



**QAA**



# Institutional audit

**The University of East Anglia**

APRIL 2009

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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 assurance of the quality of learning opportunities provided for students. It also operates under contract to the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland to provide evidence to meet their statutory obligations to assure the quality and standards of academic programmes for which they disburse public funding. The audit method was developed in partnership with the funding councils and the higher education representative bodies and agreed following consultation with higher education institutions and other interested organisations. The method was endorsed by the 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 approach to external quality assurance. At the centre of the process is an emphasis on students and their learning.

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

- ensuring that the awards and qualifications in higher education are of an academic standard at least consistent with those referred to in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree-awarding bodies in a proper manner
- providing learning opportunities of a quality that enables students, whether on taught or research programmes, to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications
- enhancing the quality of their educational provision, particularly by building on information gained through monitoring, internal and external reviews, and 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 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 academic 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 East Anglia (the University) from 30 March to 3 April 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 and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the University manages the academic aspects of its provision.

In Institutional audit, the institution's management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are audited. The term 'academic standards' is used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the 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 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.

### Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University recognises that enhancement can be achieved through teaching and learning activity and deploys a number of approaches in this area, including: awards for excellence in teaching, teaching fellowships, links with the Higher Education Academy and professional development events. It supports staff through its Centre for Staff and Educational Development. The Dean of Students' Office, and within it the Learning Enhancement Team, provides effective support for students aimed at improving the learning experience. When the Student Information System is fully operational across the University it will have the potential to be a significant resource for enhancement. Overall, the audit found that the University's developing approach to enhancement was effective in contributing to the systematic enhancement of student learning opportunities.

### Postgraduate research students

The audit found that the University's Code of Practice for Research Degrees represented a sound framework for institutional arrangements for research students. The overall approach both secures the assurance of academic standards and provides for the enhancement of the students' learning opportunities. The research environment and postgraduate research student experience meet 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 information

The found that, overall, 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 academic standards of its awards.

## Features of good practice

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

- the University's systematic approach to plagiarism and the work of the school plagiarism officers, which together provide comprehensive institutional regulations and guidance
- the specification and application of the framework for student involvement in quality assurance throughout the University, which afford significant opportunities for students to express their views to the University
- the integrated approach, led by the Information Services Directorate, to the management and development of its library and information technology provision which contributes to the quality of learning opportunities
- the strategic management of student support services by the Dean of Students' Office which promotes the provision of comprehensive and coordinated support to students
- the arrangements for the operation of collaboration provision, particularly the work of the central Partnerships Office, which support the sound management of academic standards and the enhancement of quality in the partner institutions
- the provision through the Transitions initiative of an extensive and student-focused training programme for postgraduate research students, develops a range of skills directly relevant to the students' programmes of study and also prepares them for employment.

## Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- specify the limits of acceptable variability in practice at school level, with particular reference to nomenclature for key committees and to roles and responsibilities for the provision and accuracy of information for students, including the content of handbooks
- further to the advice provided in the QAA Institutional audit report of 2004, give priority to the systematic calibration of the University's provision against the guidance provided by the *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)* on the matter of levels
- assure itself that the application in practice of policy and procedures for extensions to submission deadlines and for extenuating circumstances does not result in inequitable treatment of students
- revise the guidance for the conduct of assessment boards to establish and secure institution-wide specifications for minimum attendance and quoracy
- review the policies, procedures and published information relating to the admission of postgraduate research students, to establish clarity of requirement.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- formalise the expectations for the training and ongoing support for postgraduate research students who teach, to ensure they are adequately prepared for the role
- reappraise the current approach to peer observation of teaching, to establish consistent practice across the University.

## Reference points

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

- the *Code of practice*
- 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 had responded appropriately to subject benchmark statements, programme specifications and the *Code of practice*, published by QAA; there remains some work to be undertaken in relation to the FHEQ.





## Report

### Preface

1 An Institutional audit of the University of East Anglia (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 20 March 2009. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of its awards and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team was Dr N Casey; The Revd Professor K Newport; Ms J Rice; Professor D Wright, auditors, and Mrs C Cobbett, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mrs S Patterson, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

### Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The University was one of seven new universities created in the 1960s and received its Royal Charter in 1964. In the academic year 2007-08, 14,854 students were registered for the University's awards. The University's mission is 'to understand, empower and act to enhance the lives of individuals and the prospects of communities in a rapidly changing world'. The University has 23 schools of studies and a range of research centres; the schools are assigned to one of four faculties. There are eight central service and support divisions.

4 The previous Institutional audit in 2004 found that broad confidence could be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and of the academic standards of its awards. The audit report proposed a number of recommendations; the present audit found that the University had responded appropriately to the majority of the recommendations, but that progress had been slow in respect of data management and the issue of levels and progression (see paragraphs 15 and 23).

5 Significant developments since the previous audit include the publication of a revised Corporate Plan (2008-12), a new faculty structure, a library extension and Medical School building, the establishment of a Student Experience Committee as a subcommittee of the Learning and Teaching Committee and, a new Student Information System SIS.

6 The Vice-Chancellor is the principal executive officer of the University and is supported by an Executive Team. Senate, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, is the ultimate academic body of the University, responsible for the management of academic standards and learning opportunities. Senate delegates functional authority to the Learning and Teaching Committee to oversee the quality of academic provision and the academic standards of awards. The Student Experience Committee considers a range of matters related to the students' learning opportunities such as student feedback and library resources. Joint boards of study with partner institutions report to the Learning and Teaching Committee and are responsible for overseeing the operation of quality assurance in collaborative provision. The Taught Programmes Policy Group and the Postgraduate Research Programmes Policy Group are discussion and consultation groups with a wide membership, which has an advisory role in the development of policies and procedures.

