

**Lancaster University**

**March 2009**

## **Annex to the report**

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## Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Lancaster University (the University) from 9 to 13 March 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. The audit also involved visits (one of them virtual) by audit team members to two providers of the University's collaborative provision: a local college and an overseas institution. The outcomes of these visits have been integrated into the present report.

### 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 University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its provision
- 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.

### Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University has adopted a systematic approach to the appraisal and enhancement of the quality of students' learning opportunities across all levels of the institution.

### Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The University's arrangements for postgraduate research students are soundly based, and 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, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

### Published information

The University provides helpful information for staff and for current and potential students, and has in place procedures for ensuring its accuracy and completeness.

### Features of good practice

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

- the annual teaching prizes, which have encouraged innovation and the dissemination of good practice (paragraph 72)
- the thematic review process, which has provided a structured approach to enhancing students' learning opportunities (paragraph 77).

### Recommendations for action

The audit team considers it would be advisable for the University to ensure:

- that its arrangements for the management of quality and standards in collaborative provision are better integrated with standard institutional mechanisms (paragraph 85)
- that external examiners for all overseas collaborations are competent to make independent and robust comparisons with United Kingdom (UK) national standards (paragraph 88).

It would be desirable for the University to:

- require an element of formal external academic input to programme approval (paragraph 25)
- strengthen the systematic analysis of data in annual and periodic review (paragraph 45).

## **Section 1: Introduction and background**

### **The institution and its mission**

1 The University is a chartered institution established in 1964. It occupies a purpose-built green-field campus on the southern edge of the city; it operates on a collegiate basis, which is reflected in its extensive provision of on-campus residential accommodation.

2 The University's mission, as defined in the Strategic Plan 2006-11, is 'to pursue research at the highest international level, to create a stimulating and innovative learning environment for all students and staff and, in international, national and regional collaborations, to enhance economic, cultural and social well-being'. It aspires to be 'a sustainable, medium-sized and academically excellent institution when measured by the quality of our teaching, research, third mission activities, and external engagement; our regional, national and international reputation and impact; the global identity and esteem of our multi-cultural staff, students and alumni'.

3 The University employs some 1,055 full-time equivalent (FTE) academic staff. It has around 11,500 FTE students, of whom 75 per cent are full-time, 80 per cent are undergraduates and 20 per cent originate outside the UK. These numbers include almost 400 FTE students studying at collaborative institutions who are registered directly with the University. A further 13,809 FTE higher education students are enrolled on programmes leading to Lancaster University awards but registered with collaborative partners: this figure will reduce by around 10,000 over the next two years following the success of two local partner institutions in securing degree awarding powers. The University's directly registered student population includes 1,586 research degree students, of whom almost two-thirds are full-time: since, however, the same two collaborative partners account for 13.7 per cent of the part-time tally included in this figure and only 1.3 per cent of the full-time tally, the future balance may shift slightly towards full-time students. Faculty headcounts of research degree students vary between 671 and 122; in the academic year 2007-08 the University conferred doctorates on 233 students: in 91 per cent of cases this was a PhD.

4 Research is a core activity, with all academic staff expected to produce research outputs of at least national quality. Over 92 per cent of academic staff were entered in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise in 22 units of assessment. One unit achieved a modal score of 4\* and 13 a modal score of 3\*. In no case was the modal score below 2\* (see also paragraph 55).

### **The information base for the audit**

5 The University provided a Briefing Paper and supporting documentation. The index to the Briefing Paper was referenced to sources of evidence to illustrate the University's approach to managing the security of the academic standards of awards and the quality of its educational provision. The audit team also had access to the report of the previous Institutional and Collaborative audit reports (respectively June 2004 and March 2006) and the special Review of research degree programmes (July 2006), and was provided with hard copies of all documents referenced in the Briefing Paper and other documentation requested; the main materials were also made available electronically. The team received extensive materials from and concerning the two partner institutions visited, and members are grateful for the willing cooperation of the colleges concerned.

6 Lancaster University Students' Union produced a written submission, setting out students' views on the accuracy of information provided to them, their experience as learners and their role in quality management. The audit team thanks the Union for its submission, to which members made repeated reference in the course of their enquiries.

### **Developments since the last audit**

7 The University's previous Institutional audit identified as features of good practice: (i) the range of opportunities for students to become involved in many aspects of the University at all levels of its operation and (ii) the thoughtful and reflective approach to course design, teaching and student learning in a number of academic departments. The report also made a series of recommendations for action, some of them quite extensive, a central theme of which was the development and implementation of a centralised regulatory framework to ensure the comprehensive and effective dissemination of institutional policies.

8 Several major developments have subsequently (and largely consequently) been put in place. First, the University, having reviewed its frameworks for managing quality and standards, has codified them in its newly-created Manual of Academic Regulations and Procedures (MARP) (see paragraph 15). Second, it has instituted a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy (supported by a comprehensive range of sub-policies and frameworks), and a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee to monitor and develop it. Third, it has revised the portfolios of two pro-vice-chancellors to include institutional-level responsibilities for the management of quality and standards. Fourth, it has introduced a new Strategic Plan (2006 to 2011), which has as one of its five key aims the enhancement of the quality of the student experience: it has begun to meet this aim by investing heavily in upgrading learning and teaching facilities and student accommodation.

9 Fifth, it has restructured its academic organisation. This is now based on five main delivery units: the two Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences, and Science and Technology; the Lancaster University Management School; the School of Lifelong Learning and Widening Participation; and the recently formed School of Health and Medicine. Sixth, it has introduced a common set of faculty committees and faculty associate deans responsible for undergraduate teaching and postgraduate programmes. Seventh, it has assigned a dedicated teaching quality support officer to each faculty. Finally, it has incorporated the Teaching Quality Support Office in the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT). This was done with the intention of providing an integrated approach to quality assurance and enhancement. Since, however, the future organisation of central administration was under review at the time of the audit, with CELT's current functions likely to be dispersed, this change should be seen as temporary.

10 In general, the audit team considers the University has responded appropriately to the recommendations contained in the Institutional audit report. Nevertheless, in that many of the institutional policies, requirements and associated guidance have been only recently put in place, further work will be needed to ensure that all recommendations are fully and successfully implemented, particularly given the significant administrative reorganisation mentioned above, which, at the time of the audit, was in the early stages of implementation.

11 Collaborative provision was subject to a separate audit in 2006. The four areas of good practice were (in brief) (i) specified aspects of the role of the course consultant; (ii) an annual meeting of associate college programme leaders; (iii) specified aspects of student support; and (iv) allocating a proportion of fee income to the development of partner institution staff. In addition the report made seven recommendations, the two advisable recommendations being (i) to review and strengthen its processes for ensuring that it has appropriate oversight of the quality assurance of programmes validated through tripartite arrangements with an accredited college; and (ii) to review its procedures for ensuring the accuracy, consistency and clarity of information provided to students through programme handbooks. The five desirable recommendations related to (i) developing an operational handbook/procedures manual; (ii) keeping under review the mechanisms for initiating, developing and monitoring specified

partnership categories; (iii) improving terminological consistency; (iv) improving the consistency of responses to external examiners; and (v) common data sets for student information.

