QAA

Institutional audit

University of Derby

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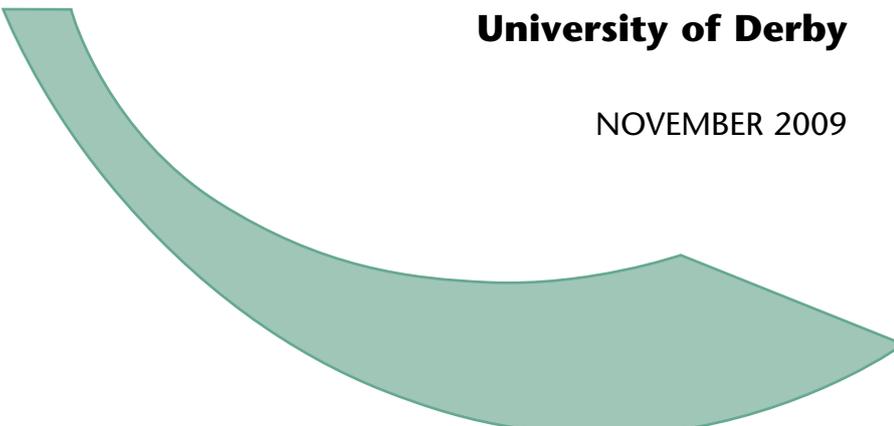
Preface

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

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

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

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

- ensuring that the awards and qualifications in higher education are of an academic standard, at least consistent with those referred to in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree-awarding bodies in a proper manner

- providing learning opportunities of a quality that enables students, whether on taught or research programmes, to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications

- enhancing the quality of their educational provision, particularly by building on information gained through monitoring, internal and external reviews and on feedback from stakeholders.

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

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of awards

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

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

- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research

- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

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

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

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

- the **summary** of the findings of the report, including the judgements, is intended for the wider public, especially potential students

- the **report** is an overview of the findings of the audit for both lay and external professional audiences

- a separate **annex** provides the detail and explanations behind the findings of the audit and is intended to be of practical use to the institution.

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

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Derby (the University) from 23 to 27 November 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

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

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

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers

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

As the University will be subject to a separate audit of its collaborative provision these judgements do not apply to that provision.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit found the University's commitment to enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities evident in the structures and processes of management and embedded in the inclusive, open and reflective culture of the institution.

Postgraduate research students

The University is actively growing its research activity from a modest base while being mindful that the environment for postgraduate research students, and their associated experience, meet the precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Published information

The audit 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.

Features of good practice

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

- the comprehensive and integrated planning and quality processes which guide the priorities and actions of the University at institutional and faculty level (paragraph 6)

- the development of a culture of inclusivity, openness and self-reflection which underpins the successful operation of the University's quality assurance and quality enhancement processes (paragraph 7)

- the work of the External Examiner Sub-Committee and development of the database of external examiners (paragraph 2)

- the development of a closer working relationship between the University Executive and the Students' Union (paragraph 36)

- the well thought-out approach to the University's engagement with employers (paragraph 42)

- the use of management information such as attendance and assignment submission data to target student support (paragraph 51).

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- take further steps to increase the effective participation of students at all levels of the deliberative structure (paragraph 35)

- ensure the consistent application of the policy that all postgraduate research students who teach receive appropriate training (paragraph 64).

It would be desirable for the University to:

- establish an effective system for appointing, supporting and guiding student members of periodic review panels (paragraph 17)

- ensure that external examiner reports are routinely shared with relevant student representatives (paragraph 37)

- expedite the inclusion of Foundation Degree and postgraduate taught students in the University's new PDP model (paragraph 50)

- ensure all student handbooks contain the University's required core information (paragraph 68)

- accelerate implementation of the University's decision to produce readily accessible programme specifications (paragraph 69).

Reference points

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

- the *Code of practice*

- frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland

- subject benchmark statements

- programme specifications.

The audit found that the University has responded appropriately to the FHEQ and subject benchmark statement. However, the University might consider whether more use could be made of these aspects of the Academic Infrastructure as a benchmark in monitoring and review. The University has made some progress with introducing programme specifications and most aspects of the QAA *Code of practice*.

Report

Preface

1   An Institutional audit of the University of Derby (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 23 November 2009. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2   The audit team was Dr C Alder, Professor E Evans, Dr P Lloyd and Dr C Vielba, auditors, and G Simpson, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr A Biscoe, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3   The origins of the University can be traced back to 1851 when the Diocesan Institution for the Training of School Mistresses was created. Following a number of mergers the Derbyshire College of Higher Education was established in 1983. It became a University in 1993 and in 1998 the University merged with High Peak College at Buxton.

4   The mission of the University is 'to be the learner's first choice university for quality and opportunity'. The Corporate Plan 2009-2014 states that 'the learner is placed at the heart of everything that we do, offering choices that match students' expectations and supporting them in achieving their aspirations and ambitions'. Eight Core Strategies underpin the Corporate Plan: Academic development, Learning, teaching and assessment, Student experience, Target markets & progression, Employer engagement, Internationalisation and Research. Business Unit Plans detail how each operating unit (faculty/school/division) contributes to delivering the Corporate Plan.