7 Faculty learning, teaching and quality committees exercise local responsibility for academic quality and standards and report to the Learning and Teaching Committee. Each school has a board that is responsible for the management of academic provision and quality assurance processes at that level, but, there is provision for further delegation of that authority to another subsidiary body. There is a variety of nomenclature for the deliberative structures at faculty level and below, which contributes to some ambiguity in the designation of roles and responsibilities at that level. It would be advisable for the University to specify the limits of acceptable variability in practice at school level with reference to nomenclature for key committees.

8 The University's executive and deliberative framework based on the reporting structures and memberships of the Learning and Teaching Committee, the faculty learning, teaching and quality committees and the school boards provides a structure that allows for systematic communication in the operation of the institution's management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

## **Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards**

9 The University defines the academic standards of its awards in programme specifications which set out programme outcomes, taking account of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), subject benchmark statements, the *Code of practice, for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*), and the requirements of public, statutory and/or regulatory bodies. The report of the previous audit advised the University to review its use of externality in its routine approval, monitoring and review procedures and the present audit confirmed the University's evident commitment to externality in approval, monitoring and review. The University makes use of both 'internal' externality through individuals not associated with the provision and of independent external experts in the initial calibration of standards at course approval. Monitoring processes draw on reports from external examiners and the associated responses and actions. The University's periodic (quinquennial) course review process involves both external and student membership of the panel. The audit team reviewed a range of material related to the approval, monitoring and review of award standards by the University and concluded that the University's arrangements in this area were effective in the management of academic standards.

10 The University's approach to external examining is governed by internal codes of practice for the nomination, appointment and briefing of external examiners and for reporting arrangements, which were framed following consideration of the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*. The University's Codes of Practice are kept under review by the Learning and Teaching Committee. There are well-defined criteria for the nomination of external examiners and the scrutiny of nominations and the appointment procedures are orderly and operate as intended to secure external examiners with the requisite expertise and independence. On appointment, all external examiners receive an information pack incorporating general guidance, degree regulations and relevant University policies. Induction and the provision of information related to courses are delegated to schools and there is no central University guidance and overview in this area. There is therefore potential for differences in the information provided to examiners and disparity in approach across schools.

11 The Code of Practice for the External Examiner System for Awards (Taught Programmes) is explicit in requiring comment from external examiners on the academic standards of awards and the standards demonstrated by students, as well as various other aspects of the assessment process, including public, statutory and/or regulatory bodies' requirements.

12 The arrangements for central consideration of external examiner reports are satisfactory, with the Director of Taught Programmes and the Director of Research Degree Programmes providing annual overview reports to the Learning and Teaching Committee. Schools also consider the reports and prepare responses and with the faculty learning, teaching and quality committees confirming the adequacy of the responses. The audit team found that, although there were differing arrangements at school level, external examiner reports were subject to serious consideration and response. There is some variation in practice at faculty level with respect to the identification of generic issues arising from the reports; the team suggests that promotion of a more consistent approach at this level might assist the University in identifying matters of relevance across the University that might also support enhancement. Students are party to the consideration of external examiners' reports and responses through membership of local and central committees; staff-student liaison committees are not required to receive external examiners' reports.

13 The review of documentation and discussion with staff established that the University's approach to external examining allowed it to secure the requisite assurance of the academic standards of its awards. It is confirmed that the University makes strong and scrupulous use of external examiners in summative assessment and that institutional procedures play an effective role in the management of academic standards.

14 The University takes systematic account of subject benchmark statements and the *Code of practice* in its management of the academic standards of its awards, and in the compilation of programme specifications for each programme of study. The University has kept abreast of the emergence of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* published by ENQA the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, and other developments relating to academic standards in the European Higher Education Area, particularly in the context of the Bologna Process. A number of the University's programmes are accredited by public, statutory and/or regulatory bodies, and there is evidence that regulations, policies and procedures have been calibrated to meet their requirements and to confirm the University's view that it has a 'sound track record' with regard to its engagement with these bodies.

15 The report of the previous audit advised the University to review its approach to the use of levels in its assessment arrangements for undergraduates in the context of demonstration of progression. Review of documentation and discussion with staff indicated that the University's approach to framing academic standards in terms of the level of study was subject to ongoing internal debate in the context of revisions to the undergraduate Common Course Structure. The present audit team found an evident tension with respect to progression in reconciling alignment with the FHEQ with the University's approach to wide availability of free choice of modules, and the fact that modules in years two and three are not defined by level of study. There remains a need for the University to be more explicit on the matter of levels of study to strengthen its approach in this area and to secure demonstrable progression between levels throughout its provision. Accordingly, the team advises the University that, further to the advice provided in the QAA Institutional audit report of 2004, it should give priority to the systematic calibration of its provision, against the guidance provided by the FHEQ on the matter of levels.

16 Consideration of documentation and discussion with staff demonstrated generally effective use of those elements of the Academic Infrastructure related to the academic standards of awards and of other external reference points. The audit team confirmed that the University's use of the Academic Infrastructure and external reference points contributed to its effective management of academic standards, although, as noted above, there remains some work to be undertaken with respect to the FHEQ.