12 While the University has met a number of these recommendations, the audit team noted that its progress in doing so has been variable. This is of particular significance for the present audit in that the recent and future planned growth in international collaborations poses, and will continue to pose, new challenges of a kind which may increasingly put the efficacy of current procedures to the test. This point is discussed later in this report (see paragraph 85).

### **Institutional framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities**

13 The Vice-Chancellor, as chief executive officer, is supported and advised by the University Management Advisory Group, the membership of which includes the four pro-vice-chancellors, the deans of faculty and the faculty associate deans (who chair faculty teaching committees). Although not part of the formal decision-making structure, this Group is an influential body, which oversees faculty plans, and takes a view on recommendations and policies put forward for discussion and approval by deliberative bodies.

14 Senate, which is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, is responsible for the strategic development of academic activities and for approving policies relating to academic quality. In respect of matters falling within the ambit of this report, Senate's key standing committees are the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee; Undergraduate and Graduate Studies Committees (which have delegated authority for the approval of all courses within their remit); the Committee for the Associated Institutions (which has overall responsibility for collaborative provision); and the Committee for Lifelong Learning, Widening Participation and Outreach. All these committees other than the first are referred to internally as 'thematic committees'. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development) and with membership including the chairs of all thematic committees, the Academic Registrar and the Librarian, is responsible for monitoring and developing learning, teaching and assessment strategy and promoting enhancement.

15 In its Briefing Paper the University described its approach to the management of quality and standards as strategic, coherent and proactive, and reflective of a culture of engagement and shared ownership. This approach, which reflects a culture which is more collegial than overtly managerial, involves delegating specified levels of responsibility to faculties: each faculty is supported by a centrally-managed teaching quality support officer (the audit found teaching quality support officers to be effective) and reports to the thematic committees through its teaching committee(s). The University's quality framework is articulated in MARP, which specifies (i) guiding principles; (ii) regulations and standard practice in course design and approval, annual and periodic review, external examiners, admissions, student support, assessment, appeals and complaints, and collaborative provision; and (iii) requirements at departmental, faculty and institutional levels. MARP also distinguishes those areas where compliance is required from those where some flexibility is permitted. The audit team considers that MARP, in both capturing the totality of the quality framework and communicating it to the University community as a whole, has become a key resource in quality management and enhancement.

16 Senate is responsible for the academic standards and quality of collaborative provision, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor has responsibility for international collaborations, and the Director of Regional Outreach oversees regional partnerships. While falling within the quality and standards framework such provision is given a bespoke section in MARP. The Committee for the Associated Institutions, the operational arm of which is the Office for the Associated Institutions, is parent to a wide range of committees, boards and groups involved with particular aspects of provision: it is responsible for strategy implementation and oversees partnership arrangements as a whole.

17 In summary, the University's approach to the management of standards and the quality of learning opportunities is characterised by an institution-wide academic quality management framework and associated regulations and procedures set out in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy and disseminated in MARP. The departmental-level implementation of quality assurance is monitored by faculty teaching committees, which report to the thematic standing committees of Senate responsible for undergraduate and postgraduate teaching. Central oversight of collaborative provision is the responsibility of the Committee for the Associated Institutions.

18 This annex will show that these arrangements are generally effective. At institutional level thematic committees play a key role in assuring standards and quality through their roles in course approval, annual monitoring and periodic review, with the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee promoting enhancement. Faculties, particularly through their teaching quality support officer, play an important role in the scrutiny of proposals for new and revised programmes, the annual monitoring and review of existing programmes and the implementation of central policies at departmental level.

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

19 The University stated in its Briefing Paper that its approach to the management of academic standards is based on shared responsibility and delegation. The framework is specified in the Manual of Academic Regulations and Procedures (MARP) in terms of a 'hierarchy of compliance', involving precepts (broad guiding principles), regulations (where compliance is required), standard practice (which has been established as effective and where variation requires justification and approval) and operational procedures (where specified operational variability is permitted).

20 Major revisions to programmes require faculty and institutional approval; new modules require faculty approval; minor programme and module revisions are approved at departmental level. All require student input. Faculty teaching quality support officers are responsible for ensuring that programme specifications are revised and updated. The audit team confirms, on the basis of documentary review, that these processes operate effectively.

### **Programme approval, monitoring and review**

21 For ease of reference all matters relating to approval, monitoring and review are considered in this section, whether they relate primarily to academic standards or to assuring the quality of students' learning opportunities.

22 The Teaching Quality Support Office plays a central role in supporting academic staff in relation to course design, approval and modification, both internally and by ensuring they have access to clear explanations of external requirements or expectations: here the audit team found the guidance on the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) website especially helpful.

23 Programme approval takes place at departmental, faculty and institutional levels. Proposals are formulated in departments with the aid of a detailed online approval form, which, where a proposal is successful, becomes the basis of the programme specification. The form requires departments to detail what external reference points have been addressed, and what external inputs (from external examiners, employers and other stakeholders) taken into consideration. The audit team noted that, while departments are encouraged to take external advice they are only required to do so in the case of collaborative provision, where risk is deemed greater, or where professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs) are involved. The team confirms that all proposals scrutinised in the course of the audit had been formally discussed at departmental level, and that in all cases student contributions had been considered; the team was, however, unable to find specific student comments in the documentation made available.

24 The audit team reviewed the two-stage faculty-level approval procedure, noting that it involves consideration of resource issues and the *Code of practice* as well as all aspects of academic standards and quality. Although the team noted that one faculty considered proposals primarily through a committee lacking student representation, the normal procedure is for proposals to be considered by faculty teaching committees which do have such representation. It is confirmed that faculties give detailed and rigorous consideration to proposals. Proposals endorsed by faculties are forwarded to the appropriate thematic committee, which, while it has delegated approval powers, forwards proposals to Senate when issues of principle or serious concerns arise. The team, having trailed a number of programme approvals and noted that a consultation exercise on course design and approval procedures is scheduled for later this academic year, was generally satisfied as to the thoroughness of the procedure.

25 Nevertheless, as was the case at the time of the 2004 Institutional audit, external specialist academic input is not invariably sought other than by reference to external examiners. It follows that, since not all faculty committees contain subject expertise independent of the proposers, their scrutiny would be strengthened were external expertise to be deployed at this stage. The University may accordingly wish to reflect further on the guidance notes for precept 3 of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*, concerning the benefits of such participation. It would be desirable for the University to require an element of formal external academic input into programme approval.

26 The present annual and periodic review procedures were introduced in 2007, although the audit team noted that in some institutional and departmental documentation reference is still made to the former procedures.

27 Annual teaching review, a departmental process designed and introduced in 2007 to be more reflective than its predecessor, is largely based on self-evaluation. It covers most aspects of the student experience and results in an action plan, implementation of which is monitored by the faculty concerned. Faculty teaching quality support officers collate the departmental review reports for which they are responsible, producing a summary report for the faculty teaching committee; this in turn forms the basis of a submission to the thematic committee. The audit team, which found evidence of serious institutional and faculty-level consideration being given to these reports, concluded that the process, while still rather new, has the potential, particularly by disseminating good practice and detecting cross-departmental and cross-faculty issues, to enhance institutional practice.

