

University of Oxford

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 the University of Oxford (the University) from 10 to 15 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.

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 audit team concluded that the institutional approach to quality enhancement has developed considerably since the last audit and has helped to promote an ethos across the collegiate University that expects and encourages enhancement of learning opportunities, and there are effective processes for opportunities for enhancement to be identified and disseminated.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The audit team found that the University has a sound infrastructure in place to ensure satisfactory arrangements for postgraduate research students. The University has taken appropriate action following the report of QAA's special Review of research degree programmes in 2006, through the ongoing 'Embedding Graduate Studies' programme, including the introduction of the Graduate Supervision System. Institutional oversight is provided by the Graduate Panel and the Education Committee. The team considered that the research environment and postgraduate experience meet in full the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the design and systematic use of the annual Quality Assurance Template (paragraph 89)
- the consideration given to data derived from student surveys (paragraph 98)
- the development of online tools for the monitoring and communication of student performance and progression, in particular the Graduate Supervision System (paragraph 144)
- the high level of academic support and learning resources available to undergraduate students (paragraph 150)
- the framework for staff development in relation to learning and teaching provided by the Oxford Learning Institute and the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (paragraph 159).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- that the University ensures that it has effective means to ensure oversight of equity of practice across colleges, especially where this affects student progression (paragraph 62)
- that the University ensures that it is able to know that both the University and colleges have suitable complaints and appeals procedures for students registered on their programmes and that information on these is readily accessible to students (paragraph 82)
- that the University reviews its process of overview for legal agreements covering collaborative arrangements, particularly to ensure that such agreements remain current (paragraph 184).

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- that the University should progress its plans for improvement of the student information system so that it can monitor and investigate causes for students who fail to progress (paragraph 67)
- that the University should continue its work on identifying and addressing the gender gap in the examination performance of final-year students (paragraph 141)
- that the University finds ways of ensuring that published information regarding college provision is clear and accurate, in order to allow students to make an informed choice at admission (paragraph 221).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 Teaching has existed in some form in Oxford since the eleventh century. The title of Chancellor was conferred in 1214, and in 1231 the scholarly community was recognised as a universitas or corporation.

2 The current mission of the University is to 'achieve and sustain excellence in every area of its teaching and research, maintaining and developing its historical position as a world-class university, and enriching the international, national and regional communities through the fruits of its research, the skills of its alumni, and the publishing of academic and educational materials'.

3 The University consists of 57 academic departments of the University, organised into four divisions, and 38 colleges and six Permanent Private Halls (PPHs). While the awarding body for degrees is the University, the University and the colleges are interdependent communities and support each other in all aspects of teaching and learning. All full-time students, both undergraduate and postgraduate, part-time matriculated postgraduate students, and all established academic staff, are members of both the University and a college.

4 The University is a collegiate university. The 38 colleges and six PPHs have a key role in supporting and delivering teaching and learning. For undergraduates, this is through the provision of small group and individual tutorial teaching in particular. For postgraduates, colleges provide an interdisciplinary environment that offers substantial academic opportunities, as well as social and pastoral support.

5 In 2007-08, the University had 18,200 full-time students. Of these, 11,300 undergraduate students were studying on 49 single and joint honours courses, 2,500 postgraduate students were studying on 190 taught courses, and 4,400 postgraduates were studying for research degrees. There are also 1,200 full-time equivalent (FTE) part-time students largely associated

with the Department for Continuing Education: 600 FTE (or 1,200 headcount) are studying for award-bearing qualifications, and 600 FTE (6,100 head count) are on credit-bearing courses.

6 Following the University's use in its Briefing Paper, the annex uses 'departments' to refer to the academic units that are the constituent bodies of each division. The term includes departments, faculties, schools and institutes.

The information base for the audit

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

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

9 In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the previous Institutional audit, 2004
- reports of reviews by QAA since the previous Institutional audit
- reports produced by other relevant bodies (for example, professional, statutory or regulatory bodies)
- the institution's internal documents
- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.

Developments since the last audit

10 The University last underwent an Institutional audit in March 2004. This audit was broadly positive and noted a range of features of good practice, but highlighted two areas where action was recommended: (i) to ensure that the full extent of the programme outcomes were summatively assessed, and (ii) to consider the advantages of developing a more proactive approach to staff development to enhance the teaching and learning experience. Further areas where it was considered desirable to enhance practice were identified as (i) developing the annual monitoring process; (ii) rationalizing the process of responding to external examiners' comments; (iii) enhancing the consistency of support for both study and generic skills; (iv) further development of student handbooks; and (v) clarification of the pastoral and academic roles of graduate students' college advisers.

11 In response to the recommendations of the 2004 audit, there has been a review of approaches to assessment with reference to broadening the assessment tools used, ensuring the appropriate preparation is in hand for assessments other than by formal unseen examinations, and strengthening the research-teaching nexus. There have also been some review of assessments with regard to gender.

12 A teaching award scheme to reward excellence in teaching was initiated in 2005-06, and in 2007-08 awarded 63 individual awards, seven team awards and 11 project grants.

13 Professional development opportunities have been significantly enhanced, including by the establishment of a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Preparing for Academic Practice in 2005 and the expansion of the Career Development Fellowship Scheme.

14 The effectiveness of the annual monitoring process has been considerably enhanced by the further development of a detailed quality assurance calendar template, with elements of the process reviewed by divisions and the Education Committee. These processes have improved the management and oversight of external examiners' reports.

15 Since the 2004 audit, there has been a further reorganisation of the academic divisions of the University, with a resulting reduction in number from five to four, with the dissolution of the Division of Life and Environmental Sciences and the renaming of the Division of Mathematical and Physical Sciences into the Division of Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences.

16 The development of a detailed approach to institutional strategic management has occurred over the recent past, with the adoption of a Corporate Plan in 2005, and a new Strategic Plan in 2009.

17 A review of provision and support for postgraduate students has taken place since 2004, called 'Embedding Graduate Studies', which was approved by Council in 2006. This provides a framework for the monitoring of progress and of skills development. Further related developments have been the introduction of an online supervision reporting system - the Graduate Supervision System and an online graduate application system.

18 A new online system to aid the monitoring of student progress, OxCORT (Oxford Colleges Online Reports for Tutorials) was implemented in summer 2007. This system allows the institutional tracking of undergraduate students' progress and feedback to individual students.

19 A significant development was the adoption in 2006-07 of a 'common framework' for undergraduate admission across all subjects and all colleges, with an aim of providing a standard benchmark across applicants regardless of preferred college choice, and also allowing the possibility of access to applicants without a stated preferred college.

20 The institutional resource allocation process has been revised, and the Joint Resource Allocation Method for the Collegiate University, which now more transparently reflects postgraduate and research measures, as well as undergraduate numbers, has been implemented in 2008-09.

Institutional framework for the management of academic standards and learning opportunities

21 The Vice-Chancellor is the senior officer of the institution. There are 12 pro-vice-chancellors, of whom five (an increase from three in 2004) have portfolios for Research; Education, Academic Services and University Collections; Development and External Affairs; Personnel and Equality; and Planning and Resources, and seven have purely ceremonial roles.

22 In the University's unicameral structure, the principal policy-making body is the Council of the University, which is responsible for academic, strategic and financial decisions. The Council is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and has 25 members, plus three co-opted members and three student observers. Lay members comprise a small minority of the council (four, of which one is currently vacant). The sovereign body of the University, with oversight over all statutes and regulations and the power to bind Council, is Congregation, which comprises over 3,500 members of staff.

23 The Education Committee (EC) (prior to 2008 named the Educational Policy and Standards Committee) is the committee of Council with responsibility for academic standards, and assures standards through the following processes: (i) oversight of examinations and the use made of examiners' reports; (ii) formulation and oversight of examination policies and examination regulations; (iii) policies and procedures for the introduction of new courses and approval of major changes to existing courses; (iv) joint divisional/EC reviews of departments, which include review of the quality of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes; (v) the review of quality assurance templates; (vi) the review of student data, including student feedback;

(vii) engagement with external points of reference. The EC is responsible for both undergraduate and postgraduate matters. Membership includes the proctors and assessor, four representatives from the Conference of Colleges, four chairs of divisional ECs (or their local equivalents), four Council nominees, two students, and two co-options (including the Director of the Oxford Learning Institute). Four subcommittees ('panels') with specific responsibilities (Graduate, Undergraduate, Gender and Examinations), report to the EC.

24 The four other committees reporting to Council (General Purposes Committee, Personnel Committee, Planning and Resource Allocation Committee, Research Committee) have influence, to differing degrees, over policy, staffing and resources which may impact upon students and teaching.

25 Within the collegiate structure, the central University departments provide lectures, classes and practicals and provide subject-specific facilities. The colleges have 'a key role in supporting and delivering education', through small group and tutorial teaching for undergraduates, the provision of an interdisciplinary environment and social and pastoral support.

26 The teaching provision of the colleges is organised under a Steering Committee of the joint-college body, the Conference of Colleges. There are two academic subcommittees of Conference, the Senior Tutors' Committee (STC), which deals with undergraduate provision, and the Graduate Committee (GC). These two subcommittees are represented on the University EC.

27 The STC's purpose is to contribute, on behalf of the colleges, to the collegiate University's quality assurance and quality enhancement mechanisms. It specifically aims to promote coordination between colleges and the University and promote consistency of practice between colleges. In 2007, the college reporting process was further developed with the introduction of structured quality assurance templates for undergraduate and postgraduate provision. These are summarised by the STC and GC for the University's EC in an annual report. The audit team noted that there was a college-based system comparable to the University's use of quality templates for departments. Its value to the University for identifying poor practice, however, was limited because the information was only received in summarised form.

28 An office of particular importance is that of proctor. There are two proctors, Senior and Junior, and an Assessor, each of whom is elected for a single year by the colleges. They have membership of a number of key University committees and provide a role in ensuring communication occurs between these bodies. The proctors have responsibility for the maintenance of compliance of University regulations by both students and staff, and their oversight includes examination arrangements, including those for disabled students. The proctors and the Assessor also have a role in student health and welfare.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

29 The Education Committee (EC) of the University Council is responsible for the management of academic standards and does this through its own programme of work, those of three of its panels (undergraduate, graduate and examinations) and by delegation to the University's academic divisional boards. The four University academic divisions contain 57 departments, faculties and centres which propose and run programmes and have their own teaching committees which report to the divisional boards. The University emphasises the principle of subsidiarity in its approach to management of standards, which it defines as 'decisions should be taken as far as possible by those directly engaged in the matter at hand'.