17 The University's main regulatory framework for assessment is published in 'The Calendar' and there are separate documents covering issues such as anonymous-marking, marking criteria, provisions for marking and feedback on assessed work, posted on the University website. Students are provided with essential information on learning outcomes, assessment tasks, marking, and plagiarism within, variously, module outlines, school handbooks or faculty handbooks. The student written submission suggested that students would benefit from there being 'a single accessible and up-to-date home' for student regulations and, while it is clear that the requisite information is available, students expressed some uncertainty about where to find it. The audit team is of the view that this uncertainty is exacerbated by a lack of clear institutional guidance about where such information should be provided and the consequent diversity of places where the information may be found. There is potential for students to be disadvantaged by this variety of practice, which is therefore a further area in which the University might consider seeking to be more specific about limits on local discretion.

18 Regulations on submission of assessment including provisions for late submission and extenuating circumstances are set out in The Calendar. Responsibility for determining submission deadlines is delegated to appropriate role-holders in each school and, once again, there is evidence a range of approaches between schools.

It is therefore not clear how the University ensures that students on joint courses are not subject to unacceptable coincidence of deadlines. The criteria for the acceptability of extenuating circumstances are not specified, but there is a well-defined procedure for dealing with late work where extenuating circumstances may apply. Discussion with staff and students indicated that there was significant diversity of practice across schools and faculties such that there is potential for students to be treated differently, dependent on their courses of study. It would therefore be advisable for the University to assure itself that the application in practice of policy and procedures for extensions to submission deadlines, and for extenuating circumstances, does not result in inequitable treatment of students.

19 The University's regulatory approach to academic malpractice is set out in its policy on plagiarism and collusion. The formal regulatory framework is reinforced by active encouragement to staff and students to prevent and avoid plagiarism through school plagiarism officers and guidance within handbooks. Review of the relevant documentation and discussion with staff and students led the audit team to identify the University's systematic approach to plagiarism, and the work of the school plagiarism officers, which together provide comprehensive institutional regulations and guidance as a feature of good practice in the University's management of academic standards. There is scope for further development in the area of guidance on referencing, which varies according to the subject heritages of courses. Staff acknowledged that it was a particular challenge for students on joint courses to accommodate this variability.

20 In the student written submission and in meetings with the audit team, students voiced some concern at the quality and timeliness of feedback on assessment, which also featured in the National Student Survey results. There was evidence that the University was taking seriously student opinion in this area and was seeking to improve the provision of assessment feedback to students, which was being monitored at the programme level. While it was clear that students concerns persisted about assessment feedback, the team found that that the University was pursuing strategies, at University and course level, which had the potential to improve the timeliness and quality of feedback to students on assessed work.

21 The University's expectations with respect to the conduct, rights, responsibilities and membership of assessment boards are set out in The Calendar and accompanying advice. The guidance includes the responsibilities of external examiners which do not extend to attendance at stage assessment boards for modules that contribute to the final award. Requirements for the membership of assessment boards do not specify a minimum number of members nor a quoracy requirement meaning that, in the case of some module assessment and stage assessment boards, assessment decisions could be taken by a comparatively small number of members in attendance. There is a requirement that members unable to attend an assessment board seek authorisation from the Learning and Teaching Committee for their absence in advance of the meeting. There is no evidence for assessment boards being conducted without due regard to the relevant regulations, but the University is advised to revise the guidance for the conduct of assessment boards to establish and secure university-wide specifications for minimum attendance and quoracy. The University may find the *Code of practice, Section 6: the assessment of students* a useful starting point for its discussions in this respect.

22 On the basis of meetings with staff and students, and scrutiny of documentation, the audit team was able to confirm that arrangements for the assessment of students were effective in enabling the University to maintain the academic standards of its awards.

23 At the time of the audit, the University was working on the implementation of a new management information system, which had not been without some difficulties. Nonetheless, there was evidence of the effective use of management information, including the performance indicators outlined in the University's Corporate Plan 2008-12, in the management of academic standards. The Learning and Teaching Committee has a pivotal role in using management information in the University's stewardship of its academic standards. The University has developed a 'traffic-light' risk system to monitor performance in the National Student Survey

across schools and the implications of a range of management information are discussed at school boards and staff-student liaison committees. Statistical reporting is used across the university to inform internal monitoring and review processes, but there was evidence of varying approaches to the analysis of relevant management information at course and module level, with some courses interrogating quantitative data and others relying on more qualitative evidence. There is therefore scope for greater standardisation of approach in the analytical use of statistical management information in the management of academic standards at course and module level, to support structured comparisons across the University's provision.

24 Overall the audit team found that confidence could reasonably be placed in the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

### Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

25 The University's' approach to the management of learning opportunities is based within a three-tier structure, with Senate holding ultimate responsibility, supported by the Learning and Teaching Committee and its subcommittees and faculty and school structures. The Learning and Teaching Committee oversees the use of external reference points, in particular the *Code of practice*, in the management of learning opportunities. Policies and procedures are aligned with relevant sections of the *Code* and reviewed as revised sections of the *Code* are published.

26 Processes for programme approval fall into a number of categories according to the nature of the proposal being submitted. There are clear requirements for institutional-level approvals and for external input into the development and approval of programmes. For joint programme proposals, there is a designated 'school of registration' responsible for liaising across schools and, where relevant, faculties. Programme approval processes are adapted to enable conjoint approvals with public statutory and/or regulatory bodies.