5   In 2008-09 the University had 18,949 students (14,963 FTEs) studying across its three sites. There were 11,904 full-time and 3,931 part-time undergraduates, 540 full-time and 2,433 part-time postgraduate taught students. There were 1,665 students who studied remotely (designated as online, Learning Through Work or University of Derby Corporate). There were 74 full-time and 67 part-time postgraduate research students, of whom 36 were distance-learners.

6   In 2005 the University's academic provision was restructured into four faculties in order to create greater academic focus and a more accountable management structure. A fifth unit was added, the School of Flexible and Partnership Learning, which brought together the University's flexible and partnership learning activities. Faculty Management Boards have recently been created, the purpose of which is to deliver the area's annual business plan and manage its budget. A number of central service departments were also reorganised to create the Student Support and Information Service which focuses on student administration and student services. During this period the University of Derby Corporate was created to manage the interface with employers. The University has invested in upgrading its facilities and has opened new libraries at Buxton and the Britannia Mill site in Derby. A feature of good practice of the University's management system is its comprehensive and integrated approach to planning and quality processes at both central and faculty level. This strength is evident in the way in which the outcomes of quality assurance and enhancement processes inform deliberative processes and the plans and actions which follow from these, particularly at faculty level, where the outcomes of annual monitoring inform the planning process. See paragraphs 21 and 29 for examples.

7   The University's quality management framework was revised following a review in 2005-06. As a result of the review new procedures for annual and periodic review were put in place which, in line with the University's Quality Strategy, are risk-based and enhancement focused. The former is exemplified by the approach to annual monitoring and by the additional scrutiny that is required for the approval of programmes that are considered high risk. The audit

team considered that the University's quality management framework has led to the development of a culture of inclusivity, openness and self-reflection which underpins the operation of the University's quality assurance and quality enhancement processes (see paragraphs 15, 23 and 63 for examples). The team concluded this was a feature of good practice.

8   The 2005 Institutional audit of the University expressed confidence in the University's current and likely future management of the quality and standards of its academic provision. The Report contained a number of features of good practice and this audit team noted that the University had built further on its work in relation to retention and student support, employer engagement, staff development and flexible learning. The 2005 Report also contained a number of recommendations for action that were either advisable or desirable, all of which have been addressed to some degree. However in two areas, one relating to the consistency of internal reports (see paragraph 29) and one to student participation in formal committees (see paragraph 38), the University had identified the need for further action.

9   The audit team found that the University has an effective framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. The 2006 Internal Audit of Academic Governance established a new committee structure at both University and faculty levels. The Academic Board chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, is responsible for the quality and standards of Derby's academic provision. It discharges many of its duties through a number of committees and sub-committees. Of central importance to the management of academic standards and quality are the University Quality Enhancement Committee; the University Research and Research Degrees Committee; the Regulatory Framework Committee which is responsible for programme and assessment regulations; and the Academic Development Committee which plays a key role in ensuring that the University's academic provision develops in line with the Corporate Plan. The University Quality Enhancement Committee has a number of sub-committees including the Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee; the External Examining Sub-Committee; and the Validation Sub-Committee which oversees programme approval and review.

10   The University provided the audit team with a briefing paper and supporting documentation. The University of Derby Students' Union produced a Student Written Submission setting out the students' views on the accuracy of information provided to them, the experience of students as learners and their role in quality management.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

11   Formal responsibility for defining and assuring the standards of the University's awards lies with the Academic Board, which devolves operational responsibility for undergraduate and taught postgraduate awards to the University Quality Enhancement Committee, and for research degrees to the University Research and Research Degrees Committee. The sub-committees' responsibilities include oversight of what the University considers to be key elements relating to standards: the University's academic regulations; programme approval; annual monitoring and revalidation of programmes; the work of its external examiners; its information management systems and engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

12   Programme approval is in two stages: development-approval, followed by validation. The nature and intensity of the approval process is determined by the extent of the risk demonstrated in a given submission. If there is low risk then a paper-based approval process can follow.

13   Where it is determined that there is higher risk a validation panel is established. Through its reading of a number of validation panel reports the audit team noted that the University's revised policy of routinely including two members external to the University was being adhered to. It also noted that the process was managed thoroughly, consistently and in accordance with the University's published procedures. It also considered that validation panels had carefully

considered the evidence presented to confirm that the academic standards were set at the appropriate level.

14   The Validation Sub-Committee compiles an annual report in which generic issues raised by programme approval reports are highlighted. The 2007-08 Validation Sub-Committee report expressed reservations about the quality of some validation documentation and had drawn attention to some programme aims which were too generic and learning outcomes which were set at the wrong level. The rigour of this analysis contributed to the team's view of the culture of inclusivity, openness and self-reflection.

15   The audit team found that Annual Monitoring Reports at programme level often identified market risks associated with a changing student profile. The Reports read by the team, which were detailed, generally evaluative and made use of statistical data, also indicated what responses had been made to external examiners' comments. The team did, however, note that some reports were less forward-looking and risk-focused than the University's revised process might expect. It also noted that the University's Annual Monitoring Report had drawn attention to the limited critical comment on risk factors made in some faculty reports on annual programme monitoring. The team concurred with the University's view that integrating the evidence from this process into a risk-based monitoring strategy, where the degree of scrutiny varies according to risk, needs further consideration and development.