28 Periodic quality review was designed to follow the first cycle of annual teaching review. A comprehensive quinquennial review of all programmes, undergraduate and postgraduate, taught and research, periodic quality review is an institutional procedure, steered and coordinated by the teaching quality support officer; the parallel process for collaborative provision is discussed later (see paragraph 91). Periodic quality review involves the submission of a wide range of documentary evidence (including five annual review reports and external examiners' reports, current programme documentation, the most recent PSRB report and three years' committee minutes), a brief departmental analysis and a 500-word faculty perspective. The two-day review is undertaken by a panel, chaired by a senior academic member of the University and including two internal and two external members, one of the latter normally being a former external examiner.

29 The ensuing report involves similar judgements, features of good practice and recommendations to those of QAA's Institutional audit. Outcomes are reported to Senate; faculty teaching committees monitor follow-up actions, which are also reported in subsequent annual teaching reviews; and teaching quality support officers produce annual summaries of outcomes for thematic committees. The audit team noted that an overview report of the 2002 to 2008 periodic review cycle, produced by CELT in September 2008, identified common themes, including such issues of concern as the consistency of treatment of students on combined majors and consortial programmes, and the actions taken to address them. This particular concern led to

the institution of a working party, which had yet to report at the time of the audit, and a consultation process, planned for later in the academic year.

30 The audit team trailed two periodic quality reviews, one under the former, the other under the present procedures. Both appeared generally robust, demonstrating that serious thought had been given to issues raised and constituting a secure base for the institutional consideration of the quality of programmes and the academic standards of awards. Nevertheless, the team's view that there was scope for the data analysis on which the process as a whole is based to be more thorough, is discussed later in this annex (see paragraph 45).

### External examiners

31 Proposals for appointing external examiners are made by departments; faculty approval is confirmed on behalf of Senate by the Director of Undergraduate Studies or Director of the Graduate School as appropriate; teaching quality support officers ensure the efficiency of faculty-level operations. While responsibility for detailed briefing also rests with departments, the University issues external examiners' handbooks at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. These handbooks, which are reproduced in MARP, are considered by the audit team to be both clear and comprehensive.

32 The University employs standard external examiners' report forms which were revised in academic year 2007-08. The University has clear procedures for examining and responding to external examiners' reports; student representatives have an opportunity to comment on them; departmental responses contribute to both annual and periodic review; faculty associate deans produce summaries of reports for faculty boards; in the case of undergraduate programmes the Director of Undergraduate Studies produces a report highlighting common issues for Undergraduate Studies Committee; a parallel reporting process for postgraduates has been discontinued in the light of experience (the issues raised being too varied to justify synthesis): nevertheless, where common issues do arise the audit team found evidence of serious consideration being given to them and of action being taken.

33 The audit team concludes that the external examiner system is generally robust and, at least as far as internal provision is concerned, meets the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*. The external examining of collaborative programmes raises other issues which are discussed later in this report (see paragraphs 86-88). It is confirmed that institutional procedures permit the effective institutional oversight of external examiners' contributions to securing the standards of internal awards.

### Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

34 For ease of reference all matters relating to the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points are considered in this section, whether they relate primarily to academic standards or to assuring the quality of students' learning opportunities.

35 The University stated in its Briefing Paper that all relevant policies and procedures are informed by and meet the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure, and the audit team confirms that institutional documentation makes frequent reference to it. For example, the CELT web pages provide hyperlinks to QAA's website and other external reference points; the Assessment Policy articulates with the Infrastructure; and a new complaints procedure was put in place in conjunction with the publication of the revised *Code of practice, Section 5: Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters* in October 2007 to ensure that information about appeals and complaints is readily accessible to students. It is confirmed that students told the team that complaints typically receive an appropriate and timely response.

36 The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee is responsible for overseeing the University's continuing engagement with external norms and expectations; CELT is responsible for ensuring that the *Code of practice* is communicated to staff; faculty teaching quality support officers are critical to ensuring that departments are kept fully informed and up-to-date. The main vehicles for monitoring engagement with the Academic Infrastructure are annual and periodic review, with relevant aspects of the Infrastructure being routinely considered at programme approval and by faculty and thematic committees. The audit team found evidence of the departmental use of subject benchmark statements in approval and review.

37 CELT maintains a register of externally accredited programmes; relationships with PSRBs rest with departments and are overseen by faculties. The audit team trailed one such relationship in a re-accreditation exercise, noting the careful departmental preparation for the event and the thorough manner in which the professional body's conditions were subsequently discussed, addressed and monitored at all institutional levels (including the periodic quality review) and communicated to the body concerned. The team considers that all stages of the process were both well-informed and well-managed.

38 The audit team noted that the University is beginning to liaise with employers in the development and delivery of curricula and in seeking to enhance student progression into work: two areas of the institution have established employer advisory boards and a range of activities have been put in place, including the increasing use of work placements. The University encourages staff to engage with the Higher Education Academy (HEA), and many departments maintain links with the relevant subject centre, and a number of staff have engaged in HEA-funded projects and used the Academy to disseminate innovative practice.

39 It is confirmed that the University engages appropriately with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points.

### **Assessment policies and regulations**

40 The University's recently introduced Assessment Policy creates the framework within which departmental assessment must operate, but places the onus on departments to ensure both that it does and that its details are communicated to students. Detailed assessment regulations form part of the hierarchy of compliance (see paragraph 19), and are specified in MARP.

41 The University stated in its Briefing Paper that it ensures parity of treatment of students through institutional regulations; the framework for late submission and penalties; the granting of extensions; the condonation and compensation rules; standard procedures for dealing with mitigating circumstances; the external examiner and examination board systems; and the plagiarism framework. The audit team, having reviewed the relevant documentation, confirms that these procedures are in place and appropriately implemented.

42 Requirements for the composition and conduct of examination boards, along with progression and classification rules, are specified in MARP. University-wide classification schemes for all taught awards are in operation, with special schemes for non-standard programmes. Such schemes have been the subject of critical comment in faculty overview reports, with a number of external examiners saying that aspects of the regulations are confusing, and some students, in spite of the existence of seemingly clear procedures for informing them, making similar comments to the audit team. Given these differences of view, it is noteworthy that consultations on the possibility of revising examination board procedures and reviewing degree classification regulations are scheduled for later this year.

43 Whereas institution-wide penalties for the late submission of undergraduate coursework exist, some flexibility exists on taught postgraduate programmes where one of four methods may be chosen, ranging from the imposition of strict deadlines with penalties to very considerably more lenient requirements. Plagiarism procedures provide detailed information, including prevention, detection and penalties. Although the University is currently using a

well-established commercial detection method, with CELT advising staff on its use, a full review of the framework, in the light of changes since its introduction, recommended in a thematic review (see paragraph 76) was in progress at the time of the audit.