27 Monitoring is undertaken every time a module is taught. There was evidence that monitoring was undertaken effectively and assiduously as required. Schools have discretion in the methods they use to gather and consider student feedback in support of course monitoring. Module monitoring feeds into the annual course update procedure, which covers content, currency, structure and assessment of the course, external examiner reports, student achievement and student feedback. Although the University indicates that the monitoring and course update processes provide an opportunity for the dissemination of good practice, there was little evidence of systematic identification of generic matters, especially good practice.

28 Course or programme review, undertaken every five years, expects schools 'to conduct a thorough and strategic review of programmes, considering a range of issues and drawing on a range of management information'. There is provision for effective independent external input and public statutory and/or regulatory body involvement as appropriate. There are clear requirements for action planning and the faculty learning, teaching and quality committees are expected to notify the Learning and Teaching Committee of areas of good practice and any concerns with implications wider than the faculty. There was clear documentary evidence that the process was conducted in accordance with University guidelines, but it seldom included structured consideration of generic issues arising and good practice for further dissemination.

29 The audit team found that the University's arrangements for programme approval, monitoring and review were effective in the maintenance of students' learning opportunities, and that there was scope for development of the processes to make a more structured contribution to the enhancement if those opportunities across the institution.

30 The University's approach to student feedback is set out in a comprehensive, clear and periodically reviewed document, Student Representation and Staff:Student Liaison: A Code of Practice. Most of the student handbooks seen by the audit team included information about how students could feed back on their experiences but on occasion there was little or no guidance. Provision for student involvement in monitoring and review is set out in the same Code of

Practice. Student module evaluations feed into annual module monitoring and course updates. Examples of the University's quinquennial Course Review demonstrated that student feedback at module and course level was routinely considered in the process.

31 Results of the National Student Survey are considered in a number of ways at institutional and programme level, to appraise students' learning opportunities at the University. The Learning and Teaching Committee oversees analysis of the results of the Survey using the 'traffic-light' system to identify areas for improvement. The outcomes of the survey are also discussed in staff-student liaison committees and the outcomes of these discussions are analysed by the Taught Programmes Policy Group. The audit team found that the University was taking a systematic approach to the use of the outcomes of the National Student Survey in work to improve students' learning opportunities. There is potential for further development in the area of the experience of students on joint degrees but, overall, the University's arrangements for student feedback provide an effective framework for gathering student views on their experience.

32 The University's Corporate Plan recognises the role played by student representatives. The Student Representation and Staff:Student Liaison: A Code of Practice outlines the formal arrangements for student representation on faculty committees, school boards and staff-student liaison committees. Students are represented at all levels in the institution's central committee structure, including Senate, the Learning and Teaching Committee, the Student Advisory Group and the Student Experience Committee. Student representatives spoke very positively about the latter and the opportunities for students to influence the agenda of the Committee. The audit team found that the Committee was well placed to ensure that its views were considered by the Learning and Teaching Committee and that it played a key role in the development of policy, in reviews of procedures and practices, and in consideration of national survey results. Students are also represented on teaching policy groups, which report to the Learning and Teaching Committee and forums concerned with library and information technology resources.

33 There is also provision for student representation on staff:student liaison committees. Schools are free to determine the way in which the committees operate, within guidance provided by the University's Code. The student written submission and records of meetings indicate that the committees operate in line with University guidance. In meeting with the audit team, students reported that effectiveness varied between schools, particularly for students on joint courses. Nonetheless, there was clear evidence of areas where student input into staff-student liaison committees had resulted in changes to policy or procedures; the team found that, overall, staff-student liaison made a contribution to meeting student concerns.

34 The University's Student Representation and Staff:Student Liaison: A Code of Practice document recommends that induction sessions for new students should include their 'key and on-going role in quality assurance and enhancement' and provides guidance for schools and faculties on how students should be made aware of the opportunities to act as a student representative. The Union of UEA Students and Graduate Students' Association provide training and support for student representatives. The audit team found the specification and application of the framework for student involvement in quality assurance throughout the University, which afford significant opportunities for students to express their views to the University, to be a feature of good practice in the University's management of learning opportunities.

35 The University's Mission Statement includes the advancement of 'understanding through research, scholarly communication and research-led teaching', which is in turn articulated in the Student Charter and in the University's Education Strategy 2006-11. To promote understanding and development of research-led teaching and learning, a website has been developed to share practice across disciplines. The University also supports research-led teaching and learning through a range of policy statements and strategies. The Learning and Teaching Committee has oversight of how the student learning experience benefits from contact with research-active staff through programme periodic reviews, which include questions on how the curricula are informed by the latest developments in scholarship and research and by the research or

professional activity of the teaching team. The student written submission affirmed that it was clear that 'interdisciplinarity, creativity and research-led teaching and learning were highly valued by UEA students.'

36 Research skills are embedded into the undergraduate curricula from the start of the programmes of study. Courses with placements and years spent abroad or in industry also offer research and scholarship opportunities that are appreciated by students. Internal studies at the University have identified a range of modes from research-informed teaching to research-led (inquiry and problem-based) learning, and considered that there was 'little doubt that the majority of students at UEA experienced a research-rich curriculum'. The studies also concluded that the 'extent to which they [the students] know this is less certain', which was borne out by audit team discussions with undergraduate and taught postgraduate students. Nonetheless, the audit found that the University ensured that staff research and scholarly activity fed into the curricula and that it acted continuously to support, promote and review developments in this area, to make a productive contribution to student learning opportunities.

