QAA

University of Portsmouth

December 2008

Annex to the report

Contents

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Portsmouth (the University) from 1 to 5 December 2008 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 of the University. This audit considered the non-collaborative programmes of the University. Its collaborative programmes will later be subject to a separate collaborative provision audit.

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 found that the University takes deliberate actions at institutional level to improve the quality of the learning opportunities. The University has a structured and strategic approach to enhancing learning opportunities.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The audit team found that the University has a sound framework for its arrangements for postgraduate research students. The research environment and postgraduate experience meet the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*. However, the team found that postgraduate students who also undertake teaching are not always promptly trained for this role.

Published information

The audit team established that the University provides, an extensive and accessible range of published information for prospective and current students both electronically and printed. The team concluded that reliance can reasonably be placed in the integrity and reliability of the information the University publishes.

Features of good practice

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

- the regular review and updating of University policies with consistent use of gap analysis (paragraphs 16, 58, 80)

- the use of strategic themes to direct a wide range of staff development activities (paragraphs 16, 20)

- the role of the Department for Curriculum and Quality Enhancement in coordinating and promoting developments in the student learning experience (paragraphs 20, 151, 155, 156)

- the provision of case-studies for the training of external examiners (paragraph 52)

- the use of systematic feedback from students to inform major planning (paragraph 107)

- the University's pursuit of its employability and volunteering strategies including its cooperation with the Students' Union in these themes (paragraph 145)

- the accuracy and comprehensive nature of the information provided to students (paragraph 186).

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- ensure that its policies for the management of the submission, security and return of student coursework are followed consistently (paragraph 69).

It would be desirable for the University to:

- revise the external examiner report form with prompts for more detailed comment, in particular about learning opportunities, in order to strengthen the enhancement value of these reports (paragraph 54)

- ensure that before postgraduate research students undertake teaching duties, they are trained for that role in accordance with the University's requirement (paragraph 176).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1   The Instrument of Government for the University of Portsmouth was made by the Privy Council on 5 March 1993. The University has its origins in the Portsmouth Municipal College which opened in 1908. The University is located in the heart of the City of Portsmouth and comprises two campuses: the Guildhall Campus and the Langstone Residential Campus.

2   The University has five faculties: the Business School; Creative and Cultural Industries; Humanities and Social Sciences; Science; and Technology. In 2008-09, it has 19,629 higher education students: 14,899 are full-time, and 4,730 part-time. There are 3,204 taught postgraduate students, and 487 postgraduate research students; 2,052 students have international status for the purpose of fees.

3   The University's core mission is outlined in the strategic plan 'Looking ahead 2007-2012'. The University's Briefing Paper affirmed that the strategic plan 'grew organically from the previous plan'. The core mission is stated to be a 'commitment to innovative learning and teaching alongside significant research and scholarship, and by work that helps other organisations to benefit from the knowledge and skills available in the University'.

4   The University's Strategic Plan sets out the out four 'headline aims' of the strategy as follows: to give an excellent student experience focused on knowledge and skills essential for roles in the global workforce; to raise aspirations and to promote access to the University; to promote the discovery, development and application of knowledge through high-quality research; and to contribute to sustainable economic, social, cultural and community regeneration and development.

5   The University stresses its strong commitment to vocational and professional recognition. Evidence for this statement cited by the University includes the introduction of the subject of journalism, the establishment of a School of Professionals Complementary to Dentistry and a School of Law, the development of a range of employer-focused Foundation Degrees, engagement in the Lifelong Learning Network, and the establishment of progression agreements in vocational subjects with other education providers.

The information base for the audit

6   The information provided to the audit team included previous reports produced by QAA:

- Institutional audit, April 2004

- Foundation Degree reviews in Marine Systems Engineering, June 2005, and Police Studies, June 2004

- Major review of Allied Health Professions, March 2005

- Review of research degree programmes, July 2006.

7   The University provided the audit team with a range of documents and information including the following:

- information on the University's website, including its undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses

- reports by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies

- the institution's Briefing Paper

- the institution's internal documentation (contained within a CD-ROM appendix to the Briefing Paper)

- intranet access to a wide range of internal and published documents

- audit trails of two recent programme-level reviews

- notes taken at meetings with staff and students

- additional documentation requested by the team during the audit visit.

8   The documentation presented by the University was detailed, clear and up to date and was effective in enabling the audit team to undertake its duties.

9   The audit team was grateful to representatives of the University of Portsmouth's Students' Union who produced a student written submission that included detailed analysis of data relating to student opinions.

Developments since the previous audit

10   The previous QAA Institutional audit of April 2004 found that 'broad confidence could be placed in the soundness of the University's current management of the quality of its programmes; and the findings of the audit suggest that there can be broad confidence in the institutional-level capacity to manage effectively the security of its awards'. Good practice was identified in the quality and range of opportunities for staff development and the processes underpinning this; the development of a strong and supportive culture of student support, with highly accessible staff and responsive mechanisms; and the development of new roles, and organisational structures, which assist quality assurance and enhancement and the security of standards within the University.

