

Brunel University

December 2009

Annex to the report

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Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Brunel University (the University) from 14 December to 18 December 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards the University offers.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the Brunel University 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. Limited confidence can be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards in collaborative provision
- 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.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University's approach to quality enhancement is implemented via the Learning and Teaching Committee, which carries responsibility for academic activities through its engagement with schools and relevant service providers, and the Campus Life Committee, which carries responsibility for non-academic aspects. Enhancement considerations feature prominently in the procedures for regulatory audit, but the associated guidelines may limit the scope of the enhancement reporting opportunities.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The audit team concluded that the University's management of its research degree programmes met the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA, and that the procedures for assuring the quality and standards of these programmes were appropriately secure.

Published information

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

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the team considers essential:

- the University puts in place robust procedures and systems to ensure that the central deliberative bodies of the University are able to be assured that appropriate, timely and effective action has been taken on recommendations arising from its audit of collaborative provision (paragraphs 131, 132 and 139).

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- the University should ensure that the way in which it records and processes actions arising from its quality and standards procedures is sound, reliable and timely and enables central deliberative bodies to be assured that standards are secure (paragraphs 14, 23 and 61)

- the University should make fuller use of the data available to it from internal and external sources in order to benchmark and evaluate its academic standards (paragraph 71).

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- the University should ensure that its external examiners are consistently well supported, briefed and trained (paragraphs 39 and 44)
- the University's deliberative bodies should consider fully how the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, has been mapped on to its own procedures and processes (paragraph 74).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 Founded by Royal Charter in 1966, the history of Brunel University is a story of growth and evolution. Its constituent elements include Acton and Shoreditch Technical Colleges and, through incorporation of the West London Institute in 1995, Borough Road College, Maria Grey College and Chiswick Polytechnic. The University now makes a major contribution to the economy and community of the West London region.

2 Following significant redevelopment of the Uxbridge campus, all of the University's activities have been located on a single campus since 2007. The University now has aspirations to be 'a world-class creative community able to meet the challenges of the future' with a continued focus on quality teaching and quality research.

3 The University is structured into eight academic schools: School of Arts; Brunel Business School; Brunel Law School; School of Engineering and Design; School of Health Sciences and Social Care; School of Information Systems, Computing and Mathematics; School of Social Sciences; and School of Sport and Education. It also has an Institute for the Environment offering postgraduate provision and six other specialist research institutes offering research degrees.

4 In 2008-09 the student population was 10,200 full-time equivalent (FTE) undergraduates, 2,100 FTE taught postgraduates, and 700 FTE research students. One of the distinctive features of the University is that 35 per cent of the undergraduate students are enrolled on sandwich programmes.

5 Collaborative provision offered through the University is small in size and scope and until recently was limited to an 'off-campus' mode of delivery and to articulation arrangements. This provision was included in the scope of this Institutional audit, and judgements on that provision have been made independently of the on-campus provision.

6 A review by the University of its aims and objectives, resulting in the current Strategic Plan (2008-12), led the University to define a set of value statements and five strategic imperatives. The value statements are intended to guide the way in which the University achieves its vision of being a world-class creative community, and the strategic imperatives define the areas on which the University will focus. The core values identified are quality, ideas, integrity, empowerment, community, partnerships and sustainability and the five strategic imperatives defined are:

- encourage and support a vibrant research community that is
 - research-intensive
 - creative and collaborative
 - engaged with the world at large

- enhance the student experience by
 - focusing on the needs of our students
 - developing confident, talented and versatile graduates
- compete globally through
 - collaborations and partnerships
 - encouraging staff and students to be global citizens
- enhance our enterprise culture by
 - encouraging stronger business awareness
 - expanding enterprise and knowledge transfer activities
- provide an enabling environment where
 - staff contribution, retention and development are valued
 - the work environment is supportive and confidence-building
 - the campus environment is safe and attractive, and environmental considerations inform our actions
 - there is financial sustainability
 - there is a strong sense of community and shared purpose.

The information base for the audit

7 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 Briefing Paper referenced a range of sources of evidence to illustrate the University's approach to managing the security of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its educational provision. The team had access to a hard copy of all documents referenced in the Briefing Paper; in addition, the team had access to a range of electronic resources available on the institution's intranet.

8 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.

9 In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the previous Institutional audit (May 2004)
- the report on the Major review of healthcare programmes by North East London Strategic Health Authority (March 2006)
- the report of the Audit of overseas provision in Athens and Thessaloniki (May 2008)
- reports produced by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs)
- the institution's internal documents
- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.

Developments since the last audit

10 The previous Institutional audit in May 2004 resulted in a judgement of broad confidence in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes, and the academic standards of its awards. The report noted a number of features of good practice, notably in terms of enhancing communications with external examiners, a commitment to further development of placement opportunities, support for students with special needs and support for blended e-learning.

11 The 2004 report also contained four recommendations for advisable action. The first two recommendations concerned issues to do with the regulatory framework. A working party of Senate at that time, which was considering the regulations for degree classification, was recommended to report as a matter of priority, in order that its proposals could be implemented without delay. It was also recommended as a matter of priority that the University conduct a review and clarification of the non-negotiable core of their regulations to effect further and desirable limitations on local variability. According to the Briefing Paper, the 2004 Institutional audit 'confirmed the University's view that the evolution of its regulatory framework had reached an end point as the gradual accumulation of changes over time had resulted in a less coherent whole than was necessary to assure standards effectively'.

12 In response the University took a rigorous approach to these recommendations and view the work undertaken in developing the suite of Senate Regulations as a major focus of their efforts to secure the assurance of standards and the enhancement of students' academic experience. The revision of its regulations for all taught programmes started in February 2005 with a review of the taught postgraduate framework. This review coincided with the final stages of restructuring from faculties to schools and from terms to semesters and was not completed until March 2006.

13 The briefing paper notes that the introduction of the new regulatory framework for postgraduate degrees in September 2006 did not proceed as expected. Whilst there had appeared to be widespread support for the revised regulations during their development and approval, the implementation phase began to uncover substantial difficulties. It became apparent that the consultation process in some areas of the University had not touched large numbers of academic staff and that this, together with the scale and significance of the changes, had produced a range of more negative responses from disengagement to outright hostility. Senate was asked to revisit the issue and a review of the revised regulations took place in summer 2008. Senate accepted the findings of this review, which concluded that the principles and operational elements of the revised scheme were sound, subject to the implementation of a series of recommendations to take effect from September 2009. A particular concern raised in this context was that the implementation of the new regulations had not necessarily produced changes within modules and that some modules may well need revision to work within the new regulations. During 2007 work had commenced on the redevelopment of the undergraduate framework, and revised regulations were approved by Senate in March 2009 to take effect incrementally for each cohort of new entrants, commencing with students starting undergraduate programmes in September 2009. The audit team concluded that the undergraduate regulations for 2010 and 2011 graduates largely remain not fully fit for purpose and are not fully effective in assuring standards (see paragraph 52).

14 Given the urgency of the recommendations in the 2004 Institutional audit report, which were specifically identified to the institution as a matter of priority, the audit team concluded that the University's response in drafting the undergraduate regulations has been somewhat less than timely.

15 The third and fourth recommendations advised the University to continue its diligence in seeking to enhance the effectiveness of annual monitoring through rigorous self-evaluation, and to consider further the role that students can play in the management and assurance of quality and standards. In 2004 Senate resolved to devolve responsibility for annual monitoring to the newly formed schools. Quality assurance at the institutional level in this context was initially

scaled down to the issue of outline guidance for schools prepared by the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC). This devolution of responsibility led to variations in practice between schools, and further guidance was issued in 2006.

16 As an additional safeguard, a new institutional process of regulatory audit was also introduced specifically to monitor the implementation of the University's policies, processes and practices for the delivery of all student-related provision in each school. Despite these actions the LTC concluded during 2007 that further investigations across the University of the continuing variability of practice and of the effectiveness of monitoring practices were necessary. Updated guidance was issued during the 2008-09 cycle with the expectation that the revised arrangements should be fully operational from 2009-10.

17 In addition to the restructuring of faculties as schools, key changes were made to the portfolios of the pro vice-chancellors (PVCs). The portfolio of the PVC (Learning and Teaching) was modified in 2005 to encompass leadership in the full range of activities that contribute to the student experience, and the post was re-titled PVC (Student Experience) in recognition of this wider emphasis. In 2008 the portfolios of the other PVCs were reviewed, with the creation of a new portfolio for Strategy and Staff Development, in addition to portfolios which embrace Research and Knowledge Transfer, Development, and External Relations. Each PVC is responsible for key objectives of the new Strategic Plan, developed as part of the 2008 planning cycle.