### **Management information - statistics**

44 The Student Registry manages the University's institutional information management system. Since the 2004 Institutional audit a number of developments, supported by appropriate training and development initiatives, have been put in place to enhance departmental use of management information, particularly in annual and periodic review.

45 In its Briefing Paper the University stated that it uses data sets for taught programmes to evaluate the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its programmes, and to inform academic planning. Accordingly, the Governance and Planning Office has produced extensive data sets in the past two years, including information on applications, entry qualifications and degree results, wastage rates, degree transfers and module statistics. These data appear on the Governance and Planning Office website, facilitating detailed analysis and comparison both between programmes and longitudinally within programmes. It was, however, evident to the audit team that not all departments are routinely using these data sets; on the contrary, some departmental staff informed the team that faculty-generated data are still used, and that this practice might even become more prevalent. It follows that the University has some way to go before it can be said to be making systematic use of such data within annual and periodic review. While it is not considered that these issues pose any threat to academic standards, it would be desirable for the University to strengthen the systematic analysis of data in annual and periodic review.

46 Overall, the audit team concludes that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

## **Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities**

### **Management information - feedback from students**

47 The University's relationship with students is formally expressed in a Students' Charter which stresses the importance of mutual commitment and participation. In its Briefing Paper and elsewhere, the University has stated its commitment to providing an outstanding learning and social environment for all students and supporting it through systematically seeking and acting on feedback. The audit team confirms that the University makes use of feedback from a range of internal and external surveys, notably the National Students' Survey, the International Student Barometer, the Lancaster University Student Experience Survey and the Academic Experience Survey. This latter instrument, undertaken by the Students' Union, excludes teaching, learning and assessment, focusing instead on the wider experience, including support, accommodation and social activities. Students are also routinely involved in evaluating the quality of their experience through online module questionnaires, accessed through the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) website. Student feedback is reported in annual teaching review and presented to staff-student committees, the minutes of which are published on the intranet.

48 The University's commitment to the importance of feedback at all levels was evident to the audit team, which found a number of examples of remedial or enhancement-driven action emerging from it: for example, at institutional level Senate adopted a set of assessment and feedback procedures in the light of an analysis of the 2008 National Students' Survey; and, at departmental level, analysis of a periodic quality review revealed that data from both the National Students' Survey and the Student Experience Survey had led to the provision of clearer information on the support available for enhancing written and oral communication skills.

49 In confirmation of these findings, students commented generally positively on the University's use of student feedback. Although some students were uncertain as to how much information they received on the action taken in response to it, the audit team is satisfied that a leaflet distributed to students following the Student Experience Survey, entitled 'What we have done', demonstrates a powerful commitment to delivering and developing dissemination. The team considers student feedback contributes significantly to the development and enhancement of learning opportunities.

### **Role of students in quality assurance**

50 The Students' Union is represented on all significant institutional-level committees and involved in the development and implementation of academic policy from conception to approval. At institutional level the audit team found evidence of student influence on policy development in the recent guarantee of a minimum of 10 contact hours a week, and at programme level at the time of the audit, course representatives were involved in a review of the examination system. While students expressed an understandable wish to have greater involvement in strategic decision-making, including developing the Strategic Plan, they recognised and acknowledged the steps already taken to engage them in policy development at all levels.

51 At departmental level, consultation and representation mainly take place in staff-student committees and faculty teaching committees. While the experience of student representatives is variable across departments, with some students reporting tokenism but others feeling significantly involved, the student written submission spoke generally warmly about communication and involvement. The audit team found that the representative system works better for undergraduate than for postgraduate students, but that postgraduate representatives, partly through working increasingly closely with the Students' Union, are increasingly having an impact on departmental practices. In at least one faculty the dean regularly meets representatives outside meetings to ensure a continuing awareness of, and responsiveness to, student issues: those concerned have received this initiative very well.

52 The Students' Union coordinates and trains student representatives, with the support of senior managers, academic staff and members of CELT. The training is supplemented in some departments and faculties by local support, training and guidance, including pre-meeting sessions to clarify agenda items and encourage participation. While the uptake of training was reported as variable, the audit team considers the University is actively supporting it, and is committed to increasing the effectiveness of the representative system as a whole.

53 The audit team concluded that the University's student participation system contributes overall to the management of the quality of learning opportunities, but functions variably across faculties and departments.

### **Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities**

54 As previously noted (paragraph 2), the University's mission involves pursuing research at the highest international level and creating a stimulating and innovative learning environment. Most curricular developments relate to current research strengths, with the aim of enriching programme content. The audit team found evidence of this aim being realised: for example, in one department where staff described their closest affinity as being with their research group, those groups generate new research-driven teaching themes. On the other hand, in that the University maintains collaborative arrangements in fields of study where it lacks research expertise, the synergy between teaching and research to which it aspires is clearly neither obligatory nor ubiquitous.

55 The University operates workload models designed to ensure that staff new to teaching have reduced loads, and that all academic staff have research time. With 92 per cent of academic staff members submitted to the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise in 22 units of assessment, all of them having a modal score of 2\* or above, and 14 having a modal score of at least 3\*,

the engagement of the majority of academic staff in research of international significance is beyond question. In addition, the University identified in its Briefing Paper a number of specific steps to ensure a synergy between research and teaching; these include activities currently falling within the remit of CELT, specialist departmental seminars and the contribution of two national centres with specialists in learning, teaching and assessment. The audit team, confirming the accuracy of these claims, notes also that students told members very firmly that they value the contribution of research to teaching.

### **Other modes of study**

56 Programmes of study offered by the University are predominantly campus-based, although three postgraduate programmes with a total of 41 students are delivered through distance learning. Such provision operates within the same quality assurance framework as all other provision, although practical adjustments have been made, including an online system to expedite registration. Some distance-learning students have been critical of aspects of learning resources, which they consider not wholly fit for purpose; overall, however, students express acceptable levels of satisfaction.

57 The University stated in its Briefing Paper that it considers its e-learning strategy integral to the student learning experience. It has a well-established in-house virtual learning environment, which it uses as a gateway to a range of generic as well as programme-specific information, guidance and support. Nevertheless, the audit team noted that at least two other virtual learning environments for campus-based teaching, which the University has stated cannot be supported, were operational at the time of the audit. One of these is used in association with a recently developed collaborative master's programme, delivered using a combination of online learning and face-to-face learning; in the absence of central institutional support this has the potential to increase the risk of delivery failure at critical times.

58 The in-house virtual learning environment includes a facility for personal development planning supported by student mentors. Students informed the audit team that the facility supports reflective learning and has been helpful. A similar facility has more recently been developed for research students: while some students regard it as overly generic and involving a duplication of effort, others consider it a helpful enhancement.

59 Some departments' development of blended learning has, in the view of the audit team, enhanced students' learning experience. For example, the team found one department which, through the use of e-learning and podcasting, had freed contact time for more innovative teaching activities. In addition, one faculty has introduced an online resource to increase numeracy skills; an external examiner has written in complimentary terms about the beneficial effect on student thinking and engagement of online initiatives; and students of one large postgraduate programme are using online logs to monitor their own progression.