16   The audit team noted that revalidation normally takes place once every five years. The University stated that this process enables it to assure itself about the maintenance of appropriate academic standards and the quality of its provision. Its recently revised procedure is designed to place more emphasis on enhancing the quality of the student learning experience by greater consideration, for example, of the resources available to them and of the feedback on assessed work. The audit team found evidence in the first periodic reviews under the University's revised system that review teams were reflecting this emphasis on enhancement of the student experience.

17   As part of the changes to the Quality Management Framework mentioned in paragraph 7 above, a revised methodology for validation and revalidation and for review has been introduced. The Validation, Audit and Review Standing Panel comprises experienced and trained staff from across the University. Validation and revalidation panels are chaired by a senior member of staff drawn from a faculty not involved in delivering the programmes and must include two or more external members with current or recent experience, knowledge and understanding of higher education provision. Periodic review panels also include a student union sabbatical officer or nominee. At the time of the audit visit four such reviews had been conducted under the revised methodology. The audit team examined the processes and outcomes of two of these in detail. It concluded that the process was thorough and included substantial external involvement. It noted, however, that the student presence on periodic review panels was not consistent and learnt that student members of panels had not received any support or guidance in advance. The team considered it desirable that the University establish an effective system for appointing, supporting and guiding student members of periodic review panels.

18   The University appoints external examiners for all undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes leading to an award for a period, normally of four years. The External Examining Sub-Committee uses a new and purpose-designed external examiner database which enables the University to compare its external examiner appointments with those held by the University's own staff and also to analyse the range of institutions from which its own external examiners are drawn. The External Examining Sub-Committee considers all nominations for appointment from schools and faculties and makes a formal recommendation of appointment to the University Quality Enhancement Committee. The audit team found consideration of nominees to be thorough.

19   New external examiners receive a personalised induction pack which includes the University's regulations, copies of previous external examiner reports and the programme leader's responses to them. A personalised half- or full-day induction is also offered by the relevant faculty or school. The University holds an annual External Examiners' Forum at which examiners are updated on developments within the University and consulted on proposals and other matters relating to their role, both local and national.

20   The audit team read a number of external examiners' reports noting that external examiners considered the University's academic standards to be secure and, in the great majority of cases, that University procedures are followed at Assessment and Progression Boards. The reports are received by the Quality Enhancement Department and distributed to the Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching, Learning & Scholarship), the relevant Faculty Quality Manager and a Faculty Officer responsible for circulating reports to programme leaders. Programme committees are required to consider external examiner reports and to respond directly on the issues raised. The Quality Enhancement Department monitors responses, noting any issues which may require action at institutional level. The audit team examined a number of these reports and found that programme leaders in general responded promptly and appropriately. Reports are considered at faculty level; issues requiring attention form part of Faculty Business Plans for the succeeding year. Detailed consideration of external examiner reports is undertaken by the External Examining Sub-Committee, which produces an overview report to be considered by the University Quality Enhancement Committee.

21   The audit team noted the scrupulous attention paid to external examiner reports by the University, at all levels, and the mechanisms put in place to act on their recommendations. It considered the work of the External Examiner Sub-Committee and the development of the database of external examiners to be a feature of good practice.

22   The Quality Enhancement Department has responsibility for oversight of all sections of the QAA's *Code of practice* and University-level committees receive confirmation annually that current policy, procedures and practice continue to reflect the *Code*. The revalidation process investigates how programmes demonstrate compatibility with the FHEQ. In its study of recent revalidation reports, the audit team found that reports included only limited engagement with the totality of the Academic Infrastructure.

23   Over 60 of the University's programmes involve links to professional statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRB). Relevant subject areas are required to nominate an experienced member of staff to liaise with each PSRB. PSRB representatives are encouraged to act as external representatives on validation panels and the audit team noted that PSRB reports are routinely considered by programme teams and by relevant faculty and University Quality Enhancement Committees.

24   The University's assessment frameworks are set out in its Academic Regulations. The Academic Board is responsible for maintaining these regulations and must approve any changes to them. The Regulatory Frameworks Committee maintains oversight of the Regulations and is responsible for recommending any changes to the Academic Board. The University Research and Research Degrees Committee maintains oversight of Postgraduate Research regulations which the team regarded as being clearly documented and well integrated (see Section 6).

25   The audit team noted examples of the regular review and revision of assessment regulations, for example on anonymous marking; in the amendment of grading scales and descriptors for both undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes; and the articulation of a new Plagiarism Policy. At the time of the audit visit, the University was undertaking a wide-ranging review of its assessment policy.

26   Operational responsibility for developing and managing the student record system lies with the University's Student Support and Information Services. Council, University-level committees and Faculty Management Boards receive regular overviews. The University believes

that there has been a significant recent improvement in the provision of statistical data at all levels. Its systems are now designed to be accessible to all staff and students. The implementation of the Online Student Academic Information System enables staff to access the student record system, including statistical reports at module, programme, school and University levels. The audit team recognised that the process of assimilating and effectively using the student record system at programme and school levels was not yet complete and that the University's most recent Annual Monitoring Report also drew attention to some continuing difficulties in this area. The audit team concluded that, at University level, an effective student record system has been developed and that progress is being made towards its consistent and appropriate use at faculty and school levels.