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

18 The LTC has delegated responsibility from Senate for the maintenance and enhancement of academic quality and standards and for making recommendations to Senate on strategy and policy for learning and teaching. The terms of reference require LTC to advise schools on learning and teaching strategies, which may be developed at local level, and to ensure that these complement and are consistent with the University's Strategic Plan and its Students' Plan; advise on the policies and procedures for the maintenance and enhancement of quality and standards and oversee the implementation of such policies; oversee arrangements for assuring the quality and standards of collaborative provision; and report to Senate annually on the management of quality and standards in relation to learning, teaching and the student experience. The latitude thus extended to schools whether or not to have a school-focused learning and teaching strategy is a matter of some concern and consideration should be given to making these strategies a requirement and not an option.

19 Responsibility for the quality and standards of research degrees is delegated to the Sub-Committee for Postgraduate Research Degrees (SCPGRD). It is required to review and disseminate good practice in relation to research student provision and the student experience; to report to LTC annually on the management of quality and standards in relation to programmes of research training, internally and in partner institutions; and to develop, review and revise the framework within which schools monitor programmes of study leading to research degrees of the University.

20 Both of these committees are chaired by the PVC (Student Experience), who also chairs an informal grouping known as DASH, which consists of deputy and assistant heads of school. Its purpose is to provide a forum for discussion and communication, focusing on three specific areas: oversight of the development and operation of local quality assurance arrangements within the University's framework; school leadership for innovation in learning and teaching; and responsibility for the quality of the student experience in schools.

21 School boards are responsible for the assurance of quality and standards at local level, operating as subcommittees of Senate. They are required to maintain the standard of awards and the quality of the programmes within the school, along with any programmes offered by the school in collaboration with other bodies. Each head of school is supported by a deputy head who has thematic responsibilities including learning and teaching and also chairs the School Learning and Teaching Committee.

22 In terms of academic and strategic planning, LTC is required to review and revise the University Students' Plan and the associated risk management strategies in accordance with the University's Strategic Plan. At a local level, at the beginning of the planning cycle each head of school and head of service area produce a five-year plan, which sets out at a local level the mechanisms for delivering the strategic imperatives from the Students' Plan.

23 The audit team noted that the ways in which the University monitors the progress of actions arising from the operation of its quality and standards procedures are not wholly secure. For example, it is not clear from the minutes of LTC whether or not this key committee is routinely and reliably informed of all actions taken for which it is responsible, for example the final approval of all regulatory changes. Thus, regarding substantive issues it is not always able to confirm to Senate that the actions taken have been sound and timely. No written records are kept of DAsH meetings, and whereas the value of this informal forum to allow the discussion of key issues in an informal environment is recognised, indeed the concept of DAsH was recognised as a feature of good practice in the 2004 Institutional audit, the emerging benefits are potentially not maximised through a consequential lack of transparency in terms of monitoring the contributions of these discussions to policies and practice in terms of quality and standards. The team recommends that it is advisable that the University should ensure that the way in which it records and processes actions arising from its quality and standards procedures is sound, reliable and timely and enables central deliberative bodies to be assured that standards are secure (see paragraphs 14 and 61).

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

24 The University uses a range of mechanisms in setting and defining its academic standards and in assuring the maintenance of the standards of its awards; its primary means are its academic regulations (covering attainment and level descriptors, progression, assessment practice, award criteria etc) and its engagement with its external examiners, as well as its process for the approval of programmes. These are supported by the routine monitoring and periodic review of programmes, the setting of entry standards and some use of management information. A number of these processes, particularly those connected with the approval, annual monitoring and periodic review of programmes are also regarded by the University as central to ensuring the quality of the learning opportunities provided for its students. The University engages with the academic infrastructure and other external reference points, such as the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), in its approach to setting, assuring and maintaining academic standards. Responsibility for directly setting and assuring standards is 'located as close as possible to the point of delivery', with oversight being maintained by the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) and Senate through means such as an annual summary of external examiners' reports, receipt of the reports from Academic Programme Reviews and also through the process of regulatory audit (see paragraphs 32 and 35).

25 Programme approval is a two stage process. Approval in principle considers resources and strategic fit and broad academic issues. Approval in full is an event involving external and internal peers, and makes due use of the academic infrastructure and other external reference points as appropriate. The same process is used for major modifications to programmes, thereby ensuring that there is external input into significant changes to programmes. Formal approval for both stages is undertaken on behalf of Senate based on a recommendation from the Chair of LTC, acting on behalf of LTC; neither Senate nor LTC scrutinise the reports of approval events directly.

26 Externality is built into the programme approval process. The chair is independent from the proposing school and two members of staff from a cognate area, not normally from the same school, provide further internal independence from direct delivery interests. Externality normally consists of two external academic peers. The external is specifically seen as being

able to comment about level in relation to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and on the match to the relevant subject benchmark statements (SBSs), and thus contributes to assurance regarding the academic standards set.

27 The process for programme approval is agreed by LTC and published on the intranet, and LTC maintains oversight of the process through annual reports on programme approval events. The guidance connected with the process is detailed and helpful and indicates clearly what the expectations and responsibilities are. Reference is made to the *Code of practice* in the process and direct reference is made to the FHEQ and SBSs; with approval based on programme specifications. Programme withdrawal requires formal approval from Senate.

28 As a result of the introduction of new undergraduate regulations, programmes had to be amended for 2009 entry. These modifications were recorded as a list of programme titles at Senate in September 2009. It is formally recorded that 'each programme has been scrutinised and approved by both LTC and Senate through Chair's action' and that 'all programme specifications were scrutinised and recommended for approval by two experienced chairs of approval events prior to action by the Chair of LTC'.

29 Annual monitoring is considered by the University as 'a valuable tool for...systematic reflection on...the standards of awards and the achievement of students'. Responsibility for the annual monitoring of programmes was devolved to schools in 2004 based upon the belief that the strength of such monitoring 'is derived from the engagement of the professionalism of academic staff in the critical evaluation of their teaching'. The main source of input into the annual monitoring process in connection with standards is the external examiners' reports, although centrally produced data (see paragraph 62) also make a contribution. Detailed engagement with external examiners' comments was evident in annual monitoring reports seen by the audit team.

30 Oversight of annual monitoring is through regulatory audit (see paragraph 35) with annual reports to LTC. The regulatory audit overview in 2006-07 commented on annual monitoring reports, where the best were described as rigorous, honest, reflective and evaluative, but also noted that some reports 'tended to be mainly descriptive with little analysis applied, and monitoring through the school committee structure was sometimes incomplete'.

31 It is evident that in giving responsibility to schools to define their own annual monitoring process within very generic guidelines, and removing what had been an institutionally prescribed framework of guidance and questions, the University was not wholly satisfied with the resulting degree of variation. As a result, the University has extended the central guidance in successive years. Schools have also noted difficulties. For example, because of the lack of consistency at programme level in recording actions during annual monitoring, difficulties occur in monitoring progress in the following year.

32 Module level reports are brought together in subject level overview reports, usually one overview report for undergraduate and one for postgraduate programmes. The consolidated overview reports are formally considered by school boards. The University has detailed oversight of annual monitoring through regulatory audit, which checks compliance and engagement on an annual basis.

33 The University's periodic review of programmes is termed Academic Programme Review (APR). APR is seen as a 'periodic health check' and has operated since 2007 in its current format, with a schedule set by LTC normally based on a five-year cycle. The aims of the APR procedure include confirmation that academic standards are being maintained and to demonstrate alignment with external points of reference such as SBSs, sections of the *Code of practice*, the FHEQ and PSRB requirements.

34 APR involves external panel members as well as academics from other schools across the University and addresses standards through examining external examiners' reports and the responses to them for the previous five years. It also reviews all current programme specifications and related module documentation. Panels meet students as part of the process wherever possible, but student representatives are not involved in the process as panel members. The process picks up any need for updating documentation and identifies inconsistencies, eg between programme specifications and student handbooks.

35 Regulatory audit is designed to address the implementation of University policies and procedures at school level and is described as securing administrative compliance. It can address matters concerning academic standards, although is more routinely concerned with quality matters. Regulatory audit has, for example, checked documentation concerning minor modifications, the internal resolution of appeals and second marking and moderation arrangements within schools. Regulatory audit appears to be a well-regarded process, considered valuable at both local and central levels and to contribute to both quality assurance and enhancement. A large amount of documentation has to be assembled by each school for regulatory audit.

36 The audit team, through the scrutiny of examples of annual monitoring reports and documentation, programme approval documentation and the documentation and reports from Academic Programme Reviews concluded that these processes made appropriate contributions to the setting and assurance of the academic standards of the University's awards. Both programme approval and programme review make use of independent and external persons.

External examiners

37 External examiners are seen by the University as central to assuring the academic standards of its awards, and are required to report on the comparability of standards with other UK higher education institutions (HEIs), on whether the standards set by the University for its awards are appropriate with reference to external benchmarks and on whether the University's processes for assessment and the determination of awards are sound and fairly conducted.