37 The University's teaching provision includes flexible and distributed learning. Part-time study is available as a more flexible alternative to full-time degrees in a number of schools, but the number of students involved is relatively small, with the exception of professional studies and continuing education. The University has some distance-learning provision, and approval processes are well adapted to the additional quality assurance requirements of such provision. The student written submission confirmed that students valued highly their experiences on placements, but pointed to some problems with communication and the provision of information. At the time of the audit, the University had recently developed a Code of Practice on Placement Learning, observation of which should obviate such problems in the future. Overall, the University's arrangements for flexible and distributed learning were found to be making an effective contribution to the management of student learning opportunities.

38 Since the previous Institutional audit, there have been major investments in infrastructure, including an extension for the central library, new buildings for the Medical School, refurbished teaching and student spaces, and increased accommodation for the Dean of Students' Office (see paragraph 50). Consideration of learning resources is embedded in the approval, monitoring and review processes. For major teaching developments, prior approval of the University's Planning and Resources Committee is required. A review of the relevant documentation confirmed that there were clear and effective channels for the monitoring and review of learning resources.

39 The main provider of centrally managed learning resources is the Information Services Directorate, which is responsible for library and computing facilities, in consultation with the Information Strategy and Services Committee. The Information Services Directorate Strategy (2008-13) is fully aligned and cross-referenced with the broader objectives of the University. The Directorate is involved in a wide range of projects aimed at enhancing teaching and learning and was considered by the audit team to be well placed to be in effective dialogue with academic staff and students.

40 The University's e-Learning Strategy (2007) recognises that the University needs to take a 'more proactive and coordinated approach to the use of e-Learning'. The Learning Technology Group, a joint venture between the Directorate and the Centre for Staff and Educational Development was established to manage the implementation of new technologies into teaching and learning. The Group provides support to academic staff on software issues, while hardware support is faculty-based.

41 Comment in the student written submission about learning resources was generally positive, as was also recorded in the National Student Survey. The postgraduate research experience survey identified that research students were less satisfied with their environment compared with the national average. In response to student views, the library has introduced longer opening hours during semesters and, at the time of the audit, consideration was being

given to out-of-semester opening times, to meet the concerns of taught postgraduate students over more limited access during these periods. The integrated approach, led by the Information Services Directorate, to the management and development of its library and information technology provision that contributes to the quality of learning opportunities, is identified as a feature of good practice in the audit.

42 The University states that its admissions policy is guided by the 'Empowerment through Education' section of its Corporate Plan, where one objective is to 'continue to increase the quality, number and range of student applicants.' Admission requirements and procedures are published in the Calendar. There is a flexible undergraduate admissions policy for students without formal qualifications and there is a foundation year for science subjects and a Medicine with a Foundation Year degree. INTO, a private-sector global education partner organisation, (University of East Anglia) provides specialist academic and English language courses to prepare international applicants for entry into University courses. Strategic direction for admissions policy is provided by the Recruitment, Admissions and Marketing Committee and the associated Policy Group. There are clearly defined roles and responsibilities for aspects of the admissions process at central and local levels and advice and training is provided by the Centre for Staff and Educational Development.

43 The University's Recruitment, International and Outreach Office is responsible for much of the University's widening participation work and the University works closely with 'Aimhigher Norfolk', a programme for widening participation. Admissions and Outreach staff work with the University's 'Transitions into/within HE project' to explore ways to coordinate the information given to potential students across schools and to help better understand the admission and transitional process from the viewpoint of local high schools.

44 The audit team found that the University had in place an effective system for ensuring the consistent implementation of its admission procedures for undergraduate and taught postgraduate students, and that its varied outreach activities supported its policy for widening access to, and participation in, its courses.

45 The student written submission commented that students were 'overwhelmingly happy with the teaching, learning and academic support they receive[d].' Such comments accord with the University's strong performance in the National Student Survey and with the results of a survey undertaken in 2008 by the Dean of Students' Office, which found that three-quarters of students were satisfied with both their academic and personal support. The student written submission identified a number of areas for improvement including: communication in relation to placements; module choices; timetabling; reading lists; assessment, and feedback. There was evidence that the University was considering these matters. Inadequate information can be a particular issue for students on joint degree courses involving more than one school. The University's updated Student Representation and Staff:Student Liaison: A Code of Practice document aims to ensure that joint degrees are part of the agenda of staff:student liaison committees.

46 The student written submission recommended that the University continue to review and improve induction in the first week of the standard semester and would like a full week for student orientation. The 'Transitions into/within HE' project has reviewed induction across all schools to identify good practices and an online resource has been made available.

47 The Academic Advising System in Schools is central to student support. Students value the system highly, but there was evidence that not all individual interactions were effective, particularly for students on joint courses. In response to student concerns identified in the National Student Survey, the University conducted a review in 2007 of policy and practice. As a result of the review, changes were made for the academic year 2008-09, including the establishment of a Deputy Senior Advisor and a Disability Liaison Officer position in schools. At the time of the visit, it was too early for the audit team to form a view as to the effectiveness of the revised procedures in redressing the earlier identified deficiencies in the system.



48 Support for students in faculties is provided through undergraduate and postgraduate teaching offices. Faculty offices and the Dean of Students' Office (see paragraph 50) can provide assistance to a student considering making an academic appeal or an academic complaint, but students are also strongly advised to seek advice from the Union Advice Centre.

49 The graduate level employment rate for graduates is below that of other similar universities, but, at the time of the audit, there had been some recent improvement. Faculties' annual reports on graduate employability seen by the audit team indicated that the implementation of a University employability strategy from 2006 had led to an increase in career-related activities within the curricula and to closer interactions between many schools and their designated careers advisers.