60 Students spoke enthusiastically to the audit team about those members of academic staff who are making innovative use of the virtual learning environment; clearly the best practice is of very high quality. Overall, however, developments are variable. While this is to a degree inevitable in such a rapidly changing area, particularly given the disciplinary differences existing across the institution, the team encourages the University to continue to support innovative work in this area, particularly to ensure that the provision available to all its students is deployed optimally to support and enhance their learning opportunities.

### **Resources for learning**

61 Guided by its Masterplan 2007 to 2017, the University was at the time of the audit in the early stages of delivering a strategy for sustainable long-term development, involving a wide range of construction and refurbishment projects, including improving and expanding teaching and other specialist space. Implementing this plan has led to unavoidable but limited short-term disruption which, the audit team confirms, the University is doing its best to minimise. In addition, the

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Strategic Plan 2007 to 2010 sets out an ambitious and comprehensive approach to achieving what it terms a vibrant, information technology-enabled institution that exploits the benefits of a well-governed, effective, innovative and integrated information systems infrastructure.

62 Effective working relationships appear to exist between Library staff on the one hand, and departments and faculties on the other, with subject librarians attending relevant committees and monitoring Library resources and programme requirements. A Library user satisfaction survey conducted in 2008 showed an increase in satisfaction both in terms of opening hours and service. Detailed feedback is provided to academic staff on usage and loans in order to inform purchasing and short-term loan assignment decisions; the Library has also significantly expanded e-journal provision to meet increased demand. The audit team concludes, on the basis of both survey results and meeting with service users, that students are well served by the range of learning resources available.

### **Admissions policy**

63 The University's admissions policy aims to ensure that all applicants are treated equally and fairly, and those with the potential to succeed are attracted and retained, and that successful applicants benefit from the experience. The University has been active in schools liaison; one faculty has instituted key school partnerships; another has undertaken a range of activities to improve student admissions, including appointing ambassadors to work with specific schools and sixth form colleges. Targets for widening participation, considerably aided by regional collaborations, have thus far largely been met.

64 The University has taken steps to meet concerns with respect to international students' English language skills, mainly by enhancing language support; this includes English for academic purposes, special teaching with some academic departments and individual tutorials. One faculty offers a course in writing for international research students; one institute has arranged for the Student Learning Development Centre to offer a bespoke course on language and cultural issues as part of the degree scheme for direct entry students. The audit team concludes that the University's admissions policy is fit for purpose and that the institution is taking reasonable steps to support international students with English language needs.

### **Student support**

65 For undergraduates, academic support is provided by the department, personal support by the college: in both cases a named tutor is assigned. Prospective students apply to a college based upon the culture and ethos prevailing (for example, sport or music), and it was made abundantly clear to the audit team that students particularly value the college system: in one meeting every undergraduate present stated that the college constituted the best part of their experience at Lancaster - although this view does need to be set alongside the finding of the University Student Experience Survey 2007 that, for both academic and personal support, students reported greater satisfaction with their departmental personal tutors than with their college tutor.

66 For postgraduates, while the Graduate College has a Welfare Officer to provide general advice and direct them to specialist advisers as necessary, and while CELT has been endeavouring to develop mechanisms to improve the support available, the experience overall appears variable. Perhaps understandably, a greater degree of detachment is discernible among, in particular, research students, while the fact that some of them are affiliated to two departments was reported to the audit team as further complicating the provision of support.

67 The University identified direct entry students as a target for further developing support structures; the audit team also learned that the lines of responsibility for supporting international non-European Union students are sometimes blurred. Overall, the team shares the University's

view that it would benefit from a greater understanding of the needs of international students, an understanding which will be a necessary aspect of meeting its strategic commitment to internationalisation.

68 The Centre for Enterprise Employment and Careers provides information, advice and guidance on career planning and preparation for job applications, interviews and finding work placements and experience. At present, however, not all departments engage closely with the Centre or its provisions, and some respondents to the Student Experience Survey 2007 identified progression to employment as an area for improvement. The University does not have a formal careers policy and acknowledges the need to improve careers guidance, for example, by embedding support into curricula. Thus far, it has made progress in raising the visibility of the Careers Service and improving employability through curricular development. In addition, in summer 2008, the Centre for Enterprise Employment and Careers successfully piloted an Insight into Enterprise and Employability programme to enable students to recognise, acquire and articulate skills relevant to all forms of employment. The University is offering this programme to all second-year students in one faculty in 2009, and extending it to all second-year undergraduates in 2010.

### **Staff support (including staff development)**

69 In its Strategic Plan (2006 to 2011) the University identified supporting and developing staff as a necessary complement to its overriding priority of recruiting and retaining the best people available. Its commitment is formally expressed in the five key areas of its People Strategy (2006 to 2011): talent management; total reward; professional and leadership development; employee relations; and human resource management.

70 The University has institutional and local guidelines for inducting new staff and for preparing existing staff who assume significant new roles. Staff new to teaching are expected (and in some cases required) to take the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice; existing staff taking on such jobs as head of department or research student supervisor are mentored by experienced colleagues: such staff spoke warmly to the audit team of the procedures in place.

71 The annual staff appraisal and review scheme aims to support both individual aspirations and institutional planning. Workload allocation, a faculty responsibility, is exercised within an institutional framework of expectations concerning reduced teaching loads for new staff and research allowances at critical points - expectations which some departments exceed but which others (particularly small ones) can find hard to meet. The audit team also noted a number of creative developments in supporting student learning at departmental and faculty level; supported by CELT, these include support for dissertation supervisors and departmental sessions on such topics as teaching large groups, equal opportunities and e-learning. A well-established peer observation scheme, the implementation of which is a departmental responsibility, is now universal, and has been used in annual and periodic review both to disseminate good practice and to identify emerging issues. These arrangements appear robust in conception and effective in operation.

72 The University's reward and development framework is well understood, and examples of its successful operation include a health and well-being programme and a consistent approach to rewarding excellence, appraisal, training and development. Promotion criteria incorporate all aspects of an academic's role; participation in peer observation and staff development are integral to promotion applications. Outstanding achievement in learning and teaching (as broadly defined) is recognised in annual teaching prizes available to both teams and individuals. The audit team found evidence of staff enthusiasm for the prizes both intrinsically and, in that the award of a prize can contribute to subsequent promotion, instrumentally, and noted the existence of an expectation that University or faculty teaching prize winners would disseminate their innovative practice. Part of the University's success in having nine National Teaching Fellows is widely attributed to this scheme and, more generally, to the institutional commitment to learning and teaching of which its existence is a visible manifestation. Accordingly, the annual

teaching prizes, which have encouraged innovation and the dissemination of good practice, are considered a feature of good practice.