27   The audit team concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards. As the University of Derby will be subject to a separate audit of its collaborative provision, this judgement does not apply to that provision.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

28   The University stated that its approach to the management of learning opportunities is governed by the Quality Strategy and Enhancement Policy; the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy; Curriculum Fit for the Future Strategy; the Student Experience Strategy and the Learning Information Service Strategy. The University's arrangements for the management of learning opportunities encompass all taught programmes and all modes of delivery, including both undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision. An important feature of annual monitoring is its integration with academic and resource planning, through the production by faculties and departments of supplements to their business and service delivery plans. The audit team considered that programme monitoring was generally detailed and robust across all faculties and that its outcomes were utilised effectively at institutional level.

29   Revalidation is intended to be an enhancement-focused process seeking to identify both current and future mechanisms to enhance the quality of the student learning experience. The University's recently revised procedure aligns periodic review more closely with the objectives of annual monitoring. The audit team found that the University's arrangements for programme monitoring and periodic review were effective in maintaining the quality of the students' learning opportunities. In its emphasis on strategic issues and its detailed follow-up processes, the team also found that these arrangements were likely to enhance the learning experience.

30   The University stated that the 'student experience is the prime focus of all quality assurance in the University' and that its regulations include a range of policies to ensure that a 'consistent and comprehensive approach to gaining student feedback' is in place. Its Student Charter states that the University is committed to student participation 'in the continuous academic development of the University' and that it encourages 'student participation on key policy-forming bodies of the University'.

31   Procedures for gaining student feedback have recently been revised. At module level the University expects that 'feedback will be achieved by the use of dialogue which will be face-to-face for on-campus students' and gained by email or similar means for students on distributed learning programmes, although the University Quality Enhancement Committee was aware that some schools had reported that this was difficult to collect. At programme level students are asked to complete two standardised questionnaires, the first to capture the student experience during the early weeks of study; the second is closely linked to questions asked in the National Student Survey concerning teaching and learning, assessment and learning resources. The results of feedback feed into programme Annual Monitoring Reports. In its scrutiny of documentation the audit team found that some programmes had reinstated module evaluation questionnaires and that, at school level, uncertainty remained as to what constituted 'the minimum criteria' for feedback leading to 'good quality reporting'.

32   The University regards the National Student Survey as an important indicator of student satisfaction and all programme level data are provided to the faculties for consideration by programme teams and senior managers. Outcomes of the survey, highlighting aspects of good practice as well as issues that need to be addressed, are analysed by the Quality Enhancement Department, which produces a detailed briefing report for both the Quality Enhancement Committee and the Academic Board. This report noted general trends and also analysed key findings at subject level.

33   The audit team concluded that the University uses feedback from taught students appropriately to assure itself of the quality of its provision and to identify enhancements. In meetings with the team, students were appreciative of the accessibility of most academic staff and also of the range of effective informal means available to them to express opinions and to argue for change.

34   Student membership of University committees was considered as part of the 2006 Internal Audit of Academic Governance, which expressed considerable concern about the effectiveness of student representation. As a result those committees with direct responsibility for oversight of the student learning experience now have provision for student membership and all faculty and school committees also include programme representatives. The composition of programme committees requires at least one student representative from each stage, and additional representation for students of any collaborative partner. The audit team concluded that the right of student representation is now comprehensive at all levels.

35   Despite amending committee constitutions to include student representation the high level of vacancies, particularly at faculty and institutional levels, has remained a longstanding problem. Earlier audit reports recommended taking action to address the variability of student participation in representative processes at school level. In supporting the University's latest commitment to strengthen the student voice as a high priority, the audit team advises the University to take further steps to increase the effective participation of students at all levels of the deliberative structure.

36   The University is strongly supporting the Students Union's sustained commitment to strengthen the student representative system, resulting in a series of joint initiatives, for example the annual student representatives' conference, the 'Dear John' campaign, and the establishment of an Academic Representation Steering Group. The University's executive and Students' Union sabbatical officers both confirmed to the audit team the continuation of the close mutual engagement commented on in the previous audit report. This stable working relationship is formalised by monthly management liaison meetings between the two executives. The development of this closer working relationship between the University Executive and the Students' Union is identified by the audit team as a feature of good practice.

37   Programme committees are described as a key component of the quality assurance systems for all taught provision, whatever the mode of delivery. Programme committees are required to consider external examiner reports. However, the New Committee Structure Implementation Review noted inconsistencies in the consideration of external examiner reports, a view that was confirmed in a meeting with students. The team learnt that action would be taken to address this and, as recommended by phase 2 of the HEFCE Review of the Quality Assurance Framework (2006/45), from September 2009 all programme committees would discuss external examiner reports. This was confirmed to the audit team in discussions with students. The team considered it desirable that in line with HEFCE 06/45 the University ensures that external examiner reports are routinely shared with relevant student representatives.

38   The University considers itself a research informed but teaching led institution, with research and scholarship driving curriculum development to the benefit of its students. One of the objectives of the revised Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy is an increase in research output that will inspire and inform the curriculum. This is supported by the Teaching

Informed by Research and the Research Informed Curriculum funds. From a relatively low threshold at the beginning of the decade, the audit team considered that the University has made effective use of limited resources to develop a growing research culture, building on existing strengths, with the clear strategic objectives of promoting curriculum development and enhancing the quality of student learning opportunities.