38 Information on the process and criteria for appointment are set out within Senate Regulations. Recommendations for appointment are made to Senate using a nomination form, with nominations endorsed by at least two members of Senate, with the resulting successful nominations being forwarded to Senate for formal approval. The normal expectation is that the nominee is a senior academic with suitable experience. Individuals may be appointed as examiners for assessment blocks or for programmes. Flexibility within the system allows schools to operate examination boards in the ways which suit their provision; they may, for instance, appoint chief examiners where appropriate.

39 On appointment the Quality and Standards Office (QSO) sends external examiners key central information, including the relevant regulations, and schools are required to provide new external examiners with a clearly specified set of subject and programme-specific information. There is no formal training provided by the University for its external examiners, with academic schools responsible for briefing new examiners. The audit team noted there is variability in the ways schools undertake this devolved responsibility. This issue was identified in the overview report to Senate, which makes reference to a concern from some examiners about the lack of induction and briefing. The University has, following a review, subsequently asked that new external examiners receive some training, but the response to this request is for schools to determine. Although some action has been taken by schools, the approach of the University to the briefing and support of its external examiners means that it cannot be assured that all its external examiners have access to consistent briefing and training. The audit team noted the University's view that such matters should remain with the academic schools, but nevertheless considered it desirable for the University to consider fuller central support for the briefing and training of its external examiners.

40 The University generally operates a two-tier examination board system, with panels of examiners reviewing marks or grades for assessment blocks and boards of examiners reviewing performance at programme level. Boards of examiners are constituted by the head of school for each programme leading to an award and make decisions on progression, awards and in respect of accepted mitigating circumstances. Chairs should not normally be responsible for the delivery of the programme(s) under consideration. A member of the administrative staff of the University is designated the Vice-Chancellor's representative (VCR) at boards of examiners and is responsible for ensuring that the proceedings of the board are carried out in accordance with Senate Regulations and the approved programme specification. There are detailed guidelines for VCRs.

41 Information concerning the role of the external examiner is set out within Senate Regulation 4. Senate regulations are widely available, including on the University's intranet, and must also be available to all boards of examiners. External examiners have the right to attend all boards of examiners for those programmes to which they are appointed, and their views are to be given particular regard, but decisions are regarded as the collective decision of the board as a whole. Senate Regulations make it clear that at least one external examiner shall normally be required to be present where a final award is under consideration, but that the business 'may not be transacted in the absence of the VCR'. Appropriate arrangements are in place should an external not be able to be present.

42 External examiners are required to submit an annual report using a pro forma provided by the QSO, and such reports are formally sent to the Vice-Chancellor. Schools are required to respond in writing to examiners' reports and to copy their response to the QSO. Schools are also required to respond through their annual monitoring reports. Student representatives involved in the annual monitoring processes within their individual schools have sight of the relevant external examiner's report for their programme of study. The QSO monitors receipt of reports and reviews responses. The responses to external examiners reviewed by the audit team were detailed and individual. In general external examiners were satisfied with the responses made to their comments, although some occasionally noted that action had not been taken as a result.

43 Each year Senate considers a summary of external examiners' comments produced by the QSO. This report aims to confirm to Senate that the standards of awards are appropriate and also review the issues where favourable or unfavourable comments have been made. For example, the 2005-06 overview report recorded concern about the University's potentially overgenerous rules for classification in comparison to the sector or clarity of marking criteria in some areas. These overview reports, while generic, do illustrate that matters are identified at institutional level and taken forward in due course. For example, a number of items identified in the 2005-06 and 2006-07 overview reports were picked up by the group revising the undergraduate regulations implemented from September 2009.

44 Overall, effective use is made of external examiners in the summative assessment of students and in relation to assuring the academic standards of awards. External examiners are a respected part of the process by which the institution assures the academic standards of its awards and assures itself that the overall process for the appointment of external examiners and their participation in examination processes is effective, as is the process for the receipt and use of their reports. However, the institution should give further consideration to the briefing, training and support it gives to its external examiners

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

45 In its approach to setting award standards the University makes due reference to the relevant parts of the Academic Infrastructure published by QAA. Reference to the FHEQ is made within key processes, such as programme approval and programme monitoring, in documents such as programme specifications and in Senate Regulations. The use made of the FHEQ is not overt, that is to say the institution does not look to its approval and review processes formally

to confirm and record the alignment of awards with the relevant qualification descriptors, but this is implicit in the process. Similar reference is made to SBSs and these are seen as integral to programme approval at undergraduate level and for relevant postgraduate awards. The audit team was not able to find evidence to suggest systematic engagement with revisions to SBSs at school, subject or institutional level, with APR providing the only clear evidence of timely engagement. The University promoted the view that consideration at approval events for new and revised programmes provided evidence of SBS engagement, but the team concluded this strategy did not secure a timely approach to addressing SBS revisions.

46 Programme specifications are central to approval and review processes. There are developed and established pro formas for programme specifications with embedded references to expectations concerning SBSs and the FHEQ. The programme specification and programme approval guidance help ensure that the relationship between the curriculum, learning outcomes and the assessment of those outcomes is clear. Programmes for new students entering in 2009, operating under the revised Senate Regulations 2 (SR2), demonstrate this relationship within the revised programme specifications.

47 Students and employers are the intended audience for programme specifications and they normally form part of the information given to students. Programme specifications for taught postgraduate students include guidance on the form, nature and length of the dissertation and are issued to all postgraduate taught students at initial registration.

48 The LTC began to engage systematically and routinely with PSRB reports in 2008-09. At its meeting in November 2008 the committee received and noted reports from PSRB accreditation events held in 2007-08 and also received a list of accreditations planned for 2008-09. In subsequent meetings the committee actively engaged with PSRB reports, for instance it received and followed up a limited reapproval by General Social Care Council and noted the successful Institution of Mechanical Engineers engagement, both in 2009.

49 The University has not formally engaged with the European Standards and Guidelines but is aware of the Bologna process and is responding appropriately. Overall, the audit team was able to confirm that the University makes effective use of external reference points in setting and reviewing the academic standards of its awards.

Assessment policies and regulations

50 Assessment regulations are approved by Senate and set out in a series of documents, which form part of Senate Regulations (SRs). The relevant sections are: SR2, which is concerned with undergraduate provision; SR3, with taught postgraduate provision; SR4, with the assessment of students on taught programmes and SR6, with academic appeals and disciplinary matters.

51 A working group was established to review and revise the undergraduate and postgraduate regulations and generic regulations for taught programmes (see paragraph 12). The assessment working group undertook a very detailed and thorough investigation of the information and issues in order to produce new regulations (on which it has consulted widely) that would enable the University to be fully satisfied that, for instance, an honours degree can only be awarded where all of the programme learning outcomes have been achieved to a threshold standard.

52 However, the undergraduate regulations for the graduating cohorts in 2010 and 2011 are, in essence, the same as those operating at the time of the 2004 audit. Few significant changes have been made to them in the interim to address the issues which concerned the institution and the 2004 audit team. There is greater awareness of the issue of what the University describes as 'excessive variability' and this awareness, plus discussion with chairs of boards of examiners, is intended to control the use of the key problem areas of 'set aside' and condonement. In revising SR2, 'the University had identified, and confirmed by external scrutiny, that the use of set-aside

and condonement was variable and problematic and it was essential that the regulations were revised'. Examples of changes which have ensured closer alignment between schools include a University-wide, late submission penalties which arose from regulatory audit, and a policy on the suspension of studies (introduced from Sept 2007).

53 The University has developed two sets of generic grade descriptors: one covering undergraduate provision and the other master's level. The generic descriptors are intended for widespread use across the institution in, for instance, assessment design or the provision of academic feedback and schools are encouraged to refer to LTC's generic grade descriptors and the FHEQ in developing assessment criteria. Schools are responsible for ensuring that all examiners involved in assessing or moderating student work are fully informed of relevant grading/marking criteria and standards appropriate and make reference to generic or specific criteria.

54 Master's programmes use grade profiles to determine awards. Reassessment opportunities are defined through a combination of the number of failed credits and grade achieved, with some discretion left to the board of examiners. Since September 2009 students entering undergraduate programmes are being assessed using a grading and profiling system (pre-2009 regulations utilise marks and aggregation).

55 There are appropriate regulations surrounding assessment, including the conduct of examinations, with arrangements for students unable to take an examination under normal conditions, such as use of viva voce etc. Within its regulations the University clearly defines relevant terms for blind double-marking and internal moderation and specifies situations where they must be used. The need for anonymity is appropriately acknowledged, with student numbers and not names used wherever possible and appropriate. In addition to the regulations, a number of protocols and guidelines have been approved by LTC, for example protocols on the assessment of taught master's dissertations and for undergraduate final year project reports, or guidelines on the admission of students with advanced standing.