30 The mechanisms employed by the EC for assuring academic standards are noted in paragraph 23. The quality assurance and enhancement calendar (see paragraph 86) is an important mechanism by which the divisions and departments fulfil their responsibilities.

31 The relationship between the University and the colleges is influenced by the independence and autonomy of the colleges. This audit overviews the University's direct management of quality and standards, including the means that it uses, as the awarding body, to ensure that quality assurance processes overseen by the colleges are effective and fit for purpose.

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

31 The University's internal processes comprise three stages: the approval of new courses and major changes to existing courses; monitoring of existing courses; and review of standards achieved in all courses.

32 The EC's policy and guidance on the introduction of new courses and major changes to existing courses stipulate the requirements which cover justification for new courses, use of external reference points, production of a programme specification, content, assessment, availability of resources, etc. New courses and major changes are generally initiated at subject level, consulted upon and, where significant, flagged up in divisional five-year plans to inform the University's major committees. External advice is required and this may come from an external advisory committee, a suitable external examiner or an expert from another institution. After approval by the contributing departments and division, the detailed proposals are finally approved by the EC.

33 Monitoring of existing courses is achieved through use of annual reports of examiners, the six-yearly joint divisional/EC reviews of departments, the five-year review of new taught postgraduate courses, ad hoc divisional and/or departmental reviews of existing programmes, and student feedback. Student feedback is through regular departmental course evaluations, college collection of student feedback monitored by the Senior Tutors' Committee (STC), the University's own survey of undergraduate students and participation in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey and the National Student Survey. The EC requires the responsible departmental academic bodies to review and comment on these to their divisional bodies. In the case of the Department for Continuing Education (which does not lie within a division), an internal Board of Studies oversees the academic standards, and is chaired on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor by a chairman external to the department.

34 Review of standards achieved is principally through the annual reports of examiners that provide detail on percentages in each class or category for the last three years and in each part of the current year. These are considered by departments, divisions and (for final-year results) the EC (see next section).

35 Immediate institutional oversight of the outcomes of reviews undertaken by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) is provided by the faculty/department involved reporting the outcome of their review to their divisional board, as well as indicating in their annual quality assurance template that they received an accreditation visit. A copy of any report is also sent by the division to the Education Policy Support Section, and any significant issues are raised at the EC. PSRB reports are also considered formally in the six-yearly periodic review.

36 The audit team was provided with evidence of the consideration of new course proposals in the Divisions of Medical Sciences, Social Sciences and Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences. These demonstrated the production of a business case, discussion at divisional committees, revision following feedback, final approval by EC and incorporation into the University's examination regulations. Approval of major changes was evidenced in the History Faculty and Mathematics Department and demonstrated effective communication between departmental teaching committees, divisional academic committees, divisional boards and EC. The colleges also contribute to course development or revision through communication with the STC .

37 Overall, the audit team regarded the above components of the University's framework for managing academic standards as robust and effective.

External examiners

38 The EC's policy and guidance on examinations and assessment includes sections on external examiners and examiners' reports which stipulate that the board of examiners for each University examination must include an external examiner to act as an arbiter of standards, and may include an external examiner to provide academic expertise not otherwise available within the University. Working with the board of examiners, the University expects external examiners to have the opportunity to comment on draft examination papers, have access to all candidate scripts and to see a sample of scripts, dissertations and course work. They should also be able to comment on the fairness of any procedures for moderation or adjustment of marks.

39 Examination Regulations 2008 states that the 'supervisory body' nominates external examiners who 'may be approved and designated by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and Proctors as an external examiner'.

40 Divisions and other supervisory bodies are required to consider external examiners' reports, take and record any actions, inform external examiners of any actions and report to the EC on any specific concerns raised. These actions are managed by the divisional assistant registrars. The University provides a template for the exam board reports. The external examiners are asked to send their reports to the central University and to the divisions. The guidelines for writing reports provides six broad headings covering academic standards, assessment processes, student performance, comparability with other institutions and issues to be brought to the attention of the University.

41 The audit team was provided with detailed evidence of the use of external examiners' reports in the Faculty of History and the Mathematical Institute. The recent external examiners' reports were included in the documentation for the joint EC/divisional six-yearly review of History; there was evidence of the Faculty Board providing a formal report to external examiners and detailed consideration of individual reports. In addition, the team noted reports from the chairmen of examiners being considered by the responsible bodies and saw that the appointment of external examiners was formally documented in the examinations subcommittee or the committee for the nomination of examiners. For joint honours, there was similar documentation and oversight. Availability of examiners reports to students was quite variable: some departments had detailed and recent material available on their web pages (for example, History) but many did not. Student representatives have access to the reports at the relevant departmental and/or divisional committee. In addition, the team was told that examiners' reports are available via departmental and college libraries.

42 Reporting to ECs was confirmed by the audit team who read the Senior and Junior Proctors' reports for 2007 and the Educational Policy and Standards Committee Review of 2007 examiners' reports.

43 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University has robust and effective systems in place for appointing suitable external examiners, receiving their reports and providing responses and any necessary action.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

44 The University utilises QAA's *Code of practice*, programme specifications, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), subject benchmark statements and PSRB guidance in developing its academic framework. The five components of the University's framework are the examination regulations, the Quality Assurance Handbook, the EC policy and guidance statements, the quality assurance templates and student feedback. These are described in detail elsewhere in the annex.

45 The Quality Assurance Handbook takes the *Code of practice* precepts for each area of quality assurance, considers these in the context of the University and then provides guidance or states requirements for divisions and departments to follow. This guidance covers admissions, induction, course design, approval, monitoring and review, student feedback, student complaints and appeals, statistical information, external input, quality enhancement, monitoring of teaching, postgraduate research degrees and collaborative provision and placement learning.

46 Responsible bodies are required to observe the policy set by the EC in its seven major policy and guidance statements, and due note is taken of subject benchmarks, European standards and FHEQ guidelines. Programme specifications were seen by the audit team as part of the faculty reviews and also on the University's website.

47 The audit team confirmed that the University makes effective use of the Academic Infrastructure in the management of the standards of its awards.

Assessment policies and regulations

48 The 2004 QAA Institutional audit made an 'advisable' recommendation that the University should 'continue to work to ensure that the full range of student achievement and skills, as described in the programme specifications, are summatively assessed by appropriate means'. This resulted in an endorsement of the current balance of assessment methods used in the non-Humanities departments and an increase in the variety of methods in Humanities. In Engineering and Physics summative assessment of practical work was introduced.

49 The University also set up a working party in 2005 to look at the role of projects and dissertation at undergraduate level. Their report reviewed current provision across the University and made 13 recommendations exploring whether it was desirable for each undergraduate programme to require evidence of ability to undertake extended independent scholarship, justify policy on time devoted to projects and the proportion of marks allocated, and to ensure that students were adequately prepared, informed and supported.

50 The audit team heard that, generally, these proposals were being adopted, with specific examples cited from Mathematics, and felt that appropriate progress had been made in this area.

51 The examination regulations present the main structure and requirements of the University's courses, while detailed information on assessment requirements and course content is provided in handbooks and websites. Work is underway 'to rationalise the balance between material contained in the Regulations and material contained in handbooks and websites'.

52 The University examination regulations are published annually and are supplemented by policy and guidance from the EC (most notably the EC policy and guidance on examinations and assessment 2008) and guidance from the proctors in their 'Essential information for students (Proctors' and Assessor's Memorandum)' and their 'Notes for the Guidance of Examiners and Chairman of Examiners'. Changes to examination regulations must be approved by divisions, and by the EC in the case of major changes, and published in the University Gazette. Under the University Statute IX, 20, the proctors have the authority to make regulations concerning the conduct of examinations and also submit annual reports to the EC on undergraduate and postgraduate examination matters. Recent reports have covered the investigation of complaints, regulatory matters and practical aspects around invigilation, availability of examiners, plagiarism and use of medical certificates. The Senior Proctor generally concentrates on postgraduate matters and the Junior Proctor handles the undergraduate issues.

53 The proctors are also responsible for deciding on the arrangements for candidates with special examinations needs which includes taking account of specialist advice and generally ensuring continuity of arrangements for these candidates. Any appeal against the proctor's decision is to the chairman of the EC. The future role of Proctor's Office is under discussion and consultation in the University.

54 The audit team heard concerns that students on University undergraduate programmes were not always aware of the appeals procedures available to them and found that there was a complex interplay between University and college decisions and how these might be appealed. This is covered further in paragraph 78.

55 The University requires all examiners in honours moderations and Second Public Examinations to express the agreed final marks in a format laid down in the policy and guidance; with moderations, and preliminary examinations which are not classified, having a simpler scheme. Rules are in place describing when double-marking is required and when scaling marks may be appropriate. The University's general principles of assessment are expected to be followed and reviewed by divisions, and the Oxford Learning Institute is noted as available to provide advice on assessment design. There is a requirement to report on examinations in a standard format which covers basic statistics on student performance, use of vivas, double-marking of scripts, new examining methods and procedures and how candidates are made aware of examination conventions. In addition, the examiners are expected to inform the responsible body of trends and their view on the overall standard of performance. There is a specific section for issues related to equal opportunities.

56 The policies on double-marking and scaling of marks were revised by the EC in Trinity Term 2008 following a review of the consistency of marking and classification within and across disciplines. The EC also agreed (and put into its policy and guidance) nine action points for the divisions with regard to level descriptors, descriptors for bands of marks and consistency in agreeing the marks between two markers. The EC has required all undergraduate handbooks from 2008 to include qualitative descriptors for each classification level, classifications conventions, weight given to each paper and information on double-marking or agreed alternatives.

57 Programme specifications are generally available on the web and they provide comprehensive information about the programme and its assessment. In the Mathematics and Philosophy programme specification, it is clear that the individual colleges can take decisions on whether to allow students to continue on the course if they have failed their Moderations but subsequently pass a Preliminary Examination.

58 The audit team saw evidence that the academic standards of the First Public Examinations and Second Public Examinations for undergraduate programmes were managed in accordance with the EC's policy and guidance on examinations and assessments and the University examination regulations, and did involve a 'supervisory body' responsible for ensuring that suitably qualified examiners prepare and examine each part of the University examination, and the nomination of external examiners and chairs of exam boards.

59 Continuation and progression on an undergraduate programme, however, also requires a student to be a member of a college, and this can be suspended or terminated through the College Academic Discipline process. The recent report of the Working Group on Academic Disciplinary Procedures (April 2008), written for the Standing Committee of the STC, reaffirmed the principles of Academic Discipline agreed in 2002 and revised the details of the procedure. It states the criteria for good academic standing at undergraduate level which include 'produces work of an appropriate standard given the student's particular level of academic ability'. Where academic concerns arise, the procedure states that these should be handled through discussion, support and warnings and can include the 'attainment of appropriate levels in special and/or penal collections. Failure to comply with any of these expectations may lead to suspension or termination of his or her course'. In meetings with senior University staff, it was confirmed that the University views Academic Discipline as a matter for the colleges and that the procedure does not involve the department in charge of the programme of study, the examination board or the University-appointed external examiners.