50 Student support is coordinated by the Dean of Students, a member of the Registrar and Secretary's senior management team, who is also the Director of Student Services. The Dean of Students is a member of senior University committees including Senate, the Learning and Teaching Committee and the Student Experience Committee and contributes to the development of policy. Links between student support and teaching and learning are reinforced by joint projects and collaborations between the Dean of Students and the Director of Taught Programmes. The Dean of Students liaises with the Union of UEA Students, the Graduate Students' Association and with schools through the Academic Advisor system as each School has one or two senior advisors who are also part of the Dean of Students' Office.

51 The Dean of Students' Office has overall responsibility for student welfare and provides a range of student services. At the time of the audit, the University had recently appointed an Equality and Diversity Manager, and had created the post of 'Disability Liaison Officer' within schools to complement the work of the Dean of Students' Office. The Learning Enhancement Team within the Dean of Students' Office provides advice and tuition to students on general study skills and specifically, in mathematics, statistics, science and plagiarism awareness, and has a dedicated tutor for international students. The Learning Enhancement Team offers individual tutorials, short diagnostic consultations and a daily drop-in session, and delivers workshops centrally and in schools.

52 Students who met the audit team spoke warmly and positively about the support provided by the Dean of Students' Office. From meetings with staff and from the documentation provided, the team concluded that the strategic management of student support services by the Dean of Students' Office, which promotes the provision of comprehensive and coordinated support to students, was an example of good practice.

53 Continuing professional development for staff involved in teaching is a component of the University's strategic approach to learning and teaching. Support for staff is located in the Centre for Staff and Educational Development, which was established in 1988 to 'promote and support good practice in all aspects' of staff development. The Head of the Centre is also a member of the Learning and Teaching Committee as the LTC Director of Staff Development, and is therefore, as stated by the University, 'well placed' in respect of awareness of current issues and emerging training and support needs.

54 The Centre for Staff and Educational Development offers a programme of courses aligned with the objectives of the Corporate Plan and the Learning and Teaching Strategy. There are defined reporting arrangements, ensuring information on staff development activity reaches Senate and Council. An annual Learning and Teaching Committee Bulletin aims to update and advise staff about its work, including any changes to internal codes of practice, policies and regulations.

55 The University has clear procedures for staff recruitment, selection and induction, including 'Recruitment and Selection Guidelines', Codes of Practice on equality and 'Guidelines for Induction of New Staff'. The Centre for Staff and Educational Development offers an MA in Higher Education Practice (MA HEP), which is accredited by the Higher Education Academy. Participation in the programme is a condition of probation for academic staff with no prior teaching experience. A one-day introductory conference for new staff takes place three or four times per year.

56 The University has a staff appraisal and development scheme that includes a wide range of supporting programmes and events offered by the Centre for Staff and Educational Development. Academic practice events have been introduced by the Centre to inform teaching staff about developments in policy and procedures, as well as to promote the sharing of good practice.

57 There are clear expectations that postgraduate research students who teach will receive training. The Centre for Staff and Educational Development offers a comprehensive programme entitled 'Developing Teaching Skills: A Training Programme for Postgraduate Teaching Assistants' as part of the 'PGR Transitions' programme (paragraph 74), which is designated as compulsory for research students who wish to become teaching assistants. There is also an overarching procedural document 'Teaching Undertaken by Postgraduate Research Students'. Notwithstanding the range of training opportunities available and the statement of the University's expectations, it was evident that not all research students undertaking teaching had experienced any training and that the University was not able effectively to monitor activity in this area. It is therefore desirable that the University formalise the expectations for the training and ongoing support for postgraduate research students who teach, to ensure they are adequately prepared for the role.

58 Peer review of teaching is part of the MA in Higher Education Practice modules taken by probationary staff. Guidelines for peer review are available online. It was evident that peer review of more established staff occurred in some schools but not in others. The audit team confirmed that whether peer review of all teaching staff took place was 'at the discretion of the Head of School'. Student evaluation of modules in annual monitoring was cited as a way in addition to, or instead of, formal peer review, by which the school directors could identify any training needs. The variability in practice has the potential to disadvantage some staff and for poor teaching to continue undetected and not redressed. It is therefore desirable that the University reappraise the current approach to peer observation of teaching, to establish consistent practice across the University

59 The University's promotion criteria include teaching and scholarship, and staff 'can be considered for promotion on the basis of a strong performance' in these areas. At the time of the audit, the University's promotions criteria were under review with the aim of 'better articulation' of performance in teaching as a criterion for promotion. Links with the Higher Education Academy are being strengthened and there are schemes to recognise and reward teaching. A Higher Education Research Innovation Group aims to develop staff 'expertise, interest and enthusiasm for good teaching'.

60 In summary, the audit team found that: there were structured opportunities for student participation in quality assurance; there were explicit and systematic structured links between research and teaching; learning resources were sufficient to the needs of the student body as a whole; student support was comprehensive and noteworthy and there were considered arrangements for staff support and development. There is scope for the University to develop its approach to the management of learning opportunities for students on joint courses. Confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the learning opportunities available to students.

#### **Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement**

61 The University's approach to quality enhancement is based on an approach that integrates it into the Learning and Teaching and the Information Strategies. The Strategy for Quality Enhancement was revised by the Learning and Teaching Committee in February 2009. The University considers the strength of its approach to be that it draws on all levels of the institution. The Learning and Teaching Committee is responsible for major policy development and the quality framework, which involves the faculties and schools in quality management and allows for 'an increased focus on quality enhancement both bottom-up and top-down'. The policy groups that report to the directors of taught programmes and of postgraduate research degrees also provide opportunities for enhancement through their wide University membership, including student representation, which allows them to gather information about practice across the

university. The potential for further development of the approach to student feedback in support of enhancement has been noted above.