56 Important to the changes introduced as part of the revised regulations was the incorporation and recognition of placement learning within programmes, including how periods of placement learning would contribute towards degree classification. The University offers a range of awards with a placement year, which is a notable feature of the University's provision.

57 Generic information concerning assessment can be found on the University's intranet and the student handbook pages provide an effective short summary, plus a series of links to more detailed information, including to Senate Regulations and mitigating circumstances procedures etc. Senate Regulation 4 (SR4) explicitly states that assessment criteria 'must be published to both staff and students and be made available to external examiners'; Senate Regulation 3 (SR3) states that the 'method and schedule of assessment shall be notified to the student at the start of the academic year by the School providing the module'. An important part of the revised undergraduate regulations is intended to be the clarity of information for students. Requirements of students are to be 'published in the programme specification and associated module outlines to notified deadlines'. Students met by the audit team on both the 'old' or 'new' regulations confirmed that detailed information was available to them in module guides or equivalent handbooks.

58 Senate regulations state that feedback on assessed coursework 'should be returned to students within a reasonable period, normally defined in the programme handbook' and that oral feedback should be provided to students on formal written examinations on request. Students met by the audit team confirmed that they received feedback on their assessed work, although a number thought that feedback was not particularly timely. As a result of the National Student Survey (NSS), schools have been placing greater emphasis on the importance of useful and timely feedback to students. A number of external examiners comment positively on the quality of written feedback to students, but others have made observations about the consistency of the feedback provided.

59 Mitigating circumstances procedures are set out in SR4. Claims for mitigating circumstances to be taken into account are reviewed by a Mitigating Circumstances Panel, which determines whether a claim should be accepted and makes recommendations to the relevant Board of Examiners. This is an area where the University has sought to limit the extent of variation between schools and, although schools operate aspects of appeals and mitigating circumstances procedures, it is now within guidance set out in the regulations.

60 The audit team concluded that assessment principles, procedures and processes are clearly specified and available to staff, students and external examiners; the constitution, remit and procedures for operation of panels and boards of examiners are clear and comprehensive, as are the procedures and guidance relating to the conduct of assessment

61 The University now has regulations that support disciplinary diversity while providing 'complete transparency and corporate assurance of the standards of all undergraduate awards from 2012 onwards. The revised regulations make use of grading and profiling and mark a significant change for the University. However, the audit team did not consider that the University had acted with due priority and urgency to review and clarify aspects of its regulations and had not ensured that changes could be implemented without delay (see paragraphs 13 and 14).

Management information – statistics

62 The University uses statistical information to produce a range of management information: a standard data set is provided to schools for the purposes of annual monitoring; data is produced centrally for periodic programme review; LTC has received data on aspects of progression and awards; and recruitment information is considered routinely at institutional level by Senate. Planning produces an annual report on external measures of performance which is considered by the Strategic Planning and Resources Committee (this covers league table performance and selected Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) performance indicators).

63 The last detailed set of information considered by LTC was presented in a number of formats but the purpose of the information received was not evident, the rationale for the presentation was unclear and there was no accompanying analysis. As a result the committee 'had struggled to extract any meaningful data from the volume of the information provided'. The school-based or institution-wide data the audit team saw has some limitations and that which is produced is not always routinely used to monitor academic standards. No comparative sector data is produced for this purpose. The basic data produced for annual monitoring are not extensive, but do include information on admission numbers, retention and destinations, together with a breakdown of the student profile.

64 The analysis of data at module and programme level is undertaken by module and programme leaders. Much information is provided on actual student numbers (eg on offers or withdrawals), sometimes translated into graphical formats. Little information is routinely provided to assist in analysis and interpretation, such as subject norms for the sector, exception reporting benchmarks, commentary on statistical significance, or meaningful trends data (although numbers are presented for more than one year in some categories, such as enrolments).

65 For annual monitoring at module level, the information is contained within reports but, in the examples seen by the audit team, was not typically used as the basis of any meaningful analysis in order to help manage the standards of awards; ie it is not used effectively or consistently and the level of analysis is variable. Examples scrutinised by the team included minimal and limited analysis and response to the statistical information, and other examples where staff frustration with the quality of the data was clearly expressed, as were doubts about its reliability and accuracy; other examples illustrated a more sophisticated level of engagement and analysis. The University annually reviews the use made of statistical reporting by programmes and schools in annual monitoring through regulatory audit.

66 Fuller data is provided as part of APR and somewhat more extensive and consistent use made of the data within that process. Periodic review reports are considered by LTC, allowing the institution to consider the use made of management information by programmes and schools to monitor academic standards.

67 Over recent years detailed figures have been provided on student profile to assist with equality and diversity monitoring and Senate receives an annual report on student equality and diversity. Schools are expected to comment on equality and diversity within annual monitoring, however the audit team did not see any effective use of such information in programme monitoring and review.

68 Fuller use of tariff scores is made to monitor progress of the University's strategic goal to improve the quality of its student intake (this has risen from a minimum tariff floor of 160 to the current floor of 220/240 and an average of 320).

69 However, extensive and detailed use is made of statistical information for specific purposes. For example, the extensive analysis of internal cohort data on progression and achievement and the examination of classification systems across the sector by the Assessment Working Group helped enable the institution to form a sophisticated understanding of issues and principles surrounding the progression, assessment and classification of students. The thoroughness of this work was considered noteworthy by the audit team.

70 The University has been considering its use of data over a period of time and is presently working towards producing a more detailed set of statistical data. In February 2006 LTC discussed the use of student data for annual monitoring and a group was established to work with senior management to review its information needs. It was noted that the intention was to work towards establishing a 'data bible'. The committee requested that the following be explored further: chronological data for the sector; the most useful sector comparators; subject-level comparative sector data; more detailed analysis of retention. Only limited progress had been made since 2006 with this work, which after being deferred in 2007-08 was picked up in 2008-09 and a working group established, which has yet to report.

71 The audit team concluded that statistical information makes only a limited contribution to the way in which the institution seeks to assure academic standards. The team heard about the University's intentions in the future to develop its use of data and would strongly encourage the institution to ensure that rapid progress is made with this intention, thus helping assure the academic standards of its programmes and awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

72 The University audited its practices against the *Code of practice* when it was first published and prior to the previous Institutional audit and makes use of the *Code* in helping to ensure the maintenance of the quality of students' learning opportunities. Responsibility for engagement is in part devolved and in part addressed at institutional level.

73 A paper was produced for LTC in July 2009 summarising the consideration of the various sections of the *Code of practice* by the University. Sections 2, 4, and 7 are reported to have been reviewed by the Quality and Standards Office (QSO) but no dates are given for this work or any details of any conclusions drawn or action taken. Section 1 was reviewed by the Sub-Committee for Postgraduate Research Degrees (SCPGRD) in 2004 and some changes recommended, but the matter did not appear to have been returned to by the subcommittee. Section 5 was considered by the academic appeals committee in November 2008, which 'received and considered the most recent update of the *Code of practice*, Section 5...and...noted that it broadly met with the guidance set out in the code'. No further details are provided or follow-up recorded. The

Admissions Office reviewed Section 10 in 2006, and *Section 6: Assessment of students* and *Section 9: Work-based and placement learning* are recorded as having informed the Assessment Working Group's work in revising Senate Regulations. The summary paper enabled the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) to record the committee's 'confidence in the congruence of the University's work in relation to the sections of the code'.

74 There is evidence of widespread reference to sections of the *Code of practice* within relevant procedures, or in their development of those procedures, and of engagement with the *Code* in helping to ensure the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of the learning opportunities provided by the University. However, there is less evidence that the *Code* is routinely, fully considered through its committee structure as revised sections are published and that all actions taken are recorded, although some revised sections have been considered by specific committees (see paragraph 73). The audit team considered that the University's deliberative bodies should more fully consider how the *Code of practice* maps on to its own procedures and processes.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

75 Programme Approval in principle (see Section 2) is seen to have led to a more focused and strategic approach to programme development, with more effective evaluation of the resource implications of developments and active engagement with the Students' Plan, and thus to place greater stress on the quality of learning opportunities provided. A number of elements of the process ensure that the quality of the intended learning experience has been adequately addressed. For example, additional documentation is required for distance learning programmes and specific guidelines within the procedure are designed to ensure that any joint/major/minor awards give due consideration to the coherence of the programme for students.

76 In recognition of the importance of placement learning, separate award titles are approved for programmes with placement years. The 'Placement Learning Policy: Degrees with Placement Year' approved and published by LTC in July 2009 is intended to ensure that students' placement experience is well defined and supported before, during and after the placement, and that it is appropriately assessed and provides guidance on defining learning outcomes for placement learning. The audit team considered this policy makes a positive contribution to achieving good learning experiences on placement learning.