11   The previous audit made advisable recommendations for the University to:

- develop its monitoring and review processes, in order to enable it to assure itself of the continuing coherence of programmes and their contribution to the standard of awards

- develop further its strategic approach to the academic direction and oversight of collaborative partnerships.

12   Further desirable recommendations were made for the University to:

- review its approach to variability in the local implementation of operational procedures across all areas of its work, focusing particularly on the degree of latitude to be permitted in the interpretation of University policies

- develop further the mechanisms that monitor the scope and range of external examiners' reports, in order that these might more fully inform both internal reporting mechanisms and the requirements of Teaching Quality Information

- extend further the practice of the sharing of external examiners between University awards and cognate awards offered by collaborative partners

- enhance and develop the implementation of the formal structures, which ensure that students are fully represented in a consistent way across the University.

13   In response to these recommendations, the University outlined an action plan that was approved by its Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) in November 2004. A task group was established drawn from across the University and chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor. This Monitoring and Review Task Group made its final recommendations for addressing the recommendations of the audit report to the Academic Council. The University stated in its Briefing Paper that in developments since the audit in 2004, its 'overriding emphasis has been to ensure that it continues to improve the learning experience of students' and that this is a major strategic theme of the University. From the evidence presented to it, the audit team concluded that the University had addressed the audit recommendations of 2004 effectively.

14   The 2004 advisable recommendation referring to monitoring and review processes has been addressed in revised procedures for annual monitoring and periodic review, and these are outlined in the University's 'Framework for Maintenance and Enhancement of Academic Standards and Quality', December 2007.

15   The comprehensive and accessible nature of the University's quality and standards framework has been enhanced through a programme of regular policy review, both for internal consistency and in recognition of changing external expectations, and is good practice. The review process includes consideration by the Academic Policy and Quality Group (APQG) which advises and makes recommendations to the Academic Policy Committee (APC), QAC and the Learning and Teaching Committee for formal approval. The scope and schedule of periodic review are determined centrally by QAC. The new monitoring and review processes reference effectively both the *Code of practice* and Institutional audit process.

16   Each year the University selects a special theme to be considered in its annual policy reviews. Chosen themes have included responses to the National Student Survey and employability, The themes chosen influence staff development activities and other operations to improve student life. This feature of the University's operations is good practice in supporting and enhancing the student experience as a strategic aim of the University.

17   In response to the desirable recommendations of the last Institutional audit, the University has made 'efforts to ensure that procedures and policies are well understood and consistently implemented across the University' by introducing new external examiner reporting templates and ensuring, where feasible, that external examiners are responsible for both home and collaborative course monitoring and scrutiny.

18   In response to the desirable recommendations the University has taken steps to enhance student representation. To this end, the University has provided further formal and informal opportunities for students to participate in quality assurance. Mechanisms exist at various levels for student involvement in the committee system. Student participation is evidenced by developments such as the staff-student consultative committee at departmental level, and by student course representatives being full members of the board of studies.

19   The Committee Handbook details arrangements for student representation in committees at faculty and university level. The Vice-Chancellor holds a regular meeting with the President of the Students' Union, to ensure engagement of the student body in University matters.

20   The Institutional audit report of 2004 identified 'the quality and range of opportunities for staff development and the processes underpinning them' as one of three areas of good practice. The University has taken effective steps to further this good practice by basing staff development around annual strategic themes. In this, the Department of Curriculum and Quality Enhancement is a vehicle for enhancement impacting on staff development policy, and the annual cycle of learning and teaching conferences at faculty and university level.

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

21   The University Directorate is responsible for the strategic direction of the University. It comprises the Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, two pro vice-chancellors and the Director of Finance. The Vice-Chancellor is Chair or Convenor of three committees: the Academic Council, the Ethics Committee and the Directorate. The senior management team in the Directorate establishes an annual operating plan to inform the work of committees.

22   The Academic Council has overall institutional responsibility for the securing of academic standards, which it discharges through the faculty boards and senior academic committees reporting to it. These committees and boards are the APC, the QAC, the Equality and Diversity Committee, the Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee, the University Research Degrees Committee, Information Technology Committee, and the Ethics Committee. Responsibility for standards at local level is discharged to faculties and academic departments which are accountable to the Academic Council through faculty boards. Faculty boards are responsible for regulating the teaching and study of their respective subject areas, for considering the progress of students, and making recommendations on the appointment of external examiners and the award of degrees and prizes.