62 The University recognises that enhancement can be achieved through teaching and learning activity and deploys a number of approaches in this area including: awards for excellence in teaching, teaching fellowships, links with the Higher Education Academy and professional development events. It supports staff through its Centre for Staff and Educational Development. The role of the Dean of Students' Office, and within it the Learning Enhancement Team, in providing effective support for students aimed at improving the learning experience has been noted (paragraph 50). When the Student Information System is fully operational across the University it will have the potential to be a significant resource for enhancement. Overall, the audit team found that the University's developing approach to enhancement was effective in contributing to the systematic enhancement of student learning opportunities.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

63 The arrangements for ensuring quality in collaborative arrangements are substantially the same as those for 'home' provision and there is clear evidence in documentation of consistency of practice across the range of provision. The University's approach to collaborative arrangements is measured. At the time of the audit the focus was upon regional partnerships and those where there was a clear link between the partner institution and an identified University strength. The University indicated its intent to extend its collaborative provision in the future and, at the time of the audit, was developing the structures to facilitate such expansion. The University is involved in a collaborative arrangement with University Campus Suffolk, which was not considered within the present audit; the operation of the partnership with University Campus Suffolk will be considered through the collaborative provision audit of the University of Essex, the other party to the arrangement.

64 Operational responsibility for partnership arrangements lies with the Partnerships Office, which is within the Learning and Teaching Quality Office, and is led by the Director of Partnerships. The Director of Partnerships is a member of the Learning and Teaching Committee, ensuring that matters related to collaborative provision receive attention at a senior level in the University's deliberative structures. Key features of the management arrangements for collaborative provision are: the appointment of an 'academic link' for each arrangement; a joint board of study for each partnership and the Validation Handbook.

65 Processes for the approval of collaborative arrangements are rigorous and involve both institutional approval and validation of individual courses. All arrangements are covered by legal agreements, with clear stipulations of roles and responsibilities. The Partnerships Office provides guidance on publicity protocols as part of the validation process. The accuracy of publicity materials is monitored by the joint boards of study.

66 All validated courses are subject to external examiner arrangements consistent with those applied to the 'home' provision. There are robust mechanisms for consideration of external examiner reports within the partner institutions, as well as at the University. Records of discussion of the reports demonstrate careful consideration of matters raised by external examiners, and that attention is given to enhancement as well as assurance in responding to such reports.

67 The University approves staff at partner institutions to deliver its courses and provides such staff with access to its library and to electronic resources. Staff at partner institutions can participate in staff development at the University and may study for formal qualifications at the University at a reduced fee. Specific development events have been arranged in response to issues that have arisen during validation and annual review. There are arrangements for students in partner institutions to provide feedback to the University through annual monitoring and review. There is also student representation on the joint boards of study.

68 The University's arrangements for its collaborative provision are clearly defined and there was a range of evidence of their effective and meticulous application in practice. The approach to the management of collaborative provision meets the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure and takes due account of other relevant external reference points. The audit team identified the arrangements for the operation of collaboration provision, particularly the work of the central Partnerships Office, which support the sound management of academic standards and the enhancement of quality in the partner institutions as a feature of good practice in the University's management of academic standards and quality. There can be confidence in the University's current and likely future management of its collaborative provision.

## **Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students**

69 The audit team found the research environment at the University to be strong. There are a number of research centres and institutes, while at school-level research is organised into groups, themes or 'projects'. The University has a policy of ensuring that postgraduate research students are admitted to areas recognised as those of research strength within the University. The Learning and Teaching Committee has overall responsibility for ensuring the quality of postgraduate research programmes, with day-to-day authority being exercised by the Director of Research Degree Programmes supported by the Postgraduate Research Degrees Policy Group. In practice, a good deal of authority and responsibility is also delegated to faculty, school and institute level. The operation of postgraduate research programmes is governed by the University Research Degrees: The Code of Practice document. Further information about policies and procedures is provided in faculty handbooks and on faculty research office websites.

70 The QAA Review of research degree programmes identified matters associated with minimum degree-class and English language requirements for consideration by the University. The present audit team found that there was still a lack of clarity in the specification of requirements for admission to research degree programmes and there was evidence of variability of approach across the University. English language proficiency requirements are not specified centrally and there is a range of requirements set out at the local level, the relevant information being provided through the school. The overall lack of clarity in this area means that is difficult for potential applicants to establish the qualifications required of them and there is potential for inequity across the University; it is therefore advisable that the University review the policies, procedures and published information relating to the admission of postgraduate research students, to establish clarity of requirement.

71 The requirements for supervision are clearly set out in the University's Code of Practice and ensure that students receive effective supervision from research-active staff. Arrangements for moving from MPhil to PhD, for a change in supervisor, and for examinations, are spelt out in the University's Code of Practice. The audit team found these arrangements to be equitable and rigorous, involving the requisite independence and impartiality. There are readily available procedures for matters of academic dishonesty and for complaints and appeals.

72 There are specific requirements for the monitoring of student progress from the start of the programme, and the University maintains an effective overview of research student progress through an annual review reporting to the Postgraduate Research Programmes Policy Group. The Group receives a summary of all external examiners' reports, which also goes to the Learning and Teaching Committee, thereby allowing the University to exercise central oversight of matters raised by the examiners that might have broader implications for practice across the institution.