77 As far as annual monitoring is concerned, the main sources of input into the process regarding quality is student feedback, with schools being asked to record and reflect on student feedback, the significant points arising from it and actions taken to enhance the student experience. Engagement with student feedback was evident in most reports seen by the audit team at module and programme levels.

78 The documentation specified as part of regulatory audit, which makes a particular contribution to checking the quality of the learning opportunities, includes: annual monitoring reports; scrutiny of student handbooks for all taught programmes, especially for consistency and accuracy; information for students concerning project/dissertations and for placements/practice; policy documents and guidance for staff on student representation; student feedback and response to that feedback; and peer review of teaching.

79 APR is designed to be a reflective process based on the scrutiny of documentation and a self-assessment, including student learning opportunities. The resulting reports are considered by LTC which monitors progress. LTC minutes demonstrate engagement with the reports. The final phase of the APR process is a subject area action plan which forms part of following annual monitoring.

80 The audit team considered that programme approval and review and annual monitoring, as well as how these are overseen and checked through regulatory audit, each contribute

appropriately to ensuring that the resources available to students and the learning opportunities provided for them should enable the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Management information - feedback from students

81 The University places importance on the collection of student feedback at a number of levels and utilising a range of mechanisms. Feedback mechanisms are clearly communicated to staff and students, and the online student handbook, for instance, contains a section on 'making your views known'. The University is able to maintain appropriate oversight of the operation of its internal arrangements for student feedback through mechanisms such as regulatory audit.

82 Schools use a variety of methods to obtain feedback from their students. Students are routinely requested to complete module feedback forms and may also be asked to complete overall course questionnaires. There is no University standard form or specified core set of questions or guiding set of principles for such questionnaires, so the nature of the feedback and information derived from it is variable. As the format of such questionnaires varies both between and within schools, comparison of provision across programmes is not readily enabled, so the value of the feedback beyond the module or subject is reduced. This has been recognised at both school level and at institutional level.

83 In September 2007 an institutional approach to gathering student feedback was proposed, involving 'a standard set of questions which could be supplemented with school-specific questions' and 'would allow for a core data set, to be analysed at an institutional-level that could be used to identify and understand areas of strength and areas requiring improvement, facilitating the dissemination of good practice and provision of targeted support'. The following meeting provided reassurance that the proposal 'would not be implemented without approval by Senate'. and despite recording that work 'collating information on current practice is ongoing' the matter was not returned to at subsequent meetings. The audit team regarded this as an opportunity missed and would encourage the University to return to the matter.

84 The University places particular emphasis on staff-student consultative liaison committees (SSLC). The particular form and constitution of these committees and approaches to them are determined at school level, so there is some variability of approach. SSLCs were generally valued by the students met by the audit team. Most SSLCs were working effectively with input from students clearly welcomed and encouraged by the school. Students are also represented on School Boards. In some schools students were also represented on other school-level committees, but student membership of other committees is a matter for schools.

85 Students met by the audit team were familiar with the student representation system and recognised it as a route through which matters could be raised and a response obtained. Practices with student representation and SSLCs varied between schools, with students regarding some schools' approaches very positively and as very effective, whereas other students considered that their school was less receptive to their voice and the mechanisms for participating in committees less useful.

86 The University has found National Student Survey (NSS) output to provide beneficial feedback from its final year undergraduates. The University participates in other external student surveys, including the international student barometer and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES). In order to gain a fuller picture of non-final year student views the University instituted an 'internal NSS'; information from this is considered alongside the output from the NSS. The University takes action as a result of these surveys of student opinion in order to improve the quality of students' learning experience. Output from the NSS is analysed at institutional level and at subject level, with actions being identified and taken forward at a range of levels. At institutional level actions arising include the establishment of a subgroup of LTC chaired by the President of the Union of Brunel Students (UBS) looking at assessment feedback, and greater stress on teaching within academic promotions and on academic practice as part

of staff development, as well as the revised HEA-accredited programme as part of probation requirements. The audit team confirmed the University's view that the NSS had helped refocus attention on the importance of the learning experience of students and the quality of teaching.

87 The output from various surveys is also reported within the committee structures, including Council. There is a strong institutional expectation for action to be taken by academic schools to address issues raised. The audit team noted that the opportunity remains available to combine information from the range of available sources to allow an overview to be taken at a level which brings an overarching perspective together with operational responsibility for action.

88 The UBS has a research and representation unit, which focuses on the support of representatives within the University at all levels and produces the Union's Student Representative Handbook. Comprehensive support and training for student representatives is provided and a full-time democratic support officer appointed. The democratic support officer is able to take an overview of approaches across the University and help identify the practices which best support the democratic voice of students. The audit team identified the work by the research and representation unit and the democratic support officer as valuable and beneficial practice in support of the University's students.

89 In relation to maintaining the quality of students' learning opportunities, the University's overall arrangements for student feedback were considered effective by the audit team. The team did, however, conclude that greater benefit could be derived from student feedback if the information arising from module questionnaires enabled the University to understand and act on issues connected with the consistency of the student experience between schools. Such information could usefully inform priorities for action and plans for enhancement of students' learning opportunities.

Role of students in quality assurance

90 Students are represented on central and local decision-making bodies, including Senate, Council, school boards, and less formal welfare and service groups. There were clear examples where students were routinely invited to contribute to these meetings and active student participation in school boards was a widespread although not a wholly consistent feature. An example of this inconsistency was in a School Board for the School of Information Systems, Computing and Mathematics, where students were not invited to fully engage, student inputs were not minuted, and this school's students also raised a concern of feeling underrepresented. This variability is consistent with the variability in student input to SSLCs (see paragraph 84).

91 The UBS elects and trains students to be representatives and offers ongoing support. The training includes both basic and advanced training sessions, with top up training in additional aspects such as public speaking available. UBS also offer an extensive web-based resource for student representatives and a handbook that offers a comprehensive overview of all the features of being a student representative at the University. A standard University briefing document is also available that forms part of the school-level student handbook. The audit team were also informed that pre-meeting briefs to students prior to Senate and Council meetings were offered by the Academic Registrar. Students recognised that these briefings enabled their representatives to better understand and participate in such meetings.

92 SSLCs are active across all Schools (see paragraphs 84 and 85). Although the minuting and agendas vary in thoroughness and presentation, the meetings are generally well-attended and provide a reliable source of student feedback regarding the learning experience and for specific modular concerns. Feedback from SSLCs into boards of study was recognised by the University to be an important aspect of the APR and annual monitoring processes. While significant discussion and feedback regarding modules in SSLC was evident, when questioned students could not identify how they were assured that the feedback gathered at SSLCs was acted upon. In response

to the same question, staff identified that such changes fed into modifications the following year and thus students recommending them would not experience the changes made.

93 The audit team heard how student input to APR was integral to the process and that the review panels formally met with representative student groups as part of the evidence gathering process. Students were also involved in the recruitment of new staff whereby prospective appointees were invited to present a lecture as part of their application process.

94 The audit team concluded that the UBS was providing a well-organised, supportive and informative structure for the selection, oversight and training of student representatives. Consequently the University was able to support and accrue the benefit from UBS's management of student representation, which ensured that students were able to play an active and positive role in quality assurance.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

95 The audit team was informed that the Students' Plan sets out a framework to develop the links between research and learning opportunities. However, the plan did not discuss the existence or the proposed creation of such a framework. The team learned that the Students' Plan post-dated an earlier University level Learning and Teaching Strategy that operated from 2002 to 2005. An element of this strategy had been 'to provide curricula that are informed by research in order to attract high-calibre students' through the close linking of research and teaching. Hence it was not clear to the team how the Students' Plan had evolved from the earlier Learning and Teaching Strategy in this respect. Discussions within the LTC demonstrated that the University was seeking an update of this strategy as late as February 2008, resulting in the delivery of the Students' Plan to its May meeting. The committee is also presently mandated to oversee that any school-level learning and teaching strategies produced complement the University's Students' Plan and Strategic Plan. The team found limited evidence of the LTC considering school level plans that specifically addressed learning and teaching. The focus of plans that did exist was also varied, and in general they concentrated on implementation of the Students' Plan and school-level responses to the NSS. Clear guidance from the University as to what might satisfactorily constitute a local school-level teaching and learning strategy was hence unclear.

96 The audit team received assurances from staff during meetings that the requirement for a University-level learning and teaching strategy was eased due to the ceasing of HEFCE Teaching Quality and Enhancement Fund (TQEF) funding after 2006. However, it was evident from documentation presented during the audit that usage of, and referral to, the outdated strategy persisted subsequent to the creation of the Students' Plan. The team noted that the original strategy was retained as a regular reference feature during the development and approval processes for programmes, and the writing of their programme specifications, up to and including the 2008-09 academic year.