60 The survey of colleges' review of procedures on academic discipline indicated that some colleges had formally amended their Memoranda or Byelaws on academic discipline. There is thus opportunity for variation in the way that academic discipline is exercised in individual cases across the colleges, and implications for the standard required of a student to be able to progress. Such amendments were carried out without input from the University and it is difficult to see, therefore, how the University would assure itself that such variability was appropriate and fit for purpose.

61 Another recent example of variation in requirements for student progression concerns resits for the First Public Examination, where different colleges may require different standards of achievement in order for a student to remain in the college. This debate is well documented in the papers of the Senior Tutors' Committee and the Undergraduate Panel of the EC, and is still ongoing. The EC's Undergraduate Panel discussed the concern that the standards applied by different colleges varied and several departments indicated their wish that a student who had achieved a Pass mark on the First Public Examination should not be required to leave by a college.

62 The audit team concluded that the University's management of student progression and, thus, academic standards, could be affected by the varying policies which colleges had for progression of students, exercised through the Academic Discipline System. It considered that the progression requirements that were being set by the various colleges through the Academic Discipline System could lead to inequitable treatment of undergraduate students. Therefore, it is advisable that the University ensures that it has effective means to ensure oversight of equity of practice across colleges, especially where this affects student progression.

Management information - statistics

63 The University publishes an annual report of undergraduates' final-year results broken down by gender, ethnicity and domicile. The EC considers this report alongside the annual reports of the proctors and each division's review of examinations. These divisional reports include departmental comments covering the statistical information received from the various boards of examiners. The University is working towards having a student information system that provides admission, progression and outcome data on a regular and reliable basis for undergraduate and postgraduate taught students and for admissions, transfer, progression, submission and completion for postgraduate research students. Currently, the joint divisional/EC reviews of departments consider this information for the preceding five-year period.

64 The audit team saw evidence of this in the audit trails of History and Mathematics covering postgraduate and undergraduate data, but noted that the emphasis on progression was around the distribution of examination results and did not include analysis of the reasons for students leaving the programme. The data currently used at departmental and divisional reviews has to be compiled manually.

65 The audit team notes that the University acknowledges that the Oracle Student System has only recently reached the point where it can readily provide detailed reports on undergraduate student progression, including a breakdown of the reasons for student withdrawal and suspension, and it has the intention that these data sets will be available as standard in the future. College administrators are required to provide suitably detailed information around changes in students' circumstances to the central University, but no process for summary and analysis is currently in place.

66 The flow of management information between the colleges and the University is largely through cross-representation on University and college committees, rather than through shared formal information management systems. The introduction of the Graduate Supervision System and OxCORT is beginning to improve and help coordinate communication between University and college tutors about individual students. However, the systematic and timely analysis of cohort data is limited and this compounds the problem of colleges taking decisions on an undergraduate's progression through their Academic Discipline procedure. It creates the situation

where the University does not have available routinely the progression rates of students by discipline and college, nor reasons for lack of individual progression.

67 The audit team concluded that it was desirable that the University should progress its plans for improvement of the student information system so that it can monitor and investigate causes for students who fail to progress.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

68 One of the University's overarching objectives in its current Strategic Plan (2008-09 to 2012-13) is to provide 'an exceptional education for both undergraduates and graduates, characterised by the close contact of students with distinguished scholars in supportive collegiate and departmental communities'.

69 The University's key strategies to provide such learning opportunities include the maintenance of the tutorial system for undergraduate education; improving dialogue between colleges and departments/faculties and divisions for both undergraduate and postgraduate provision; fostering a climate where teaching is highly valued; offering challenging intensive courses that combine disciplinary depth with interdisciplinary perspectives; encouraging developments in course design; considering the addition of an international dimension to more programmes of study; providing outstanding part-time and flexible courses through research-active staff to high-calibre mature students; training postgraduate research students as academic apprentices; and creating more effective processes for the monitoring of student feedback. The Education Committee (EC), and its undergraduate and graduate panels, maintain oversight of and review the implementation of the University's learning and teaching strategy.

70 In addition to the Quality Assurance Handbook, the key University policy and guidance statements relating to learning opportunities are the Introduction of New Courses and Major Changes to Existing Courses; Undergraduate Learning and Teaching; Graduate Taught Courses; and Research Degrees.

71 Departments and faculties, through their heads and directors of both undergraduate and graduate studies, have 'significant responsibility' for the immediate oversight of learning opportunities. Oversight of the organisation, development and delivery of courses is the responsibility of the divisional boards and the Continuing Education Board (CEB), all of which have academic/teaching committees. Divisions and CEB report to Council; although CEB often reports initially via the EC.

72 The EC maintains oversight of learning opportunities on behalf of the University. It receives a wide variety of reports, reviews and proposals from divisions and CEB, departments and faculties, and from its constituent subcommittees and panels, including the annual quality assurance templates from departments. The EC also reviews student data, including admissions and final examination outcomes and student feedback (paragraph 23). The college system at Oxford is one of the great strengths of its academic provision but, as recognised by the University and students, this can result in some inconsistencies across the University (paragraph 150), although in the student written submission (SWS) it is recognised that such variation is 'often all focused towards the top end of any quality spectrum'. The Senior Tutors' Committee (STC) and Graduate Committee of the Conference of Colleges are key fora for promoting a greater consistency between colleges, and an annual summary of college reports on their undergraduate and postgraduate academic provision is submitted to the EC, both for information and to help promote the dissemination of good practice.

73 Provision of academic services to students and staff is coordinated by the Academic Services and University Collections (ASUC) Strategy Group, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Education, who is also the pro-vice-chancellor with responsibility for ASUC. Student services are coordinated by the Academic Administration Division (AAD), which is led by the Academic Registrar. The AAD is

also responsible for the central admissions process for undergraduate and postgraduate students, central administration of examinations, development and maintenance of student information systems, and has close links with Oxford University Computing Service (OUCS).

74 There have been substantial developments in student services administration since 2004 with the appointment of three new directors for Student Administration and Services, Undergraduate Admissions, and Graduate Admissions and Funding. The audit team was informed of ongoing changes to the management structure of the AAD and of the intention to use the EC as the forum for discussion of student administration and processes at a strategic level.

75 The audit team concluded that the management of student services by the University was effective and made a positive contribution to student learning opportunities.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

76 As noted above, the University's Strategic Plan refers to how external reference points are being utilised by the University to develop its academic infrastructure. The Briefing Paper refers in particular to the significant contribution made by the recently updated QAA codes of practice to the revision of Policy and Guidance statements of the EC. These, together with European standards, FHEQ guidelines, subject benchmark statements and professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) accreditation are considered in Section 2 (paragraphs 44ff).

77 Departments are required to include information on any pending PSRB reviews, and the mechanisms in place to consider their recommendations, in their annual Quality Assurance Template. Departments forward PSRB reports to their division for consideration. Divisions provide copies of the PSRB reports to the University's Education Policy Support Section. Where relevant, PSRB reports may also be considered by the EC. Where appropriate, accreditation material is also included in the periodic reviews of departments.

78 The University's Quality Assurance Handbook addresses students' complaints and appeals through reference to QAA's *Code of practice*. The University provides information on complaints and appeals through the Regulations and Statutes, the Proctors' and Assessor's memorandum and the EC Policy and Guidance on Taught Graduate Courses and on Research Degrees. In addition, the University has produced a template for inclusion in student handbooks by faculties and departments. These processes cover complaints and appeals concerning the University. For complaints related to college provision or academic decisions, students are referred to their college. University documentation about college processes is not clear with most descriptions indicating that colleges 'may' have a procedure.

79 The audit team was provided with information about the Conference of Colleges Appeal Tribunal. If a student wishes to appeal against a decision of a college governing body, they do so to the Conference of Colleges Appeal Tribunal. This Tribunal clearly states that it 'is not a University appeal body...and...is master of its own procedures'.

80 The STC has compiled a summary of replies to the survey of colleges' review of procedures on Academic Discipline (see paragraph 59) which indicates that 'a number of colleges state that they have formally amended their Memoranda or Byelaws on academic discipline without giving specific examples'. Some colleges do provide specific examples and these include introducing or revising an appeals process.

81 The audit team found that the University does not require the colleges to have an appeal process, that it has no means to ensure whether colleges' decisions taken on academic matters under the Academic Discipline System are consistent and equitable, or that information about appeals to the Conferences of Colleges' Tribunal is readily available. The team concluded that the University currently does not ensure that, in relation to academic matters managed by the colleges, the complaints and appeals procedures are approved and overseen at the highest level, are readily available and are monitored.

82 It is advised that the University must ensure that it is able to know that both the University and colleges have suitable complaints and appeals procedures for students registered on their programmes and that information on these is readily accessible to students.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

83 The University's course approval process is described in Section 2. In the audit trails, the audit team was able to see proposals for new courses and for major course amendments. These demonstrated that departments and faculties, divisions and the EC complete the approval process rigorously, with due consideration given to the learning opportunities provided by each proposal, including academic coherence, course content, assessment, and the availability of appropriate learning resources and support systems. Colleges are also asked to comment on new course proposals.

84 The documentation seen during the audit thus allowed the audit team to confirm that the University's processes for course approval were effective in managing the quality of learning opportunities.

85 Monitoring and review of learning opportunities in undergraduate and postgraduate courses is achieved, together with the management of academic standards, in various ways. The University requires that departments and faculties report on all courses annually via their quality assurance template, which includes comments on external examiners reports and any action taken or planned and how they review and respond to student feedback. Annual division and college reports encourage reflection on the academic provision and dissemination of good practice across the collegiate University (see paragraphs 27, 101, 162). New postgraduate taught courses are reviewed by departments/faculties and/or divisions after their first five years.

86 Of critical importance are the faculty/departmental standard quality assurance procedures timetabled across the year and contained in the quality assurance and quality enhancement calendars and the annual quality assurance templates. These provide the process and the monitoring to underpin the quality assurance system.

87 The quality assurance and enhancement calendar provides a summary of the activities which need to take place across the year, when this should occur and the responsible body or individual. It is designed to complement the quality assurance template. It appears to be an effective and comprehensive approach to planning quality assurance and providing practical guidance to departments and divisions. Examples were seen from the Humanities and the Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences (MPLS) divisions.