23   The University's Framework for Maintenance and Enhancement of Academic Standards and Quality is supported by supplementary documents including The Approval, Modification and Closure of Academic Provision; Programme Monitoring and Review: Policy, Procedures and Guidelines; Academic Regulations; External Examiner Regulations; Codes of Practice for the Assessment of Students; and the Unit Management Handbook.

24   The associate dean posts were established in response to the Institutional audit in 2004. These posts are of value in providing links between the University, faculties, and departments that are essential to the University's devolved system of quality assurance. The associate dean (academic) posts are responsible for overseeing the development and quality of academic provision and standards within the faculties, and are responsible, with the associate deans (students), for the delivery of key aspects of the University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy.

25   The University's approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities is set out in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2005-10 and the E-Learning Strategy 2007-10: Embedding and Advancing.

26   The maintenance and management of standards for research degrees is set out in the University's Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees, August 2008, and this is supported by supplementary documentation such as the Handbook for Postgraduate Research Degree Students, and the Handbook for Postgraduate Research Degree Supervisors. QAA undertook a Review of research degree programmes in July 2006. From its examination of the University's response to the review and the supporting evidence, the review team formed the view that, overall, the 'institution's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree programme provision is appropriate and satisfactory'.

27   It was the view of the audit team that the framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities adopted by the University was clear and effective.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

Approval

28   The requirements for course approval and modifications are specified in the Approval, Modification and Closure of Academic Provision document. The procedures state that the Academic Council is ultimately responsible for the approval of courses leading to awards of the University, but delegates aspects of responsibility to the Academic Policy Committee, Curriculum Committee and the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) and for research degrees to the University Research Degrees Committee. The programme approval procedures apply to both home campus provision (including distance and online learning) and collaborative provision. For the approval of distance and online learning courses, additional considerations apply, and the University's internal approval of programmes leading to the awards of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) takes into account their requirements.

29   Comprehensive guidance to staff on the design of new courses is given in the Curriculum Framework document. There is a four-stage process for the approval of new courses. Firstly, proposals are presented to the faculty executive and then progress to the University Curriculum Committee. Both groups consider resource implications and strategic fit, and may veto proposals.

30   Secondly, a programme specification and course structure are prepared, and the Academic Registry checks on compliance with University policies and regulations. The University also determines the procedure for the subsequent stage of the approval process. Depending on the nature of the proposal, either a faculty curriculum approval committee is established for new courses within an existing established subject area, or, in areas such as new awards, cross-University provision, Foundation Degrees and professional doctorates, a University curriculum approval committee is set up by the Department of Curriculum and Quality Enhancement (DCQE). The University has clear criteria for decision on the path to be followed. Faculty and university-level committees follow the same procedure, although university-level committees have members who are also members of the QAC.

31   Thirdly there is a curriculum approval event at which the approval committee, including a member external to the University, meets. The committee considers the curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment strategies, arrangements for academic guidance, student support, and skills development, as well as unit contents, which are set out in the programme specification and unit descriptions. There are specific criteria for the appointment of an external assessor, which the audit team viewed as robust. External panel members receive a guide that prepares them for their role. The team was also informed that the appointment of external assessors is monitored by the Quality Management Division of the Academic Registry. The committee may stipulate conditions and recommendations which must be addressed before students can be registered.

32   Fourthly, the associate dean (academic) signs off the proposal after consultation with the approval panel, confirming that conditions have been addressed and that the course documents meet the required standard. Issues identified as recommendations, if not incorporated in the revised course documentation, must be reported at the first board of studies. The report of the panel is considered by the QAC for formal ratification, which may be given after stage 3 or stage 4.

33   Where a proposed award is very similar to an existing award, or where a new award is based on an existing academic framework, the approval event may be conducted by correspondence. The audit team heard that this was not a frequent concession. All non-standard events require approval for their format from the Curriculum Committee. Through an examination of the documentation

associated with an example of this process, the audit team was able to confirm that the process was robust and involved external assessors. The procedures had been followed and requirements fully adhered to. The two programme components had been approved by a faculty approval committee using the standard course approval process. The combined award was subsequently considered and approved by a University curriculum committee by correspondence.

34   For new combined honours courses, the two subject elements are approved separately as 'halves' and are then considered together by a University curriculum approval committee, reporting to the QAC. The term 'half' is used as a convenience, irrespective of the weighting in the overall course. The audit team noted that combined honours courses do not have a single programme specification. Instead, the course themes are defined by the programme specifications of the two 'halves', and students are informed in other documents of which elements from the single honours specifications may be taken to achieve combined honours.

35   Approximately 50 per cent of the University's courses engage with one or more PSRBs. The University has developed flowcharts to assist staff in the procedures to be followed when PSRBs are involved in either the development of new courses or the accreditation of existing courses. The audit team viewed the procedures as providing effective interaction with PSRBs.