97 During meetings with students and staff the view was expressed that dissertation activity, a feature of all the University's bachelor degrees, was well supported by the University's extensive research staff base and as such was of direct benefit to the student learning experience. What was less clear was the impact that staff research had on the curriculum, although it was acknowledged in discussions with staff that in the development of new provision the University sought to capitalise on its research expertise. To this end the audit team heard from staff that a research skills focus in the first and second years helped students to then become effective researchers for the final year. What was less adequately expressed was whether more systematic use of staff research knowledge was employed to underpin teaching and ongoing curricular developments, particularly where it might benefit the student learning experience prior to the final year.

98 The audit team concluded that the University should consider the formulation of a clearer strategy to develop the links between research and learning opportunities. Such a strategy or strategies developed at school or University level would enable programme teams to more directly express the link between research and teaching.

Other modes of study

99 All programmes at the University adopt a virtual learning environment (VLE) system referred to as u-Link, enabling staff and students to have on and off-campus access to programme learning resources. Senate has approved a minimum engagement of all programmes with u-Link requiring all levels of undergraduate provision to publish module outlines, reading lists and lecture timetables online. Through this minimum level of engagement staff were able to explain how its usage across the University was now widespread and much better developed in certain areas, with the ability for students to take formative assessments online and submit certain assessments online. While the nature of its widespread adoption benefitted student learning opportunities, neither students nor the majority of staff expressed familiarity with blended or distributed learning. Students also commented on the variability of u-Link provision offered by individual academic staff.

100 Staff identified to the audit team that the University's e-Learning team works closely with the schools to support the technical and pedagogic use of u-Link. This e-Learning team had produced a publication entitled 'Educational considerations for blended learning' dated March 2008 as part of the University's Pathfinder Project 'Encouraging Teaching Innovation in a Computerised Environment' (ENTICE) initiative. This publication was designed to be a resource to assist staff in creating meaningful blended learning environments, although it was evident to the team that knowledge of its existence was not widespread. The group that produced this publication had been part of the Learning and Teaching Development Unit (LTDU), which had previously been responsible for the development of e-learning. A review considered at Senate in May 2008 resulted in the restructuring of the work of the LTDU and its reformation into the Academic Practice Development Unit (APDU). As a result, e-Learning was assigned to a separate team under the Registry. The team also noted that, although the University had an approved e-Learning Strategy, this strategy dated from 2004.

101 The University is revisiting its e-Learning strategy and its implementation through the work of the VLE strategy sub-group. In particular, this will enable programme teams to more fully exploit the University's VLE capability, thus improving student learning opportunities both on and off campus for its part-time and full-time students, including those studying with collaborative partners.

Resources for learning

102 The University has established a number of plans to assist it in determining its resourcing priorities. Intentions for the campus estate are expressed in the Estate Plan a Library Plan and a Computer Centre Plan provide input to the annual planning cycle and enable the various schools, needs to be considered against demand and affordability in these areas. Overall institutional oversight of resource rests with the Strategic Planning and Resource Committee, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor.

103 Schools have allocated to them subject liaison librarians who are integral members of appropriate school committees and provide an effective and well utilised linkage between schools and the library. From the small group of students met the audit team learned that there was a perceived disparity between the availability of taught and research postgraduate texts when compared to the library's more generous support for undergraduate study. Staff explained to the team that the library purchased books based on student numbers and school requests, and consequently smaller and more specialised provision was less likely to be comprehensively

resourced. It was also highlighted that postgraduate students had access to more comprehensive support through electronically-based resources to support their learning and research.

104 For new and amended programmes the resourcing requirements are drawn up and presented for 'approval in principle' by Senate. This five-stage process requires a pro-forma to be completed by the programme team. A section of this pro-forma requires commentary on the availability of resources to support the programme. The overall scope of the pro-forma in providing information for approval in principle is wide ranging and as such is successful in presenting information of value to enable decisions to be made. Stage four entails consideration of this information by LTC and it is standard practice that this stage of the approval process be performed by Chair's action and noted to LTC. This process of approval by Chair's action is then replicated at Senate.

105 Students met by the audit team shared the view that the University's IT resources and the IT support offered to them were effective, and these aspects also featured favourably in the NSS. The availability of computers on campus for study was likewise viewed as satisfactory. A real-time update on the availability of specific computers in the library was seen as a particularly positive feature, as was 24-hour access to certain computer rooms.

106 It was evident to the team that the University's IT resourcing, support and strategy was effective in supporting the students' learning opportunities and was recognised as such by students.

Admissions policy

107 The University operates undergraduate and postgraduate admissions policies that are reviewed annually. The policies are available on the University's website and are consistent with the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education*. The LTC is responsible to Senate for the development of the policies and the University is confident that their framework is a fair and transparent system. This view was confirmed by students, who considered, that the information and feedback available to them was clear.

108 Admissions tutors receive an annually updated handbook and meet each term with the Admissions Office to enable dissemination of policy and to gather feedback on how effectively the admissions processes are operating during the year. The audit team concluded that the admissions policy is consistently and effectively implemented across the University.

Student support

109 The audit team spoke to a representative cross section of students and heard from them that the University's overall student support arrangements were accessible and effective. At University level student welfare support issues are considered at three committees, all of which have UBS representatives in attendance. Two of these, the Student Affairs Group (SAG) and the Campus Life Committee (CLC), answer to both Council and Senate. While the primary function of SAG is to address the day-to-day interface between UBS and the University, CLC reviews the policy and operation of student support and welfare services provided by the University and ensures that they align with the Strategic Plan. These services include social, cultural and religious concerns in addition to accommodation and sports facilities. The third committee is the Student Support and Welfare Group (SSWG) and its primary purpose is to advise the Director of Resources and Operations on issues relating to matters of student welfare and the provision of student welfare services. It also has a role in coordinating the University's provision of student welfare services and ensuring that these services support the core values of the Strategic Plan.

110 The University claims that its personal tutoring system is central to the provision of student academic support. Students reported that the system was widespread and readily accessible. Students also reported that support for students with special needs was good, although accessing the special needs support system was occasionally problematic. Additional academic support is

provided by the Placement and Careers Centre (PCC), which provides a job shop, careers advice and placement provision. The provision of practice placements is seen as an important and attractive feature of the University's courses. The overall level of student satisfaction in placement provision was high, although the level of support for placement students was inconsistent across different schools and students were not always sure what to do if problems were encountered while on placement.

111 The audit team concluded that appropriate measures were in place to ensure that the student support arrangements across the University were effective. It was also evident that students' learning opportunities benefited from this provision and the services offered were understood, well-used, and appreciated by the student body.

Staff support (including staff development)

112 The Equal Opportunities and Human Resources Committee, a joint Council and Senate committee, provides institutional oversight of staff support policy and procedures. The senior management lead is the Pro-Vice Chancellor (PVC) (Strategy and Staff Development). This post was established in 2008 and the PVC leads delivery of the Staff Plan. Operational delivery of staff support procedures is the responsibility of the Director of Human Resources.

113 Staff appointment, induction, probation, appraisal, promotion, and performance management procedures are all published on the University intranet. The audit team learned that over the past 12 months staff promotional criteria had changed and that teaching effectiveness was now core to advancement, in addition to expectations in the fields of scholarship and research. Based on the concept of the 'whole academic', this evidence-based approach had been well received by staff. Staff probation procedures enabled individual tailoring of the process to be monitored at school level.

114 An online induction process is available via u-Link and all new staff members are invited to attend a welcome day within 6 months of joining. In addition, all staff are invited to attend Equal Opportunity and Diversity Awareness training provided by the Staff Development Unit. A wide range of staff training courses is also available and these are published in an online timetable, enabling ready access for the booking of courses.

115 Until June of 2009 an HEA-accredited Postgraduate Certificate (Learning and Teaching in Higher Education) was compulsory for all academic probationary staff. The audit team learned that this had now been replaced by the Professional Development and Academic Practice programme, likewise with HEA accreditation. The rationale for the change had been to enable schools to be involved in tailoring the programme for each individual probationary package. Although only recently implemented, it was viewed as a positive change by staff members. A staff development programme, the Brunel Associate Practitioner Pathway, is also available for those who teach but are not academic staff, such as Graduate Teaching Assistants, and for those who do not teach but support learning and teaching activity.

116 University-level guidance is available to staff regarding appraisal and it is undertaken at school level. If staff development needs are identified then these requests are forwarded to the Staff Development Unit for action.

117 The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for staff support and development were effective and were subject to appropriate oversight and revision. The processes were also clearly described and arrangements to communicate them to staff were effective.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Management information - quality enhancement

118 The University's approach to quality enhancement is implemented via the (LTC), which carries responsibility for academic activities through its engagement with schools and relevant service providers, and the Campus Life Committee, which carries responsibility for non-academic aspects. At the time of the 2004 Institutional audit the University's future plans for enhancement were articulated in the 2002-05 Learning and Teaching Strategy.