73 The audit team found the University's systems for the management of learning opportunities comprehensive, fit for purpose and operating largely as intended. The University engages well with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points; student participation in quality assurance is established; the University maintains links between research and scholarly activity; resource monitoring and allocation procedures appear effective, as do arrangements for student support; the arrangements for staff development and support are particularly noteworthy. Overall, 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**

74 Since the 2004 Institutional audit, the University has increased its focus on enhancement through both strategic and structural changes; for example, the Strategic Plan 2006 to 2011 refers to a 'continued and sustained effort in maintaining teaching excellence'. The overall approach to enhancement, which is set by the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee and was at the time of the audit delivered through the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and teaching (CELT), is designed to meet three objectives: pursuing sector-leading innovation in selected priority areas; ensuring greater equity; and ensuring the overall enhancement of the student learning experience.

75 In its Briefing Paper the University outlined a series of developments designed to drive forward its enhancement agenda. These have been supported by the organisational changes consequent upon the reform of academic decision-making structures; specifically, they are best seen in the creation of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee (see paragraph 8), with a remit to promote quality assurance and enhancement and to ensure both that links between key areas occur and that appropriate support, advice and good practice are cascaded across the University. The audit team confirms, from its scrutiny of the minutes of this Committee, that enhancement features in its normal business.

76 Thematic reviews, introduced to examine particular processes and procedures relating to the student experience, and to steer improvements, have contributed significantly to the development of an enhancement ethos. Initiated by the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, they complement annual and periodic reviews, cutting across institutional boundaries to explore particular issues. For example, the review 'Supporting and Developing Learning, Teaching and Assessment Practice', charged with providing a clear view of departmental practices in relation to staff development in the areas of induction, mentoring, peer review of teaching and sharing good practice, identified many examples of practices which met or exceeded University expectations, and recommended, in at least some cases successfully, that they be shared and adopted more widely. The review also led to the reform of faculty teaching committees by showing that, while they played a key role in highlighting and sharing good practice, the weight of other business could limit opportunities for detailed discussion.

77 Scrutiny of the minutes of both institutional and faculty-level teaching related committees confirmed to the audit team the positive impact of the review at both these levels; the team also learned, in meetings with academic staff, of the review's effect at departmental level, where enhancement is now conscientiously addressed in annual teaching reviews, staff-student committees and teaching forums. The team endorses the views of these staff that thematic reviews are an effective way of encouraging and disseminating good practice and of enhancing the learning opportunities of students, and notes that the University has introduced a timetable for future such reviews. The team considers the thematic review process, which has provided a structured approach to enhancing students' learning opportunities, a feature of good practice.

78 The audit team found pervasive evidence of an enhancement oriented culture within the University. For example, information about enhancement is included in annual periodic review, and members of academic staff told the team that annual teaching reviews (see paragraph 27), with their mandatory annual away day and departmental topic-based workshops, would foster enhancement by encouraging a reflection on students' experience and achievement. CELT too has established good links with departments and faculties, both to gather examples of, and to spread, good practice: its provision includes regular professional development programmes; workshops on effective practice; the publication of guides and case studies; and engagement with externally funded projects. In addition, the CELT website promotes regional and national continuing professional development events.

79 It was evident to the audit team that the University is engaging fully with the enhancement agenda. On the basis of documentary study and meetings with staff and students, the team can confirm that the University, its faculties and departments, are increasingly effective in driving and monitoring an institution-wide programme of enhancing students' learning opportunities. The University has taken a systematic approach to establishing a range of means of appraising and improving the quality of learning opportunities. Its commitment to enhancement is demonstrated in the terms of reference of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee; specific initiatives such as pilot projects and thematic reviews; institutional, faculty and department committee structures; and annual and periodic review. It is concluded that the University has adopted a systematic approach, across all levels of the institution, to the appraisal and enhancement of the quality of students' learning opportunities.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

80 The University's approach to, and administration of, collaborative provision are specified in its Policy on Collaborative Teaching Provision and explained in detail in a bespoke section of the Manual of Academic Regulations and Procedures (which had, at the time of the audit, been recently but not fundamentally revised). In that this policy incorporates access and exchange arrangements, it is clear that the University's definition of collaborative provision is broader than that of the *Code of practice, Section 2*. The Policy covers access arrangements with overseas institutions; student exchanges; validation agreements with local further education colleges; and overseas partnerships involving validated single, dual and joint awards. This report, however, focuses only on those aspects of provision covered by the *Code*. The audit team noted that at the time of the audit the University was seeing out arrangements with two large regional providers who had achieved degree awarding powers, and that as part of an envisaged expansion of overseas collaborative activity, it had recently entered into its first franchise agreement with a new partner.

81 As indicated above (see paragraph 14), responsibility for overseeing the management of collaborative provision, including advising Senate on possible new ventures and partnerships, rests with the Committee for the Associated Institutions. A subcommittee of Senate, this Committee has seven subcommittees, some of them specific to individual partnerships, others with a more general remit. Having studied the relevant papers the audit team formed the view that the Committee's workload, including as it does matters as diverse as due diligence discussions, overseeing new memoranda of agreement and confirming new validations, is both extensive and demanding.

82 The University stated in its Briefing Paper that its collaborative provision is based on a mutual interest principle. Consistently with this, it takes a flexible approach to the operation of such provision, for example, devolving greater responsibility to some partners than to others, and in some cases creating bespoke committees for specific partnerships. Underpinning this is an institutional commitment to capacity building among partner institutions, a commitment exemplified in the University's pleasure on learning that degree awarding powers had been granted to two regional partners.

83 The audit team learned of the University's intention to incorporate the management of collaborations more fully within normal faculty business. At present, faculty and departmental responsibilities are mainly to provide teaching and, through the course consultant system (course consultants act as critical friend to collaborative partners), academic expertise. The team, having explored this latter system in some detail, confirms its contribution to collaborative provision, particularly in that it incorporates disciplinary expertise. Course consultants have a core role in establishing and maintaining quality assurance, and the team, noting in particular that aspects of this role had been identified as a feature of good practice in the 2006 Collaborative provision audit, confirms that the consultants are committed individuals who contribute to capacity building and who are highly valued by partners.

84 The audit team did, however, have some concerns in the minority of situations where the absence or unavailability of expertise among University staff necessitates the employment of external course consultants (a similar reservation is expressed from a different perspective in paragraph 88). The use of such personnel makes possible the deployment of staff from one regional partner as consultants for another. While the University explained the approach by emphasising that such individuals would be familiar with its own standards and processes while also understanding the higher and further education context within which the collaboration existed, the team identified three potential problems with the arrangement. First, a possible conflict of interest exists for the course consultants themselves; secondly, such consultants are less likely than University staff to be able to ensure the close relationship with research which, the University stated in its Briefing Paper, characterises its teaching provision (see also paragraph 54); and thirdly, institutional control over a partnership link managed by a non-employee may be limited. These potential difficulties mean that the arrangement justifies both careful and sensitive attention on the part of the University.

85 The audit team confirms the finding of the 2006 Collaborative provision audit that the collaborative provision's management structure is complex, and, given the University's expansion plans in respect of overseas collaboration, it is increasingly in need of simplification if the University is to meet its strategic aspirations in an efficient and risk-averse way. The team considers a closer integration of the quality assurance of collaborative validations into standard faculty processes would facilitate both the exchange of experience and the comparison of partnership programme standards with cognate home provision. The University itself recognises that aspects of its arrangements are potentially problematic by including the workings of the Committee for the Associated Institutions in the review of central administration awaiting finalisation at the time of the audit. It would be advisable for the University to ensure that its arrangements for the management of quality and standards in collaborative provision are better integrated with standard institutional mechanisms.

### **External examiners in collaborative provision**

86 The University stated in its Briefing Paper that external examiners are critical to the maintenance of standards in collaborative provision; it retains responsibility for their appointment; they follow procedures equivalent to internal ones; and it had addressed in full the recommendation of the 2006 Collaborative provision audit to 'clarify, with all associate colleges, University requirements for responding to external examiners reports and the provision of a formal written response to each examiner, in order to ensure consistency across all partners'. While the audit team learnt that responses are required in annual review reports only and that some variability of practice continues to exist, overall it confirms the satisfactory nature of the University's approach.

87 The audit team also learned that in overseas collaborations local academics can be appointed external examiners on the basis of a recommendation by the partner institution. The team scrutinised the curricula vitae of a number of such examiners, and found no evidence of higher education experience in the UK. Nor, they noted, does a requirement for such experience

appear in the appointment criteria, although the Notes of Guidance for the Appointment of External Examiners issued by the Office for the Associated Institutions does require appointees to take an 'informed view' of the programmes for which they have examining responsibility. Although the University explained that information about UK higher education is included in the induction materials provided by the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT), it is not unreasonable to ask whether such external examiners are competent to discharge their duties to affirm that the standards set for the programmes for which they have examining responsibility are consistent with UK national standards.

88 In exploring this matter further, the audit team learned that the University relies on (i) its own evaluation of equivalence of standards between the higher education systems of the partner country and the; (ii) the range of training provided by CELT; and (iii) meetings with, and moderation by, course consultants. The team, having scrutinised the relevant documentation, including course consultants' reports, is unable to accept that external scrutiny is, in such a situation, necessarily independent, critical and competent. Indeed, in one case an external examiner, while confirming comparability with the standards of the overseas system, said nothing about national standards within the UK; and to the extent that reliance is placed on course consultants to ensure comparability with institutional standards by moderation, the University is, in effect, contributing to the external examining of its own programmes. In that these practices collectively constitute quite a serious potential threat to the security of the academic standards of the awards in question, the University is advised to ensure that external examiners for all overseas collaborations are competent to make independent and robust comparisons with UK national standards.

### **Approval, monitoring and review**

89 In its Briefing Paper the University described its approach to the establishment of collaborations as risk-based within a common framework: this broadly involves high-risk arrangements being managed by the Office for the Associated Institutions, with low-risk ones involving greater devolution to faculties and departments. The approval process, both for new partnerships and for subsequent programme and module validations, involves a common set of due diligence questions and the institution of a panel containing at least one external member, which normally makes an on-site visit; detailed arrangements are negotiated with the partner institution within the framework of institutional requirements and expectations.

90 Annual and periodic monitoring and review operate within common principles, and are conducted through mechanisms agreed within each partnership and defined through the signed memorandum of agreement and associated documentation. Partner institutions have delegated responsibility to operate agreed annual monitoring procedures, under the oversight of the Office for the Associated Institutions, the ensuing documentation receiving consideration by institutional committees. The annual process involves one report being produced by the partner and another by the course consultant: the latter report is submitted to the Office for the Associated Institutions for consideration by the Committee for Cooperation and Partnership (another subcommittee of the Committee for the Associated Institutions). While the audit team considers the course consultants' reports very thorough, it was less clear, from a study of committee minutes, that the follow-up is equally so. The team also noted that a quality manual which had been agreed with one overseas partner outlined annual monitoring only briefly and, that the annual programme review for the partnership concerned, while in other respects conscientiously undertaken, lacked relevant primary evidence, in particular the external examiner's report.

91 In the case of centrally managed partnerships, periodic quality review (see paragraph 28) is known as quinquennial review and focuses more on the institutional partner as a whole than on its constituent departments; for collaborations managed at faculty or departmental level the internal procedure applies. One periodic review of a regional partner provided evidence of the developing capacity of the partner concerned to manage its own quality processes: an outcome

of the review involved devolving to the institution powers for annual monitoring to a level where only the submission of a summary report to the University was required. This was considered wholly responsible, and reflective of the institutional commitment to capacity building.

### **Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points**

92 The University stated in its Briefing Paper that all collaborative provision is informed by and aligned with the Academic Infrastructure. The audit team confirms, from documentary study, that this is so, that questions on due diligence are informed by the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 2*, and that all papers associated with partnerships and individual memoranda of agreement which it read make due reference to relevant elements of the Infrastructure.

### **Management information**

93 While the website of the Office for the Associated Institutions has a link to the University's Register of Collaborative Partnerships it does not provide details of the programmes provided through each collaboration: these are maintained in two databases managed by the same Office. Another part of the Register is an archive of memoranda of understanding, the operation of which is monitored in annual and periodic quality review. The audit team found this arrangement rather fragmented, forming the view that both the University and potential students would benefit from a more coherent and readily accessible register of the kind suggested in the *Code of practice, Section 2*. It is confirmed that the memoranda of agreement studied by the team contain clauses defining the conditions under which use may be made by the partner of the University logo (or trademarks) and marketing material, and that the Office for the Associated Institutions annually reviews partner institutions' prospectus information.

94 At the time of the audit the University management information system was being enhanced to facilitate the integration of information regarding collaborative provision. While confirming that the registration of students from a recent overseas partnership had been incorporated in this system, the audit team also learned that the University relies on partners to provide their own data for monitoring purposes. This does seem rather a slow response to the 2006 Collaborative provision audit's suggestion that it would be desirable for the University to accelerate progress towards the use of common data sets for the monitoring of student admission, progression and achievement.

95 Generally, despite their overall complexity and the possibility of some risks to both quality and academic standards arising in the future and which the present recommendations address, the audit team has confidence in the University's arrangements for managing the academic standards and quality of learning opportunities available for students in its awards delivered by collaborative partners.

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

96 The University stated in its Briefing Paper that its policies and procedures for research degree programmes meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1*, and are, alongside other relevant information, distributed to research students in an internal Code of Practice. Arrangements for managing research programmes differ from those for taught programmes in that all procedures and regulations, including admission, advice giving, progression monitoring, liaising with supervisors and academic departments, examining, appeals and complaints, are coordinated (though not necessarily undertaken) by the Graduate School.

97 The Graduate School Committee, chaired by the Director of the Graduate School, has oversight of all postgraduate programmes. It reports to Senate and is responsible for assuring academic standards and the quality of research students' learning opportunities. It receives

regular reports (and a summative annual report) from faculty postgraduate studies committees, whose chairs (the Graduate Director or Associate Dean) are ex officio members of the Committee. The audit team, on the basis of its scrutiny of relevant minutes, confirms that the Graduate School Committee plays a central role in monitoring research degree programmes, proper oversight of the application of the regulations takes place and due regard is paid to the standards and quality of postgraduate research activity.