39   Developed from its mission to be the learner's first choice for quality and opportunity, and its commitment to widening participation and part-time students, the University has a well established practice of delivery to non-traditional learners through flexible study. In response to the evolving needs and characteristics of the student market it has developed the Curriculum Fit for the Future Strategy, which outlines plans for the development and implementation of a flexible learning curriculum and a flexible approach to its delivery, with particular emphasis on addressing the needs of employers, those currently in work, and the employability of its students. The audit team heard that the University intends to continue investing in flexible learning provision and technologies to meet employers' and learners' changing needs, and has set ambitious targets for its achievement.

40   The University has in place procedures to tackle the challenges of curriculum design, the assessment of learning, and programme management presented by flexible modes of study. Administrative, operational and quality management issues related to the support of the growing number of online learners are being addressed through an online and distributed learning project. The School of Flexible and Partnership Learning, which sits alongside the four faculties, has been established to enhance and develop innovative forms of learning and to oversee the operational management of these activities. It administers the Lifelong Learning Scheme, which includes a large number of students on programmes for whom the workplace is an integral element of their study.

41   Approximately 30 programmes across the University may be studied entirely online. Support and advice for online distance-learners is provided by a dedicated staff team, in addition to the academic support, forums and discussion groups established by individual programmes. Module leaders for all of the University's taught provision are expected to make a minimum of material available online through the virtual learning environment (VLE), and the audit team heard that an increasing number are doing so.

42   The Corporate Plan states that one of the University's three strategic aims over the next five years is to become a first choice university for employers seeking quality workforce development solutions in response to business needs. The audit team learnt that that objective is promoted by strategic direction, appropriate management structures, and inclusive quality processes which are flexible enough to address the particular characteristics of learning modes which meet the needs of work-based students and their employers. At institutional level this is being driven by the Curriculum Fit for the Future Strategy and the establishment of the University of Derby Corporate. At operational level it has been addressed through the formation of the School of Flexible and Partner Learning to manage aspects of provision perceived to involve potentially higher levels of risk, and by the promotion of enhancement, for example through bodies such as the Flexible Learning Advisory Group and by the effective deployment of quality management systems exemplified by the rigorous review of the fitness for purpose of the Lifelong learning scheme. The University is also making progress in fully engaging with section 9 of the *Code of practice* by revising its policy for workplace learning. Through its scrutiny of institutional processes for the direction, management and support of flexible learning, the audit team concluded that the University comprehensively addressed its commitment to employer engagement, both through the development of flexible learning and the creation of mechanisms for sustained liaison with the business community, thereby fulfilling one of the key aims of its Corporate Plan. The well thought out approach to the University's engagement with employers is identified as a feature of good practice.

43   Learning resources are centrally managed and integrated through the Learning and Information Services department which provides resources, systems and technology to support the academic and administrative processes of the University, guided by the department's strategy. Identification of academic learning resource requirements is primarily achieved through the processes of programme development and approval, annual monitoring and periodic review. Annual faculty curriculum development plans assess the adequacy of learning resources supporting the taught portfolio. The University has invested significantly in library, IT and learning technology in recent years, adding new and refurbishing existing libraries, and upgrading IT facilities across all sites. The Learning and Information Services department gauges customer satisfaction in a number of ways, through formal mechanisms such as annual monitoring, consultation with staff, by its own student surveys, and from the NSS outcomes.

44   The Centre for Education Development and Materials, based within Learning and Information Services, has responsibility for the VLE and, together with SFPL staff, it promotes, facilitates and supports technology enhanced learning within faculties, funding the conversion of a wide range of modules into e-supported modes of delivery through the Curriculum Fit for the Future Strategy. The management and monitoring of learning resources is very well integrated into the University's systems by ensuring that Learning and Information Services has a role in the planning and quality processes and through committee representation at faculty and institutional levels. The Learning and Information Services strategy is ambitious but has already achieved considerable progress, despite funding challenges, making a significant contribution to the quality of student learning opportunities.

45   The University's admissions policy was approved in 2007 and revised in 2009. The University has recently increased its general entry requirements to raise standards, and is currently undertaking a survey of what impact different entry profiles have on retention. Revised regulations and procedures for APL were introduced for 2009-10, aligned with the Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning. The University no longer has a separate widening participation strategy. It considers that it has moved to an holistic approach to widening participation which is reflected in the profile of the institution, indicated by its support for the acquisition of higher level learning by a wide range of students through flexible delivery, developing 'graduateness' and employability.

46   Admissions for all undergraduate, non-professional taught postgraduate and online distance-learning programmes from UK applicants are received and processed centrally by the admissions service within Student Support and Information Service. All admissions are on the basis of 'a reasonable expectation that the applicant will be able to achieve the aims and outcomes of the course and the standard required for the award for which they wish to register'. The University's Internationalisation Strategy aims to double the number of campus based overseas students by 2014, so from 2009 the University has introduced pre-sessional and in-sessional courses in English language support. It also plans a new International Foundation Programme for students who need an extra year of study to prepare for joining an undergraduate programme. The audit team concluded that the University's admissions policy and procedures, which are regularly reviewed, are fit for purpose, reflect section 10 of the *Code of practice: Admissions to higher education* and contribute to the University's ability to maintain oversight of academic standards.