36   The audit team saw several examples of course approval documents which demonstrated that the process had been conducted according to the University's requirements.

37   Occasional changes to approved programmes at unit level are approved by the associate dean (academic) upon receipt of a standard form outlining the requested modifications, and may cumulatively trigger course review, as determined by the associate dean (academic). Changes that are possible at unit level are listed in the Unit Management Handbook and are divided into minor and major. Designation as major or minor influences the notification period required. Major changes to courses are considered by the University Curriculum Committee, which considers the potential effects on existing students and applicants. The Approval, Modification and Closure of Academic Provision document specifies the process. Requests for modifications are reviewed by the Academic Registry, which makes a recommendation to the Curriculum Committee, and may also result in course review. Such review is distinct from periodic review and is essentially an approval process.

38   In November 2008, the Academic Policy and Quality Group (APQG) agreed further guidance on course modification and course approval procedures for existing courses where significant changes are proposed, or where a review is necessary as a result of cumulative change. The audit team learnt that some changes, such as changes to the title, award or annual intakes, will be considered by correspondence. Other major changes are approved through the standard course approval process.

39   The audit team reviewed a sample of minor and major modification approvals, and confirmed that the approval decisions had been made adhering to the processes and criteria specified in the University's procedures.

40   The audit team established that there was a formal process for programme closure and the team saw examples of how students had been involved in programme closures. The team concluded that the University's procedures ensured that there were effective procedures to safeguard the interests of students in such cases.

Annual monitoring

41   Revised processes for annual monitoring and periodic review were piloted in 2006, evaluated and piloted again in 2007, and then implemented across the University. These processes focus, within broad disciplines, more on grouping courses according to their structure or their professional relevance, than by academic subject. The revised processes are expressed in a single document, Programme Monitoring and Review: Policy, Procedure and Guidelines,

that the audit team considered showed good articulation with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and the *Code of practice*. The University provides guidance notes for each aspect of annual monitoring and review, including suggested agendas for meetings.

42   Annual monitoring results in the production of monitoring reports at departmental, faculty and university level. At departmental level, unit evaluation reports, course leaders' annual standards and quality evaluative reviews (ASQER), and heads of department annual standards and quality evaluative reviews are produced to a template. At faculty level, annual review group meetings take place and a faculty executive meeting specifically considers learning resource issues. At university level, the APQG considers emerging quality assurance issues arising from annual monitoring, and the Chair of QAC provides a report to Academic Council. According to the University's Briefing Paper, annual monitoring focuses on 'fitness for purpose'.

43   For annual monitoring purposes, unit coordinators provide an evaluative report on each unit, which includes staff and student comment, achievement statistics and external examiner comment. Reports are considered by a unit assessment board, or a subcommittee thereof. The course leader's ASQER reports threats to standards, proposes actions and includes responses to the previous year's action points. The head of department's ASQER focuses on all the courses within the department, and it takes into account the ASQERs produced by the course leaders. The heads of department's ASQERs have been supplemented for the previous three years by a commentary on a special annual theme, which the audit team noted as contributing to the enhancement agenda. The heads of department's ASQERs are discussed at a meeting of the faculty associate deans and department representatives and at faculty executive. The QAC considers all the reviews and is also presented with digests of points of note produced by the associate deans.

44   The APQG has a standing item to discuss issues arising from the heads' reports and faculty executive minutes. Using these, the Chair of QAC produces a report on academic standards and quality enhancement which is considered by the QAC and Academic Council. The audit team confirmed that reporting is conducted as required by University procedures. The team considered this process as a suitable means of maintaining institutional oversight.

Periodic review

45   The University defines the purpose of periodic review as 'to provide confirmation at programme level of the curriculum's continued fitness of purpose and that annual monitoring and review processes are being effective', and according to the University's Briefing Paper, periodic review focuses on 'fitness of purpose', and occurs on a six-year cycle. The review process involves consideration of documentation supplied prior to the review event, discussions with staff, students and with other stakeholders of the curriculum. The process draws on extant documents, particularly ASQERs, and a commentary on key features revealed during the delivery of the course. The review panel includes external representation, and the chair is from outside the faculty. As with approval, there are criteria for the appointment of an external assessor, which the audit team again viewed as robust. The panel meets students and staff, and produces a report that includes explicit judgements on the fitness of purpose of the curriculum and the effectiveness of annual monitoring. The report is considered at department level where an action plan is produced. The report and action plan are then presented to the faculty executive and the QAC. Progress on action plans is monitored by the associate dean (academic).

46   The audit team scrutinised documentation of examples of course annual monitoring and periodic review which demonstrated that the processes had been applied consistently and following the University's requirements. Through meetings the team also noted that staff of the University, at a range of levels, were broadly familiar with the principles and processes of monitoring and review.

47   In conclusion, the audit team regarded the University's approval, monitoring and periodