater networking opportunities and encouraging greater integration with the University. While these aims are sound, the audit team noted that attendance at the Learning and Teaching Conference among partner staff was lower than it had been for the Collaboration Conference. The University may wish to consider the development of alternative means of disseminating information and sharing good practice with collaborative partners.

91 Collaborative academic advisers play an important role in the quality assurance of collaborative provision. Each adviser makes an annual report. Previously such reports were directed to the Head of School. However, the University has recently considered introducing institutional oversight of the reports. The audit team welcomed this consideration, which accords with one of the advisable recommendations from the 2006 collaborative provision audit.

92 Periodic reviews of collaborative provision are undertaken on a five-yearly cycle and based on a critical self-evaluation. Reviews are undertaken on behalf of the Vice-President (Teaching, Learning and Students) and are chaired by the Faculty Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning, with faculty, school, TLSO and external representatives on the panel. Normally, such reviews involve a visit to a partner. Periodic reviews are followed by institutional reviews of the partnership arrangements. Review panel reports go to the Head of School and Dean of Faculty, who may reapprove the link for a further period of five years. The audit team scrutinised documentation provided for such periodic review and for revalidation. There was sound evidence that the University's procedures are being followed and that the reviews are thorough. Detailed and clear action plans of points arising from such reviews were evident. Institutional oversight of results of periodic reviews involving collaborative activity is identical to that for mainstream provision. However, it was evident that opportunities to share and disseminate good practice in collaborative work were limited. For example, the report of the periodic review of the Manchester Business School Worldwide programmes noted that 'there is no systematic mechanism for disseminating good practice and use is not made of existing school and faculty mechanisms for doing that'. Given the anticipated growth in collaborative activity, the 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.

93 The University does not maintain or analyse data relating to students in collaborative institutions. Partners are expected to do so and to analyse and supply this through usual monitoring arrangements. Evidence from annual and periodic reviews examined suggests that partners do produce appropriate information. The University has oversight of the accuracy of publicity and other information published by collaborative partners and it was clear to the audit team that this oversight was exercised effectively.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

94 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. This group sets out and drives the strategic and policy framework for doctoral education and oversees policy and procedures to ensure consistency of practice, resolve problems and share good practice. Each of the four faculties has its own Postgraduate Research Committee, chaired by the Faculty Associate Dean.

95 The Graduate Education Group is supported by the Graduate Administrators Group, chaired by the Head of Graduate Education, which focuses on operational aspects of postgraduate research provision. The audit team saw evidence of the Graduate Administrators Group being regularly consulted on policy developments and playing a significant role in implementing changes agreed by the Graduate Education Group.

96 The University's Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees is its definitive reference document for the management of all forms and modes of research programme. The Code's audience is intended to be staff and students and it is regularly reviewed and revised under the auspices of the Graduate Education Group in consultation with both audiences and in accordance with the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA. The Code conveys the important principle that research students and their supervisors have a shared responsibility for the success of students' programmes.

97 There are seven doctoral training centres in the physical and life sciences disciplines and one in social sciences. They are overseen by the Manchester Doctoral College (MDC) and its Management Committee, which is chaired by the Associate Vice-President for Graduate Education and comprises the directors of each doctoral training centre and the associate deans for graduate education. At the time of the audit, MDC's main role in the management of standards and quality was to ensure the sharing of good practice and promote exchange among the eight training centres. However, the University intends that MDC will replace the Graduate Education Group and become the University's most senior advisory committee on research programmes.

98 The University's regulations for research degrees give distinct assessment criteria for each different research award. A review of research master's programmes in 2010 has ensured that all such programmes are now harmonised with the regulations. The audit team noted that the assessment criteria for research degrees were consistent with the FHEQ.

Research environment

99 The first goal of the University's Strategic Plan is to make the University one of the 25 strongest research universities in the world by 2015. This goal is underpinned by five strategies for research, one of which is to provide world-class postgraduate research and training. Against this backdrop, the University's Code of Practice prescribes minimum standards for the research students' academic environment. It should feature national and international research excellence, as measured by the annual Research Profiling Exercise, and give access to appropriate facilities, designated study space, where possible, and an active participatory research environment.

100 Research students are encouraged to participate in symposia and publish the results of their research wherever possible. The audit team saw examples of research students winning national research prizes and attending high-profile national and international symposia to present their work.

101 Some of the research students whom the audit team met were members of a doctoral training centre and some were not. The former tended to regard the training centres as their primary academic locus within the University, while the latter saw their school as serving that function. Whatever the case, the team regarded the University as providing a strong and stimulating research environment in which to undertake postgraduate study.

Selection, admission and induction of students

102 The institution has a single Student Admissions Policy for all levels, which is comprehensive and clear. The Graduate Education Group is taking forward recommendations to improve the efficiency of the recruitment process and raise the University's profile in key markets

103 The 2006 QAA review of research degree programmes recommended that the University review how interviews might contribute to the admission of research students and make explicit its processes for the selection of research students, in particular the involvement of at least two members of University staff trained in selection and admissions procedures. 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.

104 Decisions on admissions for research degrees are made by appropriately trained academic staff in schools. Some schools have specific additional requirements for admission. The research students whom the audit team met indicated that the process was clear and operated as they had anticipated.

105 The University has a single policy on induction for all students. This describes induction as a process rather than a single event and highlights points of transition in student life. It seeks to foster a sense of community and belonging to academic, social and residential groupings, and recognises the diversity of students, particularly international students making the transition to the UK. The policy acknowledges different requirements for interdisciplinary students, part-time students and distance students. Faculties and schools are responsible for designing and operating induction processes consistent with the University's policy. Faculties also provide for students who arrive outside the main intake period in October. The research students whom the audit team met reported some variability in their experience of induction at school level, although they were generally satisfied.

Supervision

106 The supervision of research students is governed by an overarching policy, which is part of the University's Code of Practice. The policy specifies essential responsibilities for research student supervision which must be adhered to in all disciplines. One of these is the use of a supervisory team comprising a main supervisor and a co-supervisor, with an additional adviser/tutor to provide pastoral support. The audit team noted, however, from its scrutiny of the minutes of Graduate Education Group and in 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*. 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.

107 Each faculty runs supervisor training and development programmes and in some cases these are integrated into the New Academics Programme. In addition, the faculties 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. New members of academic staff have also benefitted from the mentoring available as co-supervisors within the supervisory team.

Progress and review arrangements

108 The University's Code of Practice has a comprehensive Progress and Review Policy, which includes the requirement for an independent annual progress review. A review of the implementation of the Code in 2008 identified some schools which had not yet fully implemented this requirement. However, the audit team saw evidence of action which had ensured all schools now comply. The research students whom the team met indicated that progress reviews were undertaken according to the policy and were very thorough. They also confirmed their appreciation of the requirements of annual review and its consequences.

109 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.

Development of research and other skills

110 The University has a wide-ranging and comprehensive programme of skills development, within which each faculty delivers its own programme, with additional training available from the careers service, library, language centre, enterprise centre and the staff development and training unit. A review in 2009 identified further enhancements to the training programme, making a number of recommendations to the Graduate Education Group which have been fully implemented. 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 of training. 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.

111 Although each faculty has a slightly different approach to skills development, some features are consistent, including a mandatory skills assessment at the start of the programme and regular updates throughout. Research students' choice of skills development activities is also informed by their supervisory team, although the audit team noted some variability in the support provided by supervisory teams with respect to skills training, which the institution is also aware of and addressing. The students whom the team met explained that the skills training programme was beneficial to their research and complemented the support provided by schools. The team considered the opportunities available to research students to develop both research and personal transferable skills as comprehensive and substantial.

Feedback mechanisms

112 Feedback mechanisms are provided for in the University's Student Representation Policy for Postgraduate Research Students. The policy gives a clear framework and mechanisms for students to raise issues with relevant staff. All schools and doctoral training centres are required to say how this is implemented through the annual monitoring process. Though policy may vary according to the needs of the discipline, regular meetings between nominated student representatives and academic and administrative staff are mandatory. Staff and students confirmed to the audit team that the policy worked as intended; research students indicated that issues they had raised had been addressed. The institution will be participating in the national Postgraduate Research Experience Survey for the first time in 2011, which will give greater scope for benchmarking its research provision.

Assessment

113 The framework for the assessment of research degrees is again part of the University Code of Practice. The guidance on plagiarism and other forms of academic malpractice is clear; students whom the audit team met confirmed that they understood it. 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.

114 The Examination of Doctoral Degrees Policy is clear and comprehensive. The candidate decides when to submit their thesis for examination. Vivas are open to staff and other students, who must indicate in advance if they wish to attend and sign confidentiality agreements. There is no formal requirement to inform the candidate at the end of the exam, but the timescale for communicating the outcome must be made clear. The policy gives the criteria for each possible recommendation that the examiners can make. Staff and students whom the audit team met confirmed that they were aware of these arrangements.

115 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.

Representations, complaints and appeals

116 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. The Appeal Panel's 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.

Conclusion

117 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

118 Responsibility for publicity materials 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.

119 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.

120 The University's electronic information provision and communication with students is mainly through its website and virtual learning environment. Students whom the audit team met 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 team noted the efforts the University had made in raising student awareness of this information, particularly during induction.

121 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 and to contain relevant and accurate information about course structure, programme aims and outcomes, assessment information and the range of support services available to students. 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.

122 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 to the team 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.

123 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.

Conclusion

124 The audit team found that reliance could 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.

RG 792a 08/11

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ISBN 978 1 84979 369 8

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786