47   A number of strategic, policy and operational documents promote the University's commitment to place students at the heart of everything it does, for example the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, Curriculum Fit for the Future Strategy, and the Student Experience Strategy. The Student Experience Strategy Group with cross institutional membership develops and funds projects, monitoring progress against an action plan. The strategy group is not part of the formal deliberative structure, but has a significant role in guiding University policy development relating to the enhancement of the student experience, contributing important items to the agendas of appropriate central and faculty committees.

48   Arrangements for integrated student support are set out in the SSIS Strategy. Integrated student support is primarily provided by SSIS, guided by the SSIS Strategy. A student support team operates central receptions at the four main sites, where students can receive key information, advice and guidance, and also offers specialist professional and advisory services (including health, counselling and disability support). The service works closely with the Students' Union advice centre 'The Source'. Specialist advice and support is directed at particular cohorts or to address specific individual needs. Students spoke highly of the quality of support provided for disabled students, both centrally and locally, which the audit team was able to confirm. The most comprehensive overview and analysis of performance delivered by SSIS is provided by the department's annual monitoring report to the University Quality Enhancement Committee. The audit team considered that the University has in place an extensive, generally well managed and integrated network of support for students guided by clear strategic objectives and with a strong commitment to the enhancement of the quality of student learning opportunities.

49   The University expects programme leaders to 'act in all cases as the primary contact for students requiring pastoral or academic support'. Tutorial systems vary from faculty to faculty, the range of mechanisms including personal tutors, year tutors, and academic counsellors, in addition to the programme leader. The effectiveness of local and central student support and guidance arrangements are evaluated at the programme and school reporting stages of the annual monitoring process. Hitherto there has been no standard institutional system for personal support and development planning, leading the University to recently conclude that there has been an 'unacceptable degree of variability in the student experience of employability and personal support and development planning' within the University's undergraduate programmes. In its discussions the audit team heard of examples of excellent pastoral and academic support from staff practising an open door policy, and also of occasional examples where it was less effective.

50   One of the objectives of the Student Experience Strategy is to support personal support and development planning, employability and personal tutors. The University has addressed this by revising its arrangements. From September 2009, commencing with year 1, all undergraduate programmes including Joint Honours will begin the process of identifying a module at each level which will deliver personal support and development planning, career development and personal tutor support, unless professional body requirements dictate that, alternatively, personal support and development planning should be embedded in the curriculum. The audit team learnt that the University intends to evaluate the effectiveness of this initiative before extending it to Foundation Degree and taught postgraduate programmes. The team considers it desirable that the University expedites the inclusion of Foundation Degree and taught postgraduate students in its new proposals for the delivery of personal support and development planning.

51   Each faculty and the Joint Honours Scheme located in the School of Flexible and Partnership Learning has a student liaison officer who acts as 'a hub for referral to central services and tutors and a familiar face for support'. Programme committees utilise a range of management information to monitor student performance, including the regular audit of student profiles at specific points during the academic year, both to ensure accuracy and to identify potential difficulties. Attendance monitoring, submission of coursework, VLE log in and library usage are identified as indicators giving early warning of possible lack of engagement, allowing timely intervention and support. Faculties are currently piloting automated attendance monitoring and assignment submission (including the use of anti-plagiarism software) to enhance the timeliness of student performance data. The audit team considered the University's use of management information such as attendance and assignment submission data to target student support, a feature of good practice.

52   Staff induction comprises corporate and local elements provided by Human Resources through a central course and by the appointee's line manager. Full-time staff new to teaching are expected to complete the HEA-accredited Postgraduate Programme in Learning and Teaching in HE, part of the University's CPD Framework, to demonstrate achievement of professional teaching

standards. Teaching staff engaged in teaching students on pro rata contracts, including postgraduate research students, are encouraged to participate, and, should be supported by an appropriate provision of professional development (see paragraph 64).

53   Annual Development and Performance Review which has been in place in its current form for five years, is compulsory for full-time staff and optional for associate lecturers. It is an opportunity to discuss individual performance and establish training and development needs. The University's Observation Monitoring and Support of Teaching scheme requires every member of the academic staff to participate on an annual basis. A recent internal survey found that although it occurs fairly widely, compliance is patchy, a significant minority of staff not participating, and that the scheme does not draw on its development potential, although the audit team heard that there is some good practice in place. The final report of the working group to review the assurance of teaching quality recommended its replacement by a more developmental professional practice review, and the team learnt that a more flexible and innovative scheme is to be introduced at the start of 2010.

54   The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy is informed by the expectation that staff routinely engage in reflective practice and critical thinking, both in their subject and also in pedagogy. A Learning and Teaching Advisory Group, consisting primarily of senior teaching fellows and Quality Enhancement Department managers, supports and monitors achievement of the Strategy's objectives. It was clear to the audit team that one of the most effective instruments of enhancement has been the appointment of teaching and senior teaching fellows, who were given key central and faculty developmental responsibilities. A revised fellowship scheme is now in place.