73 Postgraduate research students are represented on a range of University committees and also have the opportunity to provide feedback on their experience through internal and external surveys and reviews. In 2008, the University took part in the postgraduate research experience survey, but noted that participation was 'disappointingly low'. Nonetheless, there is clear evidence that the University has made use of the limited information which that occurrence of the survey provided in its approach to the management of the postgraduate research student experience.

74 The 'PGR Transitions Programme' is the principal means by which postgraduate research students receive training for research and other skills. The programme is extensive and it is evident that the students have access to a significant range of research and other skills development opportunities. The minutes of the Postgraduate Research Programmes Policy Group demonstrate that the operation of the programme is kept under review and that enhancement opportunities are identified and taken. The audit team identified as a feature of good practice, the provision through the PGR Transitions initiative of an extensive and student-focused training programme for postgraduate research students that develops a range of skills directly relevant to the students' programmes of study, and also prepares them for employment.

75 The audit found that the University's Code of Practice for Research Degrees represented a sound framework for institutional arrangements for research students. The overall approach both secures the assurance of academic standards and provides for the enhancement of the students' learning opportunities. The research environment and postgraduate research student experience meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

## Section 7: Published information

76 The Publications Office within The Marketing and Communications Division is responsible for the undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses and other corporate material. There is a web steering group to oversee a content management system that covers the extranet and intranet, and the student Portal. Faculties are responsible for developing appropriate safeguards for course materials through the faculty admissions offices and the Postgraduate Research Office. There is annual review of the accuracy of the web pages including a comparison of web material with print copies.

77 Students have access to course and support information through web-based material and school and or faculty handbooks in hard or electronic format. The student written submission and students whom the audit team met confirmed that information provided was accurate. The team found that there was variability in the coverage of the handbooks and no systematic institutional guidance about what should be included in the handbooks. The diversity of sources of assessment information has been noted above. It is advisable that the University specify the limits of acceptable variability in practice at school level, in particular, roles and responsibilities for the provision and accuracy of information provided to students, including the content of handbooks.

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

## Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

### Features of good practice

- the University's systematic approach to plagiarism and the work of the school plagiarism officers, which together provide comprehensive institutional regulations and guidance (paragraph 19)
- the specification and application of the framework for student involvement in quality assurance throughout the University, which afford significant opportunities for students to express their views to the University (paragraph 34)
- the integrated approach, led by the Information Services Directorate, to the management and development of its library and information technology provision, which contributes to the quality of learning opportunities (paragraph 41)
- the strategic management of student support services by the Dean of Students' Office,

which promotes the provision of comprehensive and coordinated support to students (paragraphs 50, 52)

- the arrangements for the operation of collaboration provision, particularly the work of the central Partnerships Office, which support the sound management of academic standards and the enhancement of quality in the partner institutions (paragraph 68)
- the provision through the Transitions initiative of an extensive and student-focused training programme for postgraduate research students, which develops a range of skills directly relevant to the students' programmes of study and also prepares them for employment (paragraph 74).

### **Recommendations for action**

79 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- to specify the limits of acceptable variability in practice at school level, with particular reference to nomenclature for key committees and to roles and responsibilities for the provision and accuracy of information for students, including the content of handbooks (paragraphs 7, 77)
- to further to the advice provided in the QAA Institutional audit report of 2004, give priority to the systematic calibration of the University's provision against the guidance provided by the FHEQ on the matter of levels (paragraph 15)
- to assure itself that the application in practice of policy and procedures for extensions to submission deadlines and for extenuating circumstances does not result in inequitable treatment of students (paragraph 18)
- to revise the guidance for the conduct of assessment boards to establish and secure University-wide specifications for minimum attendance and quoracy (paragraph 21)
- to review the policies, procedures and published information relating to the admission of postgraduate research students to establish clarity of requirement (paragraph 70).

80 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- to formalise the expectations for the training and ongoing support for postgraduate research students who teach to ensure they are adequately prepared for the role (paragraph 57)
- to reappraise the current approach to peer observation of teaching to establish consistent practice across the University (paragraph 58).

## Appendix

### The University of East Anglia's response to the Institutional audit report

The University welcomes the judgement of confidence in the soundness of our present and likely future management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students and the academic standards of its awards. We are pleased and very encouraged that the report of the institutional audit reflects some of the many strengths of our activities, including:

- the significant opportunities for students to express their views to the University
- the strategic management of student support services
- the integrated approach to the management and development of library and IT provision
- arrangements for the operation of collaborative provision with our Partners
- our regulations and guidance on plagiarism
- our student-focused training programme (PgR 'Transitions') for postgraduate research students.

The University notes that the report also identifies some of our own projects for enhancement, in particular:

- our ongoing substantial review of regulations, policies and procedures for the assessment of students, including the ways in which feedback is provided for students
- development of the ways in which the University provides information to students
- further development of a range of existing student-related policies and procedures
- continuing our work to ensure successful transitions into/within higher education of all our students.

Alongside these internal developments, the University will maintain its programme for the ongoing maintenance of academic standards and enhancement of quality assurance mechanisms, ensuring that they take due account of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and of the precepts of the *Code of practice* (published by QAA) and other authoritative reference points.

The University will continue to draw upon the strengths of its existing structure, running from the University-level Learning and Teaching Committee through the four Faculties to Schools of Studies, integrated with the work of the Central Divisions, to manage academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities, and the offering of a sound student experience.

The University will consider the report further and develop an action plan to take forward recommendations.

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