88 The quality assurance template provides an annual reporting mechanism between the departments and the divisional committees and EC. It addresses undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research provision through a series of detailed questions under the headings of admissions and induction; study skills and learning support; course design, approval and review; examinations; student feedback; student complaints and appeals; statistical information; external input; dissemination of good practice in learning and teaching; monitoring of teaching; and provision for research students. In total, there are over 80 specific questions to answer, and examples seen from History and Mathematics suggest that this is a powerful tool for self-evaluation and monitoring. Discussion of these occurs at the EC where the report for 2007-08 indicates that 66 were returned and signed off.

89 The audit team found the quality assurance and quality enhancement calendar and annual quality assurance templates an excellent mechanism for gaining the benefits of subsidiarity while retaining effective oversight. The team concluded that an example of good practice was the design and systematic use of the annual quality assurance template.

90 Until 2005-06, the periodic (six-year) reviews of departments and faculties alternated between divisional reviews, which focused on research, resources and strategy, and EC reviews on learning and teaching. From 2006-07, periodic reviews have been conducted jointly by divisions and by the EC. In addition to increasing the frequency of periodic review of undergraduate and postgraduate courses, the revised system has enabled the University to take a more holistic approach to its review of the academic provision within its departments and faculties. In 2006-07, Council introduced reviews of divisions and the first such review, of MPLS, was held in 2007-08.

91 From its examination of the evidence in the audit trails and other documentation, and from discussions with staff, the audit team concluded that the University's monitoring and review processes contributed positively to the management of learning opportunities.

Management information - feedback from students

92 The University has introduced Oxford Student Course Experience Questionnaires (OSCEQs) for undergraduate courses, postgraduate taught courses and postgraduate research programmes. They are designed to evaluate the students' experience of their whole programme and their satisfaction with that programme. The OSCEQ has been undertaken for final-year students and an overarching report made to EC on the collated responses. EC has determined that the OSCEQ should also be completed by second and first-year students but, in the light of the National Students Survey, a review should be undertaken of all the internal and external surveys to address any issues of over surveying. The audit team found from its meetings with the students that awareness among them of the range of surveys and evaluations for providing feedback was limited.

93 The EC considers national and in-house undergraduate and graduate surveys through summary papers prepared by its undergraduate and graduate panels which contain recommendations for action. The reports of the survey are available by course or type of student, for example, postgraduate research, Law. Guidance is provided on how to interpret the results by the Oxford Learning Institute. The information informs the quality assurance process through annual monitoring and periodic review. EC also forwards the analysis of the surveys to departments via the divisions and Quality Assurance Forum.

94 As far as the National Student Survey and OSCEQ are concerned, the Undergraduate Panel of EC considers an analysis of the results and refers particular issues to the divisions and colleges. The Undergraduate Panel also recommends further dissemination to departments and programmes where appropriate. Recommendations of the Undergraduate Panel are then referred to EC for endorsement.

95 At departmental level, in-house undergraduate questionnaires provide course directors, directors of graduate studies and heads of departments with feedback on the quality of lectures. Whether student surveys are reviewed regularly by departments is monitored by the EC through the annual quality assurance template. The AAD website provides open access to all survey data with University survey data being able to be analysed at different levels of detail by the college, division, department or course as appropriate. The audit team saw examples of how the divisions and departments had responded to survey data and how action taken had a positive impact on the quality of the students' learning experience.

96 The Oxford Learning Institute has produced guidance on the evaluation of teaching which outlines the various ways in which students may provide feedback on their experience. The audit team heard that there is also regular use of a teaching feedback form.

97 The quality assurance template, which is completed as part of the annual monitoring process, contains a section on the mechanisms for obtaining student feedback, analysis of the information and how enhancements are identified and taken forward by the department.

98 The audit team concluded that the University, through the EC and its panels, processes local and national student feedback data in an efficient and effective way, and that the role of the EC in considering the results from the surveys ensured that the University had a clear oversight of the range of issues raised. Furthermore, the University's extensive arrangements for gathering and disseminating feedback from students is effective in identifying generic and specific issues for the University and its departments. The team concluded that the consideration given to data derived from student surveys was a feature of good practice.

Role of students in quality assurance

99 There is provision for student representation on selected University committees and within the divisions and departments. The colleges also have student representation through the Junior and Middle Common Room committees, as well as a range of college committees. The University's Statutes and Regulations provide for representation on Council; EC; the Committee on Student Health and Welfare; curators of the University libraries; the information and communications technology (ICT) subcommittee of the Planning and Resource Allocation Committee; the Sports Strategy Committee and divisional boards.

100 Representation on University committees is drawn from the Students' Union officers. Although there is a briefing by the Students' Union there is no formal training. However, as representatives on University committees are Oxford University Students' Union (OUSU) officers, there is an informal support network. Student representation on University committees varies from full membership to observer status. This is determined by the University's Statutes and Regulations. Observer status permits participation in meetings but does not allow students to vote. Student representatives are then expected to leave the meeting for the restricted agenda items and are not permitted to have sight of the restricted items agenda or the papers. Although concerns were raised in the SWS about the limits placed on the student voice in the University committee structure, the audit team formed the view that the use of the restricted agenda was generally used appropriately. The team formed the view that students are well represented on University committees.

101 The University has published regulations for divisional boards. The regulations cover functions and powers of divisional boards, membership and the attendance of student members. The board provides an annual report to Council. Students are represented at divisional board by two members of OUSU who are working in the subject area of the division concerned; one of whom must be a graduate student. They serve for one year. Student members can speak at these meetings but not vote.

102 Departments have undergraduate and postgraduate joint consultative committees (JCCs) with student representatives appointed from the relevant constituency. Students on these committees are able to raise a range of issues under the student business section of the agenda. The meetings of the JCC are held once per term. JCC minutes also feed into the periodic review process. Divisional JCCs also exist: for example, the Medical Sciences and Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Divisions have divisional graduate JCC's and the latter a divisional undergraduate JCC.

103 The audit team heard that the University also has informal mechanisms for identifying student issues through the fortnightly meetings of a selected group of students from the Junior and Middle Common Rooms with the Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Education.

104 The guidance on periodic review states that meetings with students should be part of the review programme with undergraduate and graduate students generally being seen separately. However, the audit team was unable to confirm the level of engagement with students in the review process.

105 The audit team concluded that the role of students in quality assurance makes an effective contribution to the management of quality and standards in the University.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

106 The University has a renowned international reputation for research. Its commitment to research and how that feeds into teaching is reflected in undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes as well as postgraduate research. The strategic plan emphasises the need, when reviewing courses, to ensure that their design and the curriculum draw on developments both in research and pedagogy. The learning and teaching strategy, which forms part of the strategic plan, emphasises the importance of the high level of engagement of senior research-active academics, both in the tutorial teaching of undergraduates and in the teaching and supervision of graduates, and the need to sustain this.

107 A study of the research-teaching nexus has been undertaken by the Oxford Learning Institute (OLI) in respect of the University's undergraduate education. This study involved an extensive series of interviews with staff as well as the completion of a questionnaire at divisional level. The study found that there was widespread understanding among staff of the potential benefits of the research-teaching nexus, both in terms of teaching, learning and research. The report concluded that research clearly feeds into curriculum, design and review; it results in staff being at the leading edge of their disciplines and it underpins undergraduate dissertations and projects.

108 There are recommendations in the report which have been considered by the Undergraduate Panel of the EC and the EC itself. The main focus is the encouragement of departments and divisions to keep in mind the research-teaching nexus when designing courses and examinations, and for departments to be more explicit in their course literature about the links between research and teaching. The report has been further disseminated through the Quality Assurance Forum which has representatives from each division. The audit team was informed that individual staff made the connection between research and learning opportunities through the development of new courses specifically linked to research; through dissertation supervisions at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, and the supervision of doctorate students in specialist fields of study. There is also evidence of wider discussion through the publication, 'illuminatio', with particular focus on how undergraduates benefit from Oxford's research strategies.

109 The audit team confirmed that the University has articulated its position on the research-teaching nexus and is continuing to develop and disseminate this within the divisions and departments.

Other modes of study

110 The University states that it is committed to providing outstanding part-time and flexible courses through research-active staff to high-calibre mature students. The expectation is that these students will be on 'exceptional professional programmes' and that the Department for Continuing Education (CE) will reshape its current portfolio to provide greater emphasis on high quality postgraduate programmes aligned with the University's subject strengths and resources.

111 The University's CE Department currently has responsibility for continuing professional development and online and distance learning. The online and distance-learning provision leading to an award of the University is relatively small with only five courses being delivered in this way. However, the Department, through its Continuing Professional Development Centre, offers a significant number of non-award bearing short courses which may be offered online and/or face to face.

112 The CE Department has a CE Board which has recently presented a 10-year vision to EC. The strategy for the Department is to grow its provision and consider further the potential for creating a graduate school. The Board reports to Council or one of its committees. It operates in the same way as a divisional board and has a number of supporting committees, including appointments, board of studies and research. However, the audit team found little evidence that reports from the CE Board were received or discussed by Council.

113 The University states that all e-learning and distance-learning courses are subject to the same quality assurance framework as on-campus provision. The EC has produced guidance, Policy and Guidance on Flexible and Distributed Learning, which has taken into account QAA's precepts. It provides a clear statement of the expectations for managing and delivering such programmes and ensuring equivalent standards for online courses. The Department of Continuing Professional Education has its own Unit - Technology-Assisted Lifelong Learning (TALL) - which supports programme and course development in this area and its website provides information on the support available to staff in respect of learning design, author support, multimedia and web development.

114 The audit team was informed that the quality assurance of its online and blended learning programmes follows a similar process to its on-campus provision such as completion of the annual quality assurance template and the six-yearly reviews of its programmes. Each award bearing programme has a course leader who teaches and manages the programme; each programme is subject to the external examining process. Non-award bearing courses are subject to a student evaluation at the end of the course. The department is represented on the Quality Assurance Forum and through this made aware of the key issues to be addressed and how good practice may be shared.

115 Students on award bearing programmes are members of Kellogg College and can access University facilities and resources. Students on blended learning programmes have access to online discussions with the tutor; information technology (IT) support and any online library resources. Course materials are also supplied in hard copy. The audit team found that student support for online and part-time programmes within the Department was in line with QAA's *Code of practice*. It concluded that the arrangements for ensuring the quality of standards and learning opportunities for the University's blended learning and part-time programmes were effective.

Resources for learning

116 Library and IT resources are provided across the University and within departments and colleges. The University benefits from extensive library provision with many specialist library holdings which support its research and academic work. In addition it has an extensive museum provision. The University has an established governing body for Oxford University Library Services (OULS) on which there are two student members.

117 The University is committed to providing outstanding services to library users in support of research, teaching and learning. A similar commitment has been made to further develop the museums and collections as a research, educational and research resource for the University and the wider world.

118 An evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of the library and ICT provision forms part of the student satisfaction questionnaires. OULS was reviewed in 2006. A report produced by the curators of the University libraries on the strategic direction of the Library Service has been considered and approved by Congregation. As a result a number of cognate subject libraries have been consolidated into larger libraries. In order to communicate changes to the provision, OULS has held a series of open meetings for staff and students. A member of OULS is responsible for divisional and departmental library resources.

119 Following a strategic review of ICT, a detailed ICT Strategic Plan 2005 to 2009-10 has been produced which lays down detailed specifications in respect of the ICT requirements for the University, including the investment required to support the student and staff experience. The Planning and Resource Allocation Committee (PRAC) ICT subcommittee was established in 2007. This subcommittee has responsibility for the implementation of the plan and its requirements. The office of the Director of ICT is a new unit which coordinates ICT across the University.

120 OUCS has also developed a five-year plan to improve the service offered to users. The audit team noted that these plans incorporated set targets and a timeline for delivery. As part of the University's commitment to developing e-learning, OUCS has a Learning Technologies Group (LTG) which provides support and guidance on the use of IT in teaching, learning and research, including how to facilitate distance learning using the virtual learning environment (VLE). It also provides support for the use of the plagiarism detection programme, Turnitin. The LTG provides the IT skills training and is responsible for the VLE and the podcasting service. It works in collaboration with the OLI and TALL. The LTG's advisory group, OxTalent also advises the PRAC ICT subcommittee. OxTalent's remit is to raise awareness of ICT and promote greater interaction by the staff and students. It also determines the awards for innovative use of ICT in learning and teaching. Membership of OxTalent includes divisional and student representatives. The team noted that there is also a new initiative for engaging divisions and departments in e-learning led by the Academic Administration Division.

121 Students have access to email, and WebLearn, the University's VLE. OUCS provides support, guidance and IT training for staff and students. WebLearn usage is monitored by OUCS. A devolved approach is taken to the use of IT and WebLearn in that once capabilities are determined, it is left to departments to decide on the level of staff engagement.

122 The University Language Centre supports international students who require pre-sessional English support and offers a range of language programmes for staff and students. It also offers an academic writing workshop to support students who have to write a thesis or dissertation. The Language Centre was reviewed in 2007 and the report was considered by EC. The report emphasised the University's commitment to the work of the Centre, and recognised the increased demand for language support from international and research students; the latter would need to be acknowledged by PRAC in the resource allocation.

123 The audit team noted that periodic reviews of resources and services were undertaken on a six-yearly cycle, the same as the cycle for academic departments, in addition to the student course questionnaire, and these reports were considered by EC.

124 The students with whom the audit team met were generally satisfied with the learning resources provided by the University and its divisions and departments. Overall, the team concluded that the University's arrangements for the provision, allocation and management of its learning resources are effective and valued by its students.

Admissions policy

125 Procedures for undergraduate and graduate admissions have been subject to review across the University. At undergraduate level there is now a common framework which was introduced following the report of the Working Party on Selection and Admissions; this was to be fully implemented by 2007-08. As a result prospective students no longer have to apply to a particular college as part of the process, although they can if they wish. All undergraduate students can now register online.

126 The audit team found that the information provided by the colleges was variable and heard that it was not always accurate.

127 The Common Framework for Undergraduate Admissions (set out in the Quality Assurance Handbook) requires faculties/departments to report annually through the quality assurance template to the Admissions Executive on the procedures in place for their subjects, and to demonstrate using relevant data how the procedures are working in practice. The University acknowledged that this has yet to be fully embedded. In addition, there is a statistics advisory group for Undergraduate Access, Recruitment and Admissions which focuses on widening participation. The audit team noted that data on admissions is reported in the Gazette and to EC, as is a report on widening access; reports are considered and approved by the EC.

128 Divisions are required to identify the person(s) in their faculties/departments who is/are responsible for admissions for their subjects. The Common Framework allows a faculty/department to make significant changes to procedures, with the agreement of the Admissions Executive and the EC. It was unclear to the audit team the extent of the approved exceptions. It is understood that a reporting template for use by faculties and departments is in preparation. The team welcomed the developments in respect of undergraduate admissions. However, it noted that the report of the implementation of the framework has identified the need for greater transparency by subjects in publishing shortlisting and interview criteria to prospective applicants.

129 University guidance on postgraduate taught (PGT) and research (PGR) admissions is provided for staff. General regulations governing admission to taught graduate courses are set out in the general regulations for each degree awarded. Admissions are managed by the department and an offer secures a place within a college. Any associated special regulations are made by boards or departments. The policy includes a section on 'good practice' relating to the information to be provided to applicants general, requirements on admission procedures and criteria. The University has recently introduced an online application for all PGT and PGR applicants. The audit team heard that it had worked well for the PGT students. The Graduate Panel continues to review graduate admissions.

130 The undergraduate Admissions Office has a comprehensive website which provides extensive information for prospective students to the University and has developed a code of practice for admissions tutors. Training is provided in conducting interviews and there is an online training programme as well as a refresh programme provided by the OLI.

131 Guidance for international students who wish to apply to the University can be found on the Admissions website and on the International Office website. This covers English language requirements, immigration, finances and funding. All overseas students are invited to attend a two-day orientation course. Guidance for disabled students is provided by the Disability Office. The audit team heard that staff from this office support disabled students attending open days and interviews.

132 On acceptance to the University all students are required to sign a student contract which outlines the respective duties of the University and the student.

133 The audit team noted the continuing work in embedding the revised admissions procedures for undergraduate and postgraduate students to ensure a more transparent, consistent and efficient process for the students.

Student support

134 Student support is provided in a variety of ways by the University, divisions, departments and colleges. The one-to-one/one-to-two tutorial system which operates across undergraduate courses through the college tutor system provides a high level of academic support. Tutors provide regular oral and written feedback to the students and monitor progress. The University is committed to not only maintaining the tutorial system but also ensuring that a major part of its courses are delivered by senior academics.

135 The personal support system for both undergraduate and postgraduate taught students is provided by college tutors and covers both pastoral and academic guidance. Feedback on academic progress is provided from a number of sources including the Collections System which is the formative examination system operating within some of the colleges. However, the audit team found that the use of Collections varied and was dependent upon the tutor and college.

136 Senior tutors have responsibility for the academic support and well-being of undergraduate students. Supervisors based in departments have responsibility for the academic progress of postgraduate students, while tutors for graduates based in colleges are responsible for their well-being. Graduate students are supported within the colleges by college advisers who

provide pastoral support as required. The colleges provide explicit guidance on the role of the college adviser. However, the audit team found that the implementation of the role was variable and had not been fully addressed since the last audit.

137 The proctors and assessor (who are college appointments) play a key role in assessment, discipline and complaints. The assessor focuses on student health, welfare and financial issues. The Proctors' Office provides each student with a handbook - Essential Information for Students. There is also detailed information on the Proctors' Office website about examinations, plagiarism and disciplinary procedures. The Junior Proctor and Senior Proctor provide an annual report on special needs, academic misconduct and complaints to the Undergraduate Panel of EC. The audit team noted that the University is currently undertaking a review of the Proctors' Office. The recommendations if implemented may lead to some changes to the remit of the Office.

138 The University has a clear commitment to enhancing the support for graduate students through its 'Embedding Graduate Studies' (EGS) agenda. This agenda focuses primarily on postgraduate research students but also raises the profile of the college adviser in supporting graduate students within the colleges. The EGS is also enhancing the role of the Director of Graduate Studies who currently has an oversight, policy and administrative role in developing postgraduate studies. Progress on implementing the EGS is reported to the Graduate Panel of EC and then to EC.

139 The University in its guidance to staff recognises the importance of induction and study skills. This is further encouraged in the Notes of Guidance on the 2007-08 College Reports on Undergraduate and Postgraduate Academic Provision.

140 The OLI undertook an audit in 2008 of the support available across departments and colleges for the development of students as learners. It looked at induction, study skills and the use of course handbooks. The audit found that a diverse range of activity occurs at both pre-enrolment, enrolment and during the course of study. Both a summary of findings and recommendations are included in the report which has been considered by the Undergraduate Panel of EC and EC itself, and referred to the Quality Assurance Forum for further consideration.

141 The University has identified a gender gap in the performance of its final honours students in specific disciplines. The Gender Panel (GP) of EC has been set the task of addressing this issue. The audit team noted from its reading of the minutes of the GP the considerable amount of work undertaken from the inception of the GP in 2007, including a review of the Final Honours School's' results in specific disciplines, a review of the results of the OSCEQ and the admissions study. Some colleges have introduced a finals forum for female students. It also noted the proposal by the OLI to carry out a research project on gender and admissions. Given the importance of this issue the audit team recommends that it is desirable that the University should continue to expedite this work.

142 All undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses are supported by course handbooks. While these are generally comprehensive they may or may not contain programme specifications and content may be variable between disciplines. They are generally available online. Guidance is provided in the Policy and Guidance on Undergraduate Learning and Teaching on the content of course handbooks. Students also receive college handbooks which provide information about student life. The audit team noted that there was a lack of consistency in the quality of the information provided in the college handbooks.

143 With support from the University, the colleges have recently developed OxCORT which is an online tutorial report for undergraduate students. This allows the student to have online access to the tutorial reports on their academic progress. However, the audit team found that engagement by both students and tutors with OxCORT was variable, although it was seen as a positive development and was supported by an online tutorial for staff and a guide for students. Students also have online access to past examination papers (Oxam). In addition the University VLE, WebLearn, is used to support learning, particularly as a repository for materials.

144 The Graduate Supervision System (GSS) (see also paragraph 202) allows PGR and PGT students to access online reports on their progress and for both student and supervisor to report on the term's work. The audit team heard that students and staff felt that the GSS was an improvement on the paper-based system. The development of online tools for the monitoring and communication of student performance and progression, in particular the GSS, are considered by the team to be a feature of good practice.

145 The Careers Service provides a range of guidance, support and advice for students as well as being responsible for the development of the skills portal, ASPIRE, and a career mentoring programme for PGR students. It also provides specialist support for PGR students on writing curricula vitae (CVs) and preparing for interview. Online guidance is also provided on avoiding plagiarism through the skills portal. The Service has been subject to a six-yearly review and the report of the 2006 review was considered with the response from the Service by EC in 2007. The University has a clear commitment to developing and enhancing the role of the Careers Service, in particular the support it is developing for PGR and international students. The students who met the audit team were positive about the service provided.

146 ASPIRE is a personal development programme developed by the Careers Service which allows students to reflect on skills development and identify particular development needs. This is a relatively new programme which initially is targeted at postgraduate research students. The audit team found from meetings with staff and students that there was little awareness of this initiative.

147 General information and support is provided by the Student Information and International Student Advisory Service. The University also provides a counselling service. The students who met the audit team were aware of the range and availability of the services available to support them.

148 The Disability Equality Scheme Working Group provides advice to the University on disability issues. It is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Personnel and Equality) and its membership includes undergraduate and postgraduate disabled students as well as academic staff and representatives of the colleges and departments. The Disability Office provides advice and guidance to staff and students particularly in respect of adjustments to courses and assessment, and specific equipment needs. The Office also provides support during the admissions process and liaises with the disability contacts in each department.

149 All annual reports from the service departments are considered by, or on behalf of, the EC and recommendations referred back to the service. All services have now been brought within the University Administration and Services.

150 The audit team found that there is an extensive range of support for students to assist them in making the most of the learning opportunities. The University was embedding new methods to support students, particularly at postgraduate level and these were welcomed by staff and students. While the team considers the high level of academic support and learning resources available to undergraduate students to be a feature of good practice, the team also noted that there were some inconsistencies between the information provided by colleges and departments and the support of the college advisers which need to be addressed.

Staff support (including staff development)

151 The Personnel Committee is responsible for staff development and training. Professional development and staff development support for learning and teaching is provided by OLI. The Institute offers a diverse range of support for new and experienced academic staff including introductory sessions, mentoring, guidance on peer observation as well as award bearing qualifications such as the Postgraduate Diploma in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. The Institute's annual report to EC provides a comprehensive list of seminars on offer as well as an analysis of attendance by division. The work of the Institute is supported by the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) in Preparing for Academic Practice which plays a key role in developing and supporting postgraduate research students and postdoctoral researchers

who wish to develop academic careers. All divisions have CETL coordinators. HEFCE funding for the CETL ends in 2010 and it is expected that the work will be further integrated into the work of the divisions.

152 All new academic staff undergo a five-year period of probation. During this period each member of staff has a departmental mentor. An experienced member of staff is appointed as mentor for all new appointments and the guidance provided is intended to assist the mentee gain the best from the relationship in terms of support and guidance. The mentor will usually be an experienced member of the faculty and not have a line management relationship with the mentee. The mentor is encouraged to allow the mentee to observe their teaching. The mentor is not normally involved in any interim and final reviews or probationary reviews. Reviews are normally undertaken by a departmental panel with college representatives appointed for this purpose, and are reviewed by, or on behalf of, the divisional board. Performance review takes place during the second and fourth year of this period.

153 Academic staff are appraised every five years. This scheme is compulsory and is triggered by notification from divisional board (or equivalent). Appraisees may request discussions in the intervening years.

154 Since 2004 the University has made a clear commitment to foster a climate in which teaching is highly valued. Through the work of OLI, and the development of the CETL with the divisions, further support for and the recognition of teaching has been undertaken. The scheme for the Development of Academic Practice is for academics new to Oxford and those new to teaching. It is also available to more experienced academics who wish to engage further with academic practice. The scheme is a four-part framework for individuals at different stages in their academic careers. For graduate students and research staff with little experience of teaching, there is the Preparation for Learning and Teaching at Oxford (PLTO) and the next stage is Developing Learning and Teaching (DLT).

155 The audit team heard that the PLTO is mandatory for graduates to be entered on the register of graduate teaching assistants. However, the register appeared to be a recent development and not all postgraduate research students were aware of it. Seminars for these programmes take place in departments/faculties and are discipline specific introductions to learning and teaching. The PLTO is designed for students intending to start teaching at Oxford, and, for graduates with some initial teaching experience, there is the DLT, a more widely applicable programme leading to Associated Membership of the Higher Education Academy. All academic staff may undertake the seminars on Developing Academic Practice, and those with more experience and responsibility are encouraged to progress to the Postgraduate Diploma in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PgDip LATHE), a part-time programme taken over up to two years: both these programmes lead to Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. Each participant in the PgDip LATHE has a teaching mentor who is usually an experienced academic from a cognate discipline. The CETL and OLI annual reports provide details of the level of engagement by divisional staff in these programmes.

156 The Career Development Fellowship (CDF) scheme was established in 2002 to provide a structure to encourage the development of promising early career staff. It is aimed at attracting postdoctoral level people into academic careers by providing short-term teaching posts of three years supported by an individual training and development package including mentoring. The posts involve both teaching and research. Between 12 to 15 CDFs are awarded every three years. The impact of the scheme in developing female academics has been undertaken as part of a wider evaluation study.

157 The University introduced the Oxford Teaching Awards in 2005 in order to recognise excellence and innovation in teaching. Although the process is managed by OLI, divisions operate their own schemes either based on direct applications or nominations by departments. The OLI has the opportunity to refine the scheme as it develops and is encouraging the use of

nominations from students. The scheme is open to academic and learning support staff. On average there are 70 to 80 awards made each year. The OLI provides an annual report to EC on the operation of the scheme.

158 Skills support for research active staff is provided by the Language Centre, Library Services and Computing Services. In addition, the Skills portal is an important source for both research staff and students.

159 From its reading of the documentation and meetings with staff, the audit team formed the view that the University provides a high level of staff support and appropriate opportunities for staff development, particularly the support for teaching and learning. The team welcomed the recognition and reward for academic practice and the programmes in place to develop staff as academic practitioners. The framework for staff development in relation to learning and teaching provided by OLI and the CETL is considered to be a feature of good practice.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

160 The University views its approach to quality enhancement as 'the deliberate steps it takes to make steady, reliable and demonstrable improvements in the quality of students' opportunities for learning'. The Education Committee (EC) provides 'a locus for the University quality enhancement strategy' and this role has been included in its revised terms of reference.

161 Quality enhancement of learning opportunities is managed by the University in various ways: through the quality assurance framework identifying issues and good practice; the EC identifying core themes that inform strategy at institutional level; the dissemination of good practice to and by divisions, departments and faculties, and colleges; and a framework of coordinators and advisers in divisions to enhance teaching and transferable skills of staff and postgraduate research students. These features have been described in previous sections of the annex.

162 The quality assurance framework (paragraphs 23, 32-35) enables departments and faculties, divisions, colleges and the University to identify issues for quality enhancement and items of good practice. As described in Section 1, for the University, the EC has scrutiny of student surveys; annual reports by examiners, the Senior Tutors' Committee (STC) and Graduate Committee (GC) of the Conference of Colleges, and the proctors; departmental quality assurance templates; annual admissions and examination data; annual reports from CETL and service providers; and periodic reviews of departments, divisions and service providers, such as careers. Examples cited in the institutional Briefing Paper of how consideration of management information has led to new initiatives are 'measures to address student concerns over the clarity of marking criteria, and the use of feedback' and the establishment of the Gender Panel to investigate 'the gap in attainment at UG finals level by men and women' (paragraph 141).

163 The University states that 'a primary purpose of the periodic reviews of departments and support services is to identify opportunities for enhancement'. The audit team regarded the changes made in the departmental review process since 2006-07 (paragraph 90) as a particularly positive development. These changes were cited as an example of how external input (in this case the recommendations of external members of review panels) can be of considerable benefit to the University.

164 The EC identifies core themes for enhancement at institutional level, and sets out in the Strategic Plan the 'deliberate steps' it intends to take to enhance learning opportunities. Examples cited in the institutional Briefing Paper and looked at by the audit team were the Embedding Graduate Studies Agenda (paragraphs 17,138), developments in research and transferable skills training (paragraph 205) and the development of the common framework for undergraduate admissions (paragraph 125). The EC has oversight of the progress made on each of the strategies under the learning and teaching objective in the current Strategic Plan.

165 Divisions build on the Strategic Plan, on the outcome of reviews (for example, of divisional quality assurance and enhancement processes), and on departmental plans and concerns. The audit team saw examples of this process following the review of the Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences (MPLS) Division in 2007.

166 Good practice is disseminated at institutional level through EC Policy and Guidance documentation and a variety of other means. Working groups on specific topics (for example, 'projects and dissertations'), with their broad membership across the University comprising academic and administrative staff, and students, help to 'improve communication and foster shared understanding across the University and colleges'. In addition to the use of student survey data (above and paragraphs 33, 93, 95), students 'contribute to and initiate discussions about enhancement' through the review process and their representation on university-level committees, divisional boards, joint consultative committees in departments, and most college governing bodies (paragraphs 99, 100).

167 Other mechanisms include the dissemination of departmental responses to the enhancement sections of quality assurance templates, Academic Administration Division (AAD) briefing sessions for college and departmental administrators and directors of graduate studies, and the work of the Oxford Learning Institute (OLI). For example, a report from OLI on the research-teaching nexus was considered by the Undergraduate Panel and EC in October 2008. The report recommended a series of steps to strengthen links between research and scholarly activity to be taken forward by divisions during 2008-09 (paragraphs 107,108). The OLI disseminates much of its work via its website and its publication 'illuminatio', whose Spring 2007 issue contained a series of articles on research-informed teaching at Oxford and at various United States research universities.

168 The EC has considered ways in which its business may be made more transparent to the collegiate University, including publication of approved minutes on the EC website. The upcoming EC agenda is now also displayed on its website, together with contact details to encourage comments prior to meetings. The EC agenda and conclusions are discussed formally after each meeting by the Quality Assurance Forum, comprising quality assurance administrative officers from the EC, divisions/Continuing Education (CE). During the briefing and audit visits, the audit team was told of the linking role that the Quality Assurance Forum plays in the dissemination of good practice between the University and divisions.

169 The OLI has been the single largest recipient of the University's Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF) allocation from HEFCE over the 10 years to 2008-09, with other TQEF funds going to divisions, CE and for staff and student volunteering.

170 In the documentation provided at the audit, the audit team saw evidence of effective information flow between departments and faculties, divisions and the EC. Divisional boards and their ECs (or equivalent) 'regularly scrutinise the educational activities of their departments' and highlight good practice for 'wider dissemination across the division'. The MPLS Division is also trialling 'Subject Days', which are 'designed to enhance the links between department and College teaching'.

171 In parallel to the quality assurance template completed by departments and faculties, each college completes an annual undergraduate and/or postgraduate Academic Provision Report (paragraph 27). These reports are considered by the STC and GC of the Conference of Colleges and enable colleges 'to reflect on their academic provision for their students' and aid in the identification and dissemination of good practice between colleges. This process has been 'strengthened' by the formation in 2007 of a College Quality Assurance Group, which reviews the college reports and prepares an annual commentary for the STC and GC that also goes to the EC.

172 The Oxford University Computing Service (OUCS) is responsible for the ICT provision. The EC and the ICT subcommittee of the Planning and Resource Allocation Committee provide the guidance on ICT for OUCS and its Learning Technology Group (LTG) whose advisory group, OxTalent, has divisional academic representatives.

173 The LTG manages the University's virtual learning environment (WebLearn), and through OxTalent has a key role to 'raise awareness, promote interaction, and stimulate the use of IT in teaching and learning across the University' (paragraph 120). In its current five-year plan, OUCS highlights the ways it aims to support academic staff in developing learning technology. The audit team heard of plans to expand existing exemplar teaching rooms at OUCS for promoting effective use of ICT facilities in the classroom.

174 In February 2009, the AAD launched an initiative, Fostering Learning Through IT, which aims to increase engagement with divisions and departments on e-learning. The use of learning technology is most fully embedded in the Medical Sciences Division. During the audit, the audit team heard from staff and students that the use of e-learning varied across the University, and that in some departments and faculties the VLE was mostly used as a repository for materials. The introduction of OxCORT, an online tutorial reporting system for undergraduate students, was seen as a very positive development by staff and students, although it has yet to be fully implemented across the University (paragraph 143). A new online Graduate Supervision System is considered in paragraph 202.

175 The University introduced a scheme to reward excellence in teaching in 2005-06, which includes individual and team awards and project grants (paragraph 157). There are also awards for innovative use of ICT in learning and teaching (paragraph 120).

176 The audit team concluded that the institutional approach to quality enhancement has developed considerably since the last audit and has helped to promote an ethos across the collegiate University that expects and encourages enhancement of learning opportunities, and that there are effective processes for opportunities for enhancement to be identified and disseminated.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

177 The University's collaborative provision is relatively small scale, totalling just over 500 students, including around 130 University students on language placements and year-abroad schemes. The policy regarding collaborative provision was revised in 2007 and placed in a framework that would allow an increase in such provision within an overall institutional strategic framework. There has been some modest expansion recently in focused and specialised areas.

178 Quality management and reporting follow the same annual and periodical procedures as internal programmes and feed into divisional and Department of Continuing Education oversight and review processes. During the audit the audit team identified no concerns regarding the operation of these procedures.

179 There were five significant collaborations at the time of audit: (i) a Postgraduate Diploma in Legal Practice which is jointly awarded with Oxford Brookes University; (ii) a MSc programme, jointly taught with Oxford Brookes University, in Psychological Research/Psychology; (iii) a suite of programmes in clinical psychology and cognitive therapy delivered by the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust; (iv) a suite of programmes in theology taught by Ripon College, Cuddesdon; and (v) a DPhil programme in Biomedical Research jointly supervised in collaboration with the National Institutes of Health of the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

180 The arrangements relating to the jointly awarded Postgraduate Diploma in Legal Practice have changed in the recent past. The programme was previously delivered by a third party, the Oxford Institute of Legal Practice (OILP). In August 2008, OILP was taken over by Oxford Brookes University and the relationship between OILP and the University of Oxford terminated, at which point the 1993 Joint Venture Agreement was renewed (this agreement was not available to the audit team, having been 'archived off-site', so no comment on its coverage can be made). The jointly awarded programme continues to be delivered as a collaborative venture. There is a quality assurance operations manual for the programme, which is recognised as requiring revision.

181 Admissions to the jointly taught MSc in Psychological Research occur at both host institutions (that is, University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University), the programme leading to an award of the admitting institution only. The original legal agreement expired in May 2007 and was revised by annex, with a break in coverage of two months in July 2007 and extended to December 2008. There was apparently no legal agreement covering this programme at the time of audit. A review of this programme, with independent external participation, occurred in October 2007, and this has been discussed at the Divisional Education and Policy Strategy Committee in March and October 2008.

182 Four programmes are taught by the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Mental Health NHS Trust leading to awards of the University: a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology; an MSc in Advanced Cognitive Therapy Studies; a Postgraduate Diploma in Advanced Cognitive Therapy; and a Postgraduate Diploma in Cognitive Therapy. The latter three programmes were governed by a legal agreement that expired in May 2008 and was replaced after a break of eight months by a new agreement.

183 The audit team noted that the authority to sign legally binding collaboration agreements is spread among staff of the University, including departmental programme managers. The University may wish to consider the appropriateness of this arrangement.

184 It is advised that the University reviews its process of overview for legal agreements covering collaborative arrangements particularly to ensure that such agreements remain current.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

185 The University offers master's (MSc, MLitt) and doctoral (DPhil) degrees by research. In 2007-08 there were 4,400 enrolled research students and, of these, about 80 were part-time DPhil students who are covered by the same arrangements as full-time students. One DPhil programme is in collaboration with National Institutes of Health, USA (paragraph 179). Postgraduate research (PGR) student numbers increased by 2 per cent in the five years up to 2007-08 and the University intends that postgraduate student numbers 'should only grow modestly'.

186 The University's regulations, policies and guidelines, and codes of practice and procedure relating to PGR students are clearly accessible online. Institutional arrangements for PGR programmes are given in Examinations Regulations and Policy and Guidance on Research Degrees and were seen to reflect QAA's *Code of practice* and the UK Council and other national expectations.

187 Since the University's 2004 Institutional audit, one priority has been to review the postgraduate provision. An integrated programme, Embedding Graduate Studies, has been developed by the Education Committee (EC) (paragraphs 17, 138) and the first phase, on new codes of supervision, monitoring and progression, and statements of provision, has been implemented. For PGR students, the current phase focuses on DPhil submission/completion rates, teaching opportunities for PGR students, and support for the role of Director of Graduate Studies (DGS).

188 QAA's special Review of research degree programmes at Oxford in July 2006 concluded that the institution's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its provision was appropriate and satisfactory. Good practice was noted in the provision of 'the highest quality research facilities'; the 'development of research and general skills training'; the 'rigorous transfer and confirmation stages' for assessment of student progress and development; and 'discussion about supervision involving both staff and students'. The special Review suggested, in light of QAA's *Code of practice, Section 1*, precept 11, that the University may wish to give further consideration to 'the extent to which the advisory nature of the good practice guidance for supervisor arrangement allows the existence of areas where there is a gap between what the student experiences and what is regarded as good practice'.

189 The student written submission (SWS) suggests satisfaction among graduate students is somewhat lower than among undergraduates, and that more needs to be done to implement policies and codes of practice. The overall satisfaction rate for PGR students in the Postgraduate Research Experience Surevey (PRES) 2008 was 79 per cent compared with 82 per cent average for all universities participating. In the 2007 and 2008 International Student Barometer, about 80 per cent of responding international PGT and PGR students at Oxford would recommend the University to other applicants. The EC considers national and in-house graduate surveys through summary papers prepared by its Graduate Panel.

Institutional arrangements and research environment:

190 For the University, the EC is responsible for oversight of the PGR provision through several of its subcommittees: the Graduate Panel, the Examinations Panel, the Graduate Skills Advisory Group, and the Graduate Admissions Committee. At divisional level, PGR programmes are managed through graduate subcommittees in Humanities, Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences (MPLS) and Medical Sciences. In Social Sciences, PGR matters are considered at the Teaching Policy Committee. A working group of the Academic Committee in the MPLS Division is exploring the possibility of a Graduate School. In departments, the primary academic officer is the Director of Graduate Studies. The audit team noted a draft response to colleges from the Graduate Committee of the Conference of Colleges on the need for the role of DGS to be clarified across the University and of ensuring that the DGS had sufficient administrative support (see 'Embedding Graduate Studies' above and paragraphs 17,138).

191 All PGR students are members of a college. Each college has a tutor for graduates or a senior tutor (in postgraduate-only colleges). Each graduate student has a college adviser in addition to a supervisor. The Graduate Committee of the Conference of Colleges brings together all graduate tutors and has a remit to support postgraduate research and taught students within colleges. An annual summary of college reports on graduate provision is submitted to the EC.

192 Oxford provides an outstanding research environment and has the highest research income of any UK university. The mission of the University is 'to achieve and sustain excellence in every area of its teaching and research'. Research excellence is the 'norm', with 'high-quality resources and infrastructure' and a 'very extensive range of special lectures and seminars is organised by departments and Colleges'. The SWS refers to issues on library access across colleges, especially outside term, and the audit team heard at meetings that students would like access to any library across the collegiate University for consultation. Humanities is recognised by the University as relatively poorly resourced, especially for postgraduate students, and this is a priority area for the University's current fund-raising initiative, Campaign for the University of Oxford.

193 The University is developing its interdisciplinary PGR provision through Science Doctoral Training Centres and other initiatives, such as the Oxford Internet Institute, the Khalii Research Centre, and the Institute for Biomedical Engineering.

Selection, admission, induction and supervision

194 The EC has overall responsibility for PGR admission policies and procedures which are set out in the Policy and Guidance on Research Degrees. The Graduate Prospectus is available online and provides extensive information for all applicants. Additional information is available via University, divisional, departmental and college websites. Divisional and departmental handbooks and the booklet Essential Information for Students provide information for admitted students.

195 Decisions on PGR admissions are made by departments, and involve at least two members of academic staff, including the DGS. The University's Graduate Admissions Office manages the admissions process. The 'overriding priority' for PGR is to recruit the very best students nationally and internationally, with an equitable selection process 'based on achievement and potential'. Admission procedures have been restructured to 'ensure that the best students continue to be selected'. A Graduate Admissions Committee has been established to maintain oversight and reports to the EC and the Conference of Colleges. An online application system is now used by all subjects. The 2009-10 Graduate Studies Prospectus states that the 'normal minimum qualification to be eligible for admission as a graduate student' is a First or Upper Second class honours bachelor's degree or the international equivalent.

196 Induction 'involves departments, Colleges and supervisors'. The role of college advisers is more variable (paragraph 199). There is a two-day orientation course for international students, and an initial week of departmental and college activities for all new PGR students. In 2005-06, Oxford introduced a contract for all new postgraduate students, setting out the terms that govern their membership of the University.

197 The University's expectations regarding supervision of PGR students are set out in the Memorandum of Guidance for Research Students and Supervisors, the Examination Regulations and Policy and Guidance on Research Degrees, and divisional codes of practice on supervision. Joint supervision arrangements are made for PGR students wishing to pursue interdisciplinary research.