55   In the absence of an overarching workforce development strategy, the University has established a strategic development steering group to agree workforce development organisational priorities and to support delivery of the University's core strategic aims. The audit team concluded that the University offers a rich and varied network of development and training opportunities to encourage the professional development of its staff. Procedures are regularly reviewed and continuously enhanced.

56   The audit team found that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. As the University will be subject to a separate audit of its collaborative provision this judgement does not apply to that provision.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

57   The University defines enhancement as 'change leading to improvement in the quality of learning opportunities'. It focuses on four types of activity; recognising individual good practice; identifying and acting on opportunities for improvement in the process of monitoring and reviewing academic provision; investing and supporting innovation and transformational change; and creating a climate that promotes learning and teaching. The University's approach to enhancement is set out in a formal Enhancement Policy which it regards as inseparable from the effectiveness of the institution's overall management of quality and standards and is a key aspect of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. The Academic Board, key committees, key post-holders and the Quality Enhancement Department are all tasked with promoting enhancement.

58   The audit team observed a commitment to continuous improvement across the University noting the revised design of annual monitoring and periodic review processes which are intended in part to enhance the quality of learning opportunities available to students. Increasingly, staff development has a similar focus and the Periodic Review of Schools provides further evidence. The audit team examined the operation of the University's revised annual monitoring process as it operated at all levels. It found the University-level Annual Monitoring Report to be thorough, scrupulous and self-reflective and it considered the Enhancement Plan, with statements of the

progress made, to be an example of its commitment to enhancing the student learning experience.

59   The audit found the University's commitment to enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities evident in the structures and processes of management and embedded in the inclusive, open and reflective culture of the institution.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

60   The University of Derby's collaborative provision will be subject to a separate audit.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

61   Research is overseen by the University Research and Research Degrees Committee, a sub-committee of the Academic Board. This committee oversees the work of faculty Research and Research Degrees Committees. The audit team noted the open and reflective interaction between the various elements of this system, particularly the work of the Research Office in coordinating the various factors. The audit team found that this structure was effective in maintaining the academic standards and quality of postgraduate research programmes.

62   Postgraduate research provision encompasses traditional three-year, full-time doctorates, part-time, and distance-learning programmes. There is also a newly introduced extended 'New Route' doctorate, although registered numbers are very small. Students on such programmes are regarded as postgraduate research students. There are a lesser number of students following professional doctorates, such as the EdD, that incorporates a sizeable element of practice into independent research. The Postgraduate Regulations, 2008 Edition, Part B, covering postgraduate research students are separate from those for postgraduate professional doctorates and postgraduate taught students. The University's postgraduate regulatory frameworks have been subject to recent updating, together with enhancements to various operating procedures and support systems. The audit team noted the availability of a comprehensive collection of guidance documents, forms, and the regulatory frameworks themselves, on the research website. These documents include a 'Guide for postgraduate research students' and a 'Postgraduate Research Student Charter' covering the whole of the student life-cycle.

63   Initial interaction for potential postgraduate research students is with the Research Office, with the admissions decision and supervisory package allocation being the responsibility of the faculty. The Research Office continues to have a significant supporting role throughout students' studies. A Student Database facilitates the monitoring of an individual student's interactions with the University. Students receive both a faculty and institutional induction, covering amongst other matters, rights and responsibilities. Supervision is set within a package which involves a Director of Studies, as primary supervisor, and at least a second supervisor. As part of its strategy of growing research capacity, supervisors may be involved in supervising students spread across the range of postgraduate research and postgraduate professional provision. The maximum supervision load for a Director of Studies is limited to the equivalent of 10 full-time PhD students, but the number of individuals may be many more than 10 if part-time students or second supervisions are involved. Such high loads are restricted to a few specific individuals whose workloads are carefully managed so as not to degrade the quality of student support. The audit team saw evidence of the training available to develop both the research skills of students and the supervisory skills of staff. This is delivered by several groups such as the Research Office and the Quality Enhancement Department. Postgraduate research students spoke positively of their supervision and the monitoring and progression arrangements, which the team found to be well thought through and extensively documented.

64   The University has a policy whereby postgraduate research students who undertake teaching duties must undertake mandatory teacher training. There is a robust system to ensure that all postgraduate research students who teach are informed of the training opportunities, but

there is no similarly robust mechanism for ensuring necessary take-up. The audit team found that the policy was not universally applied and heard about issues relating to workload and adequate preparation of postgraduate research students who teach. Given the potential impact of this weakness, both on the postgraduate research students themselves, and the consequent impact on the quality of taught provision, the audit team considered it advisable that the University ensure the consistent application of the policy that all postgraduate research students who teach receive appropriate training.

65   The Head of Research compiles an Annual Research Report that incorporates a summary of the annual postgraduate research student feedback survey. Postgraduate research students also have opportunities to sit on a variety of University committees including University Research and Research Degrees Committee. However, the audit team found that attendance at committee meetings was variable with notable absence of some student constituencies, for example postgraduate research students from the Buxton campus.