119 Regulatory audit has the capacity to identify areas for further improvement, extending to the identification and scrutiny of thematic issues, thus providing a mechanism for encouraging schools to focus on their local enhancement strategies. The 2007-08 regulatory audit cycle, for example, considered monitoring practices and found that, where monitoring had been undertaken rigorously, the annual monitoring reports identified and suitably addressed areas for development and enhancement.

120 The dissemination of good practice is encouraged and supported by centrally organised support teams, notably the e-Learning team, the academic skills team, and the Academic Practice Development Unit (APDU); and DAsH provides an informal forum for the discussion of issues arising. The University has also established a set of groups specifically to focus on thematic innovation and enhancement, notably the e-Learning and library user groups. The APDU also has a supporting role in this context.

121 Having considered the information provided by the University the audit team concluded that it was evident that the importance of quality enhancement is clearly recognised and that good progress has been made with a number of enhancement-led initiatives. Progress may be further enhanced by creating clearly articulated aims and objectives and suitably effective mechanisms for evaluating and disseminating their outcomes.

122 Recommendations were made to selected schools and service areas to run and evaluate local enhancement projects arising from the findings of the 2006 Student Experience Project. The audit team was unable to confirm that the outcomes of the projects have been evaluated at an institutional level with a view to University-wide dissemination of successful outcomes.

123 The University is encouraged to revisit its approach to quality enhancement and articulate more clearly the procedures to be applied in monitoring and embedding the outcomes of associated initiatives.

124 In October 2006 the Student Experience Project was launched by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) (Student Experience), in the first instance to address concerns that had been raised in the first two years of the National Student Survey (NSS). Five thematic issues were addressed; timetabling, personal tutoring/academic support, assessment and feedback, the establishment of the Campus Life Committee, and Gathering Evidence from Students. The outcomes of this year-long project in terms of ideas and approaches were passed to schools and service areas, who were encouraged to run and evaluate local enhancement projects. In addition students were encouraged to run their own enhancement projects with support and guidance from the University.

125 This project also informed the development of the Students' Plan, introduced in 2008 as a replacement for the Learning and Teaching Strategy, which was devised as a high-level strategic document to direct and inform the development of context-specific plans developed by both academic schools and service providers. Although responsibility for monitoring and assuring this plan is retained by LTC, the design and delivery of quality enhancement has accordingly been devolved to those closest to the point of delivery.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

126 Collaborative Provision is regulated by Senate Regulation 7, which broadly reflects the precepts in the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. Specifically, the regulation requires that the academic standards of a collaborative award should be comparable with those of any other award by the University and Senate must approve individual arrangements. The Learning and Teaching Council (LTC) issues guidance to schools on the approval processes. Collaborative arrangements have typically grown out of the personal academic links of members of the University's staff with colleagues in overseas institutions, but when they are formalised they become the responsibility of the school to which they are attached. The current strategic plan envisages additions to the collaborative portfolio as part of the University's aspiration to compete globally. It is seeking key strategic partners in each of the priority markets it has identified in its strategy, and the University recognises that its traditional practices may have to be changed if collaborative provision is significantly increased. Under the current arrangements Senate receives an annual report on collaborative provision, most recently in March 2009. At the same time it approved recommendations from LTC for a new process for approving collaborative arrangements.

127 At the time of the audit there were 11 articulation agreements and five collaborative delivery agreements with institutions outside the UK, and the University states that it has a 'low risk' approach to collaborative activities. It claims that the delivery and assessment of these programmes is normally undertaken by the University's own academic staff at the partner's premises, and the same external examiners are used. The audit team saw evidence that the University does take steps to ensure that assessments are in line with those at the University, and that University boards and panels of examiners and external examiners are involved in the process.

128 In May 2008 the QAA audit of the University's provision in collaboration with the Technological Institution, Athens, and the Alexander Technological Institute, Thessaloniki, found that the University's 'protocols and guidelines for the management of its overseas collaborative arrangements were effective and aligned with the Code of practice' and 'its procedures and framework for ensuring the quality and maintenance of standards were found to be largely supported by the evidence provided to the team'.

129 The University uses the same procedures for approval, monitoring and review of its collaborative provision as it does for its own provision. The audit team saw evidence of this in the recent review of the arrangements with one of its collaborative partners, which was conducted similarly to annual and periodic reviews of the University's own provision.

130 This was a significant UK partnership, and is located on the Uxbridge campus. This collaborative provision offers a number of programmes for students who do not yet meet the University's admissions requirements to enable them to enter into degree programmes in the University after one year of study. The University views the arrangement as an 'articulation agreement', with standards firmly secured by University moderation of assessment.

131 An Academic Advisory Board, with representatives from this collaborative partner and the University, chaired by the PVC (Student Experience), manages the link arrangements on behalf of LTC, to which it reports. The University conducted an Academic Quality Audit (AQA) of the partnership in April 2009. The audit panel made 23 recommendations largely intended to bring the partnership into line with University practices, while also ensuring that students received full and accurate information. LTC accepted this report. In subsequent meetings between University staff and staff from the partnership, and in correspondence seen by the audit team, it was agreed that the recommendations would be implemented. There is strong evidence that parts of this process are in hand, but the audit team noted that no formal action plan had been drafted, making the systematic monitoring of progress more problematic. The team considers that, while the University was able to examine standards of its collaborative provision with the partnership,

it must put in place a robust approach to ensure that the deliberative structures are confident that timely and effective action has been taken on recommendations arising from its audit of collaborative provision.

132 Similar evidence has been seen in the AQA of the collaboration with a second partner undertaken in February 2008. The audit team noted that the review and its recommendations were accepted by LTC in January 2008. The AQA report included the recommendation to review the academic contract, noting that it contained 'inappropriate and misleading' paragraphs, including references to franchises, statements about appeals and disciplinary procedures and incorrect programme titles. At the time of the audit visit, the partner's website contained some information about the Brunel collaboration. The University identified a range of actions which had been completed, including the drafting of a new contract, but was not able to identify a formal action plan that was fully monitored. The team considers that it is essential that the University puts in place a robust approach to ensure that appropriate, timely and effective action has been taken on recommendations arising from its own audit of collaborative provision.

133 Research student collaborations with three other collaborative partners are being terminated. A small number of students remain from these arrangements and their progress is monitored by the Sub-Committee for Postgraduate Research Degrees in the same way as University-based students.

134 The University has recently developed an MA in European Consumer Affairs (EMCA) as a precursor to a dual award with four partners in other EU countries using funding from the EU's Directorate-General for Health and Consumer affairs (SANCO) programme for the development of a European integrated master's degree in consumer issues. The existing University procedures did not provide a framework for the proposed development. The University had a contractual obligation to participate in the design of a programme leading to a dual award with the intention of taking this through the programme approval process at a later stage.

135 As a planned measure, having recognised this position, the University approved a programme for a Brunel University award in which students spend one term in one of the partner institutions studying, in English, a predefined specialisation. This term is treated by the University as accreditation of prior learning for credit purposes.

136 The audit team concluded that the problem lay in the procedures for the approval of collaborative agreements approved by Senate in 2003. These made no provision for a programme approval event, which would have been the outcome of the development, or for the involvement of LTC or its Chair at this strategic approval stage of the process. The cooperation agreement for EMCA was consequently signed in July 2008, considered by LTC in November 2008, when it was approved, and sent to Senate, which approved it in the same month. It was at this stage that formal approval was sought for the single award version of the programme, and this was signed on behalf of Senate in January 2009. Students were admitted to the programme in the 2009-10 academic year.

137 The University recognised that the existing process represented a risk, and proposals were developed to revise the procedure. On a proposal from LTC, Senate agreed a new procedure for approving collaborative programmes in March 2009. This ensures that the Chair of LTC is involved in the development of collaborative programmes from the beginning by introducing a new strategic approval procedure in which the Chair of LTC is involved. This system was used for the approval of the dual award EMCA in July-September 2009; conditions imposed at the programme approval event were met before LTC and Senate approved the programme. The audit team noted that the University had identified that an established procedure was not fully fit for purpose and that the University has taken steps to put a new and more effective procedure in place.

138 From the evidence available to it the audit team concluded that, in relation to its collaborative arrangements, the University does not take a robust approach to assure its deliberative structures that it has implemented recommendations which those deliberative structures have accepted, even when these relate to issues which have the potential to put quality and standards at risk.

139 The audit team consequently concluded that only limited confidence can be placed in the soundness of University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards in collaborative provision. It is essential that the University should put in place a robust approach to ensure that the central deliberative bodies of the University are able to be assured that appropriate, timely and effective action has been taken on recommendations arising from its own audit of collaborative provision.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

140 The University's approach to the management of the quality and standards of its research degrees is governed by a framework of regulations, policies and procedures approved by Senate. Oversight of these processes is devolved to Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC), which in turn delegates their management to its Sub-Committee for Postgraduate Research Degrees (SCPRD).