198 The roles of the DGS and the department 'reinforce the responsibilities of the supervisor'. QAA's special Review recommendation on the advisory nature of the good practice guide for supervisor arrangements (paragraph 188) has been addressed through the Embedding Graduate Studies initiative. The EC and divisions have introduced codes of practice for supervision that are readily available via all divisional websites. The codes of practice can vary somewhat between subjects, reflecting differences between disciplines. The EC has also published a Brief Guide to Supervision, which is aimed primarily at students. This document summarises the code of practice and highlights the specific responsibility of supervisor and student.

199 The EC 'requires' all new supervisors to be supported by experienced ones. The OLI offers sessions in this area to new and existing staff. There is now also a research supervision website. PGR students in all colleges have college advisers who either receive copies of supervision reports (most colleges) or are advised of any problems via the tutor for graduates. Some variation has been noted in how the adviser system functions in terms of induction process for students and staff and in expected frequency of meetings. Recommendations on improving the adviser system have been made by the College Quality Assurance Working Group Postgraduate Templates.

Progress and review

200 The University's PGR submission and completion rates for home/European Union and overseas PGR students are close to their respective HEFCE benchmarks for the institution and are a focus of the Embedding Graduate Studies programme (see above).

201 The monitoring and review process is set out in the Policy and Guidance on Research Degrees and for each student takes place in their department and college. Divisional codes of practice for supervision provide for a minimum number of formal meetings per term.

202 An online Graduate Supervision System (GSS) has been introduced (paragraph 144), which the University states 'will enhance monitoring capacity at University, divisional, departmental and College level'. The GSS was piloted in eight faculties/departments in 2007-08 and the University has now rolled out GSS to all departments and faculties. A progress report to EC noted that timely completion of supervision reports had been an 'ongoing issue' and that the proportion of students choosing to comment on their progress was 'relatively low'. However, the SWS commented favourably on the introduction of the GSS. The GSS is not yet seen by the students as making a major impact but, in the view of the University and the audit team, its potential for improving access to management information and in enhancing student support is considerable (see paragraph 144).

203 Students who intend to complete the DPhil degree are 'normally' admitted as a 'Probationary Research Student'. In some subjects, students must successfully undertake a master's course in year one before they can progress to DPhil status. There are two formal stages for PGR students prior to submission of their thesis: transfer from probationary to doctoral status (normally within three to four terms of admission) and confirmation of status, which must be before end of the ninth term. The transfer format is common across subjects, and includes details of subject-specific and general skills training, and supervisor's and college's support for the application. At transfer, each PGR student has a viva with two assessors, neither of whom is 'normally' the supervisor. There is a similar process at confirmation, where the student provides a timetable for submission.

204 The EC has reviewed transfer and confirmation stages in the Embedding Graduate Studies Initiative. This confirmed arrangements in the Humanities Division, but led to revisions in MPLS and Medical Sciences, while Social Sciences has launched a consultation.

Development of research and other skills

205 The development of research and general skills training at Oxford was cited as an example of good practice in the 2006 special Review of research degrees programmes. The University's Strategic Plan identifies PGR training as 'academic apprentices' as a 'core strategy'. Training requirements are set out in Policy and Guidance on Research Degrees and the EC's Graduate Skills Advisory Group is involved in both training and dissemination, with a remit linked to the Research Councils UK *Joint Skills Statement* and QAA's *Code of practice*.

206 The management of teaching opportunities for PGR students varies across the University and appears to be most structured in the Humanities Division where there is a central register for students wishing to act as graduate teaching assistants. Departments also have teaching registers (Policy and Guidance on Research Degrees). Substantive teaching roles are advertised by colleges.

207 Oxford University Students' Union is of the view that 'the majority of teaching should be delivered to undergraduates by senior research academics' and more than 50 per cent of PGR students surveyed for the SWS said that they had 'not sufficient opportunity to teach'. A similar proportion of PGR students thought that they had not received adequate training or support for teaching. The University has addressed such concerns. As stated in the institutional Briefing Paper, 'one of the factors underlying the University's bid to house a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) was concern on the part of graduate students and post-docs that there should be a more highly developed and structured framework to support those who intend to teach both within and beyond the University'. The Policy and Guidance on Research Degrees also states that the responsible body or officer should ensure that 'potential tutors/demonstrators understand that they can only take on such work having undergone relevant training and preparation' and that 'where possible, training should be under the auspices' of the CETL.

208 The CETL plays an important role in developing and supporting PGR students who wish to develop academic careers (paragraph 151). The institutional Briefing Paper refers to the role that divisional CETL coordinators, skills training coordinators and academic advisers (currently supported by TQEF; see paragraph 169) play in enabling staff and research students to enhance their teaching and professional/transferable skills. The audit team heard how the CETL was starting to make an impact through funding specifically tailored to each division. The SWS mentions that the work of the CETL and of the EC's Graduate Skills Advisory Group has 'clearly helped raise the profile of skills training for graduate research students'.

209 Divisions provide generic skills training and career development programmes of their own, which are advertised directly to postgraduate students, and oversee skills training and career development and support delivery by departments. The role of divisions in transferable skills training is reported to be higher in the sciences. In departments, the DGS is responsible for skills training, while supervisors are responsible for regularly monitoring and advising their students. The Skills Portal for Oxford University Researchers, which is managed by the Careers Service, provides comprehensive information on the training available to both academic staff and PGR students. The Oxford Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation provides training in business skills and the Business School has its own specialist careers service. In a survey reported in the SWS, attendance of various skills courses by PGR students was relatively high (58 per cent to 83 per cent) but students' comments suggested the need to publicise skills training more effectively and of embedding skills training more in departments.

210 The Careers Service, which is part of the Academic Administration Division, runs various programmes for PGR students, including career mentoring, writings CVs, and preparing for interview, and the Careers website has useful links to national developments and information on research careers. The Careers Service has also developed an online personal development planning system, ASPIRE (paragraphs 145, 146), although the audit team found that awareness of this facility is currently low across the University.

Feedback arrangements

211 The University and Conference of Colleges requires departments and colleges to promote effective feedback on individual progress and on the general student experience. The institutional Briefing Paper refers to GSS (paragraph 202) as a 'key development'. In departments, the 'most common' long-established feedback mechanism is the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) which provides a forum for PGR students to discuss issues with senior staff. There are also open meetings with the DGS and questionnaires. Medical Sciences has a divisional JCC and MPLS are piloting a similar system.

212 The University participates nationally in PRES and the International Student Barometer, and their findings, together with in-house surveys, are considered by the University's Graduate Panel and EC (paragraph 93) and relevant divisional and departmental committees. In addition to their supervisor and the DGS, PGR students can provide feedback via their college adviser and the college tutor for graduates/senior tutor. The EC receives an annual composite report based on college submissions on their postgraduate provision, together with recommendations from the Graduate Committee of the Conference of Colleges (paragraph 72). There are also informal, postgraduate breakfasts with the Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (paragraph 103), which were regarded by the student representatives as a useful means of informing them. Review committees, which contain external members, always meet PGR students.

Assessment, representation, complaints and appeals

213 Details on research student assessment are set out in Examination Regulations and Policy and Guidance on Research Degrees and in the senior proctor's annual report to the EC on complaints and appeals. Complaints and appeals procedures are published by the University and by the proctors. In the SWS and during the briefing visit there were some general concerns about the appeals and complaints procedures (paragraphs 78ff).

214 A postgraduate representative is an observer on Council and student representatives have the right to speak at Congregation. Postgraduate representatives are full members of the EC and its graduate subcommittees. The EC requires departments to have a JCC or similar means of consultation. Similar procedures 'operate' in colleges. A range of other options are available for student feedback (see above).

215 The audit team found that the University has a sound infrastructure in place to ensure satisfactory arrangements for postgraduate research students. The University has taken appropriate action following the report of QAA's special Review of research degree programmes in 2006, through the ongoing Embedding Graduate Studies programme, including the introduction of the GSS. Institutional oversight is provided by the Graduate Panel and the EC. The team considered that the research environment and postgraduate experience meet in full the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1*.

Section 7: Published information

216 The undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses are both informative and well-structured, and both contain sections on individual colleges and an indication of some criteria students might wish to use to choose between them. This information is supplemented by the University web pages that contain much information on the central structures and provision and departmental information. No concerns emerged regarding the accuracy of this information.

The published information regarding collaborative provision seen by the audit team also gave no cause for concern.

217 External examiner reports are circulated to divisional education committees (ECs) (or their equivalent), which have student membership; summary reports and actions arising from external examiners' reports are reported to EC, which also has student membership. The audit team also saw evidence of external examiner reports being freely available on the virtual learning environment platform or the University's intranet, supporting the reference in the Briefing Paper of 'longstanding practice of making examiners' reports available to students'.

218 Oversight for accuracy and consistency of central University sources of information for students, including regulations, handbooks and websites, is handled by the Education Policy Support Section and is monitored by the EC through the annual quality assurance template exercise. The University prospectuses are the responsibility of the Undergraduate Admissions Office and Graduate Admissions Office, under the aegis of the Academic Registrar. There is local responsibility for the content of departmental web pages and publications, with differing arrangements in place for oversight. Oxford University Computing Service and the Web Strategy Group provide rules and guidelines for content management of electronic resources, including accessibility issues, an area raised in the student written submission (SWS) as meriting continued attention, although the SWS also recognised University and departmental admissions web resources as generally good or better. The SWS also noted that departmental printed prospectus publications are generally good, although variable in levels of detail.

219 The coverage of the information regarding college provision is shared between the central University publications and those in colleges. One area in which there is college-wide information is in the annual Norrington table (produced under the aegis of the Conference of Colleges) which shows how many undergraduate degrees were gained in total for each college and breaks

that information down by degree classifications. This receives considerable internal and national media attention.

220 Colleges produce their own handbooks on their provision and rules, and these vary considerably in form and detail. College websites are also very variable in their structure and content. Students noted that a thorough comparison of the sometimes significantly different attributes of different colleges was not readily achievable through published information. This reflects a concern raised during the 2004 audit: 'one recurring issue highlighted was to learn in advance about the variability of provision between colleges'. The SWS also raised some concern regarding the accuracy of some aspects of information. Issues of variation which students raised as possible influences on their choices which had not been readily apparent in published information included (i) levels of rent; (ii) guarantees (or the lack of such) on the availability of accommodation during the three years of their undergraduate programme; (iii) the presence (or absence) of college personal tutors; (iv) the availability of college-based bursaries, scholarships and grants.

221 It is desirable that the University finds ways of ensuring that published information regarding college provision is clear and accurate in order to allow students to make an informed choice at admission.

222 The audit 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 standards of its awards.

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