66   Postgraduate students receive comprehensive handbooks, a thorough induction and supportive supervision. The documentation is readily available via the research website. Oversight is provided by well functioning committee and operational structures with a robust system in place for monitoring the progress of postgraduate research students, although with some systemic weakness in obtaining representative student feedback. The audit team concluded that the University's postgraduate research framework and its implementation meet the expectations of the precepts of Section 1 of the *Code of practice*.

Section 7: Published information

67   The University regards its website as the most up-to-date source of information about programmes and services, but it also provides copious printed material. Prospectuses are jointly produced between the faculties and the Marketing Department, with the Dean ultimately signing off information as being correct. Other central teams provide additional information for the UCAS and Unistats websites; quantitative data for HESA; performance indicators; and a contribution to the pre-enrolment and induction information provided on the University website.

68   Students who met the audit team were in the main positive about the range of information provided, but had mixed views on the accuracy of prospectuses. A key document for enrolled students is the programme handbook, considered the main source of programme information for students. The Rights, Responsibilities and Regulations for Students on Taught Programmes document states that programme handbooks should contain a number of core pieces of information including information about complaints and appeals. From the sample of handbooks it read the audit team noted that, whilst some were comprehensive, there were also variations in both the presentation of programme specification material and that related to appeals and complaints, the latter sometimes being absent. The variations in handbooks seen by the team led them to consider it desirable for the University to ensure all student handbooks contain the University's required core information.

69   The audit team learnt that the University was aware of the varied position with respect to the presentation of programme specifications in handbooks, and the absence of a consistent system for student access to validated programme specifications. It intended to correct this situation over time, as existing programmes were revalidated or new programmes introduced. However, the team regarded this approach as resulting in an unnecessarily protracted period before the University's desired situation was arrived at. Consequently, the team considered it desirable for the University to accelerate implementation of its decision to produce readily accessible programme specifications.

70   The audit team concluded that the University provides a comprehensive range of information in print and on its website about the quality of its educational provision and the

standards of its awards. It considered that in general, reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of this information, but with the exceptions noted above.

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

71   The audit team identified the following areas of good practice

- the work of the External Examiner Sub-Committee and development of the database of external examiners (paragraph 2)

- the comprehensive and integrated planning and quality processes which guide the priorities and actions of the University at institutional and faculty level (paragraph 6)

- the development of a culture of inclusivity, openness and self-reflection which underpins the successful operation of the University's quality assurance and quality enhancement processes (paragraph 7)

- the development of a closer working relationship between the University Executive and the Students' Union (paragraph 36)

- the well thought-out approach to the University's engagement with employers (paragraph 42)

- the use of management information such as attendance and assignment submission data to target student support (paragraph 51).

Recommendations for action

72   Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- take further steps to increase the effective participation of students at all levels of the deliberative structure (paragraph 35)

- ensure the consistent application of the policy that all postgraduate research students who teach receive appropriate training (paragraph 64).

73   Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- establish an effective system for appointing, supporting and guiding student members of periodic review panels (paragraph 17)

- ensure that external examiner reports are routinely shared with relevant student representatives (paragraph 37)

- expedite the inclusion of Foundation Degree and postgraduate taught students in the University's new personal support and development planning model (paragraph 50)

- ensure all student handbooks contain the University's required core information (paragraph 68)

- accelerate implementation of the University's decision to produce readily accessible programme specifications (paragraph 69).

Appendix

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

The University has devoted considerable time and energy in reviewing its quality management system, and in ensuring that it is supportive of our commitment to enhancement. This has included the establishment of procedures for the identification and assessment of academic risks and for the effective and proportionate management of these risks. Our quality assurance procedures are now closely integrated with the University's arrangements for management decision-making and for teaching and learning development.

The University welcomes the report as an accurate reflection of our work. The features of good practice, together with the team's concluding statement on our approach to quality enhancement, endorse our quality strategy and its direction of travel. This, as is noted in the report, rests upon the University's 'culture of inclusivity, openness and self-reflection'.

The University is addressing all the matters to which the report's recommendations refer. We had already identified these issues and, in most cases, action was being taken at the time of audit.

The University places a very high value on the student voice and it has taken concerted action over a long period to ensure that this is heard. In so doing, we have been ambitious in the targets that we have set for ourselves. Our work in this area is acknowledged in paragraphs 86-90 of the annex to the report, and in one of the identified features of good practice. Students have the right of representation at all levels in the University and they actively express their views. As a consequence, the University enjoys a national reputation for, and takes pride in, the care that it takes to listen to the student voice.

The report records the difficulties that we, like many other institutions, have encountered in securing a full complement of student representatives at certain levels of our committee structure. This problem had been fully recognised by the University and was the subject of continuing action at the time of audit. In view of this, and of the range of 'fail safe' mechanisms that have been established to register the student voice, the University is both surprised and disappointed that the team considered it advisable that 'further steps' are undertaken 'to increase the effective participation of students at all levels of the deliberative structure'. Whilst it is desirable that we continue the work that we are undertaking, our formal and informal arrangements ensure that there are no risks to quality and standards.

The Vice President of the Students Union has added the following comment to the University's response:

'The Students Union both recognises and welcomes the University's strong support for the academic representation of students. With strong year-on-year growth within the representation scheme, and opportunities for representation at all levels of the committee structure, we are more than satisfied with student-led quality enhancement at the University of Derby, and we have every confidence in the scheme's continued success'.