98 The Postgraduate Admissions Office, in conjunction with departments, manages the admission of research students on the basis of published criteria, ensuring that staff involved in decision-making are properly prepared. Once registered, research students are required to take part in induction programmes and to undertake a development needs analysis and the research training activities which this analysis identifies as necessary (some of which may be provided by faculties). Participation is recorded on an online research log (MyPGR) together with such other progression information as the outcomes of supervision sessions. At the time of the audit the CELT website provided access to induction and training requirements and opportunities (some of which, including a successful Thesis in Progress programme, were delivered by the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) itself), as well as to guidance on meeting supervisors, planning the thesis and administration. CELT offers formal training as well as mentoring and general support for research students with teaching duties through an accredited programme and one-day survival skills courses. Transparent procedures and criteria for the selection and appointment of such students are widely available, and the audit team learned that their duties are more likely to involve seminars, tutorials and practicals than lectures; they seldom teach more than six hours weekly; for the most part they teach only first-year undergraduates, and their marking is moderated by the module leader. The team confirms, on the basis of meetings with staff and research students, that normally these expectations are met.

99 Requirements and procedures concerning such matters as the qualifications and experience of supervisors, the composition of supervisory teams and the nature and frequency of supervision sessions are published in the internal Code of Practice; at the time of the audit CELT organised a range of training workshops and online guidance on supervision. Following QAA's special Review of 2006, the University audited supervisory workloads within and between departments, finding that very few supervisors had more than five research students at a time. In the light of this audit, the University decided against imposing upper limits on the main ground that a small number of specialist supervisors constituted no risk to academic standards or the student experience and might in fact be beneficial; it confirmed, however, that the supervision of research students would continue to be included in academic work allocation models at faculty and department levels. The audit team found both these arrangements and their implementation appropriate.

100 All research degree students are formally monitored annually. This process, which involves a reflection on continuing training needs (the University normally expects research students to undertake at least two weeks of training a year), involves independently written but subsequently shared submissions from students and supervisors: these are considered by an independent member of staff appointed by the supervisory team in negotiation with the student. The main formal outcome of the process is the submission of a report to Student Registry, which monitors return rates, pursues non-submissions and liaises with supervisors and students where issues requiring discussion have been raised. The overall process is monitored by the faculty postgraduate committees and Graduate School Committee.

101 The University's procedure for transferring from probationary PhD (the initial status of prospective PhD students) to confirmation of registration (or downgrading to MPhil) involves a panel composed of a minimum of three members of academic staff, of whom at least one is independent of the supervisory team. The evidence required by panels is appropriately detailed, and requires, among other documentary sources, draft chapters and/or evidence of data gathered. The audit team confirms that this procedure is followed, and also that the University's

annual review of submission and completion rates is duly informed by statistical analysis and appropriately conducted.

102 Research students are represented on institutional, faculty and departmental committees, and included in a range of surveys, including those operated by the Students' Union and by academic support units. In addition, the University considers its participation in the national Postgraduate Research Experience Survey has provided useful evidence of students' perceptions as well as facilitating more sophisticated institutional benchmarking. The audit team confirms that the findings of these and other surveys are discussed with representatives at departmental staff-student liaison committees, faculty postgraduate studies committees, the Graduate School Forum and Graduate School Committee, with issues of significance being referred to Senate and in some cases addressed by single-issue working groups. The team found these arrangements are fully operational and appreciated by research students who informed the team that they help create an environment in which they are appropriately represented and well supported.

103 The appointment of internal and external examiners of theses (by the Director of the Graduate School), the conduct of the examination and the assessment criteria accord with the University's assessment procedures: these are publicly available and appropriately distributed. A minimum of one member of the examination panel must be an appropriately qualified person from outside the University; viva voce examinations are either independently chaired, usually by a senior member of academic staff, or audio-recorded; a mock examination is formally encouraged. Procedures exist for dealing with suspected plagiarism in research degrees, as do comprehensive complaints and appeals procedures: students are made aware of them during induction - they are readily available in written form and the team did not uncover difficulties in relation to them.

104 In the view of the audit team, the Graduate School, and the faculty-based arrangements that support research postgraduates, together constitute a coherent cross-disciplinary framework that addresses the risks of isolation that can hamper such students. At the same time the oversight of the Graduate School provides robust management and assurance of standards and quality. The University has taken appropriate action in response to the report of the special Review of 2006. It is confirmed that the University has a sound framework for its arrangements for research students, and that the research environment and postgraduate experience meet fully the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1*.

## **Section 7: Published information**

105 The University publishes a great deal of information, both as hard copy and on its website. This includes a Guide to Colleges, which provides applicants with full and accurate information about college accommodation. In addition, each college produces a handbook describing its systems and facilities as well as advice concerning the University's advice centres and services. In 2007 the University undertook a thematic review of information for students, with the aim of improving accuracy, consistency, clarity and accessibility; this led to the development of a template of standard information for departmental and course handbooks, and to the publication of an Essential Guide, giving concise information about learning resources and support. Student representatives told the audit team they are both aware and supportive of this review. In addition, at the time of the audit the University had recently commenced a major web infrastructure project to improve site navigation and ensure that key information is current, accessible and accurate. Students informed the team that they consider published information accurate, and that online information is generally accessible, useful and comprehensive; students on collaborative programmes expressed similar views. Students were familiar with procedures concerning extensions, mitigating circumstances, complaints and appeals.

106 Responsibility for checking the accuracy of prospectuses and updating institutional web-based material rests with the Publications Office. Departments are responsible for the content and quality of departmental course handbooks and for annually updating their departmental and

programme websites. The handbooks and associated websites give detailed information covering curricula, learning and teaching arrangements, assessment requirements and academic support. Generic course information in the form of programme specifications is available in an online courses handbook, recent improvements in the functionality of which enable such specifications to be generated automatically and facilitate improved version control. Statistical information is based on data held in the student information system. The accuracy of the data is checked by the Student Registry which is also responsible for ensuring that information on the UniStats website is accurate and up to date. In respect of collaborative provision, the Office for the Associated Institutions maintains a list of major partners and a register of collaborative partnerships and is, in most cases, responsible for checking and approving publicity materials. More detailed information about collaborative programmes is available on faculty and departmental websites, the International Office website and on partner institutions' websites.

107 On the basis of a review of a range of hard copy and electronic information and discussions with staff and students of the University and two collaborative partners, the audit team found that, at institutional level, all information in prospectuses and on the website is full and accurate. While the information provided in departmental handbooks is more variable, as indicated above (see paragraph 105), the University is taking steps to achieve greater consistency, and both accuracy and coverage are checked in periodic review. The team saw some excellent departmental handbooks containing detailed information on learning, teaching and assessment, offering clear links to online resources and policies and providing clear information on matters ranging from plagiarism to complaints and appeals procedures and student representation arrangements.

108 The University makes available all information required by HEFCE 2006/45, *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes*. It provides full and accurate information for staff and for current and potential students, and has in place appropriate systems and guidance for checking its accuracy and completeness.

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