141 This sub-committee reports on all matters relating to research degree provision with a specific brief to assure quality and standards at an institutional level. Its responsibilities include the preparatory work on regulatory changes before scrutiny and approval by LTC and Senate, the annual review of research degree provision, and consideration of external indicators such as HEFCE research degree qualification rates and any action points arising. In 2007-08 bi-annual regulatory audits of research degree provision were introduced to complement those associated with postgraduate taught degrees. Within schools, responsibility for ensuring suitable arrangements for the supervision and support of students is delegated to the relevant deputy head of school, and several schools have also established postgraduate research committees to assure the quality of provision.

142 A further dimension to the processes for managing postgraduate research is provided by the Graduate School. This school has specific responsibilities for the new route PhD and Doctor of Public Health programmes and more general responsibilities to work closely with the committees responsible for core strategies, and to keep under review, and advise Senate on, progress towards the University's strategic goals in relation to postgraduate provision. Its terms of reference also include a requirement to monitor the effectiveness of postgraduate marketing, recruitment and admissions policies and practices, the outcomes of postgraduate taught and research programmes across the University and to review matters of postgraduate student welfare and support across the University.

143 The University classes itself as a research-intensive institution, building upon strengths identified in both the 2001 and the 2008 research assessment exercises (RAEs) to develop this environment in terms of new academic posts and research studentships. A key provision in terms of encouraging the production and dissemination of student research has been the development of a University-wide programme of doctoral symposia and research conferences by schools, which integrate the presentation of papers by research students with keynote lectures by visiting academics. Further support is provided through the Vice-Chancellor's prizes for research, which include travel to attend national and international conferences and doctoral research prizes.

144 Applications for research degrees are received in the first instance by the central admissions offices, following procedures that are essentially equivalent to those for undergraduate and taught postgraduate degrees, with the registry taking responsibility for home and EU

applicants and Brunel International for overseas applicants. General induction sessions are provided by the Student Services Department with more detailed induction provided by the Graduate School and the schools and research institutes. Whereas most students enrol at the start of the academic year, students registered on professional doctorates enrol as small cohorts at specific points during the year, and receive induction sessions tailored to individual needs. In the case of students enrolling through the collaborative link in Bahrain, induction is delivered in situ by University staff as part of their programme of regular visits.

145 All research students have a minimum of two supervisors appointed by the relevant head of school. At least one supervisor must hold a doctorate and should have already successfully supervised research students to completion. First supervisors must be permanent members of academic staff. Where circumstances require a second supervisor to be an external appointment, for example to provide specific subject expertise or in the case of a student studying at a collaborative institution, the chair of SCPGRD is responsible for approving a suitable appointment on the recommendation of the relevant head of school.

146 The University revised its guidelines for the supervision of research students, the monitoring of progress, and the training of supervisors in 2005 to take account of the 2004 *Code of practice*, published by QAA, on postgraduate research programmes and has introduced a requirement that a minimum of eight supervision meetings per year are formally recorded. Notes of these meetings are held on the student record. Staff development sessions are available to all supervisors and new or inexperienced supervisors are expected to attend sessions on supervision techniques and research degree regulations. In the context of feedback to students, supervisors are expected to give written feedback to students on work submitted in a timely manner and also provide guidance to students about appropriate standards for their work and the processes and timescales for annual review and the submission of the thesis.

147 The annual monitoring process for postgraduate research students has recently been revised to ensure greater independence between supervisors and the team that carries out the annual review of student progress. Students carry out a self-assessment identifying achievements, any difficulties encountered, comments on progress, any training that they have undertaken or require, and review of deadlines for completion of each stage.

148 Students then meet with the review panel, which consists of a member of the supervisory team and an independent member of academic staff with relevant subject knowledge. Following the review meeting the panel prepares a report on the student's progress, including details of targets achieved and the new set of targets agreed with the student. These reports are then approved at school level and action points recorded on a proforma, which is sent to the Registry.

149 This information also forms a key component of the annual review of research degree provision carried out by SCPGRD. In this context schools are required to submit comprehensive information on the progress of continuing students, issues raised by students and any actions taken in response, student training and future needs, and issues raised by supervisors. Schools must also report any factors that have influenced the research environment, any issues that may have affected the final examination of research students, completion rates, and comment on how research degree provision in the school reflects the precepts in the *Code of practice*, published by QAA.

150 In 2007 the University carried out a regulatory audit of research degree provision in all schools, including the Graduate School. The action points arising revealed some issues to be addressed at an institutional level and also in some instances applicable to specific schools. The audit team was able to confirm that all of these action points had been suitably addressed before the start of the current academic year (2009-10), with the single exception of the implementation of a University-wide policy on procedures to be used for upgrading from MPhil to PhD. The importance of achieving consistency of institutional practice in this context warrants a resolution of the issues arising at the earliest opportunity.

151 The Graduate School provides a core skills training programme consisting of seminars, research training modules, themed training days, special events, and a series of on-line training courses. This programme is modelled on the Research Councils' Joint Skills Statement. Responsibility for reviewing the skills development strategy for research students lies with the Graduate School Board and SCPGRD. Skills training is also supported by central service providers such as the Placement and Careers Centre and the library.

152 The University has recently expanded its range of methods for the collection of student feedback via schools. These now include staff-research student liaison meetings and research student representation on school boards, through Facebook, and from weekly journal clubs and group meetings. In February 2008 the University introduced a feedback questionnaire for all postgraduate research students. Although the overall response rate was disappointingly low (11 per cent), some schools achieved more representative returns. In 2009 SCPGRD elected to join the HEA's Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and the resulting survey produced a much improved overall response rate of 33 per cent, above the national response rate of 25 per cent. Overall, students responded positively to the questions in the survey and were generally satisfied with the support they received and their experience of being a research student at the University. They also responded very positively to the questions about the quality of supervision they received and the competency of their supervisors.

153 There were areas, however, where the responses from students were not positive. Satisfaction levels were lowest in the context of the support given for career development and the opportunities offered by the University in gaining experience of teaching (lectures, seminars or workshops). The audit team noted that enhancing the employability of graduates was a specific objective in both the 2002-05 Learning and Teaching Strategy and the replacement Students' Plan, and that this response from the postgraduate community indicated that further work needed to be done in this context. Schools have been asked to provide detailed responses to the survey findings clearly articulating the action points that will be taken, to be evaluated as part of the 2009-10 regulatory audit of research degree provision.

154 Whereas the regulations for the assessment of research students have remained largely unchanged since the last Institutional audit, there has been one significant addition in the form of a requirement since March 2007 for the appointment of independent chairs for viva voce examinations. The independent chair must not act as an examiner, nor have any influence over the decision of the examiners. At the same time a second change was made in the context of a clarification of the role of supervisors in the viva voce process.

155 The audit team concluded that the University's management of its research degree programmes met the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes* published by QAA and that the procedures for assuring the quality and standards of these programmes were appropriately secure.

Section 7: Published information

156 During its strategic planning process, the University recognised the need to strengthen its information management systems. In May 2009 it established an Information Steering Group, chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) (Strategy and Staff Development), whose terms of reference include an obligation to 'monitor and review the information infrastructure across the University'. At the time of the audit, the group had met four times and has commissioned a series of studies of various aspects of information systems and management. External reporting of data had not been discussed, although it is scheduled for early in 2010. It is intended that the outcome of this work will include clearer oversight mechanisms within the formal governance structure. At the time of the audit such oversight was shared by a number of sections and officers.

157 The University makes information publicly available to meet the requirements of Annex F of *HEFCE 06/45*. Programme specifications are only available on the University's intranet, but

broadly equivalent and consistent information can be found on the University's website and appears to be accurate and comprehensive. Information is also available on the UNISTATS website. Responsibility for collecting, holding and providing data relating to and needed by the schools lies with the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) and the Academic Registry. The Planning Office is responsible for Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data. The audit team can confirm that the data on the UNISTATS Website is consistent with the data held internally by the University.

158 The University provides information to prospective students through printed prospectuses and on its website. The Director of External Affairs has responsibility for this material. He and his staff are required to ensure that data and information which goes into the public domain is accurate and they have designated contacts in the schools who verify the data for them. The the Quality and Standards Office (QSO) holds the authoritative information on programmes, including newly approved programmes, and is the source of all published information on this matter. Each school has a quality and standards officer who liaises with the QSO to ensure consistency and accuracy.

159 Students confirmed that recruitment and pre-arrival information was comprehensive and accurate. The audit team saw evidence that the University took steps to review the public statements made by its partner organisations in its collaborative arrangements.

160 The audit team concluded that the University publishes accurate, complete and comprehensive information about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards, and has systems in place which effectively control and monitor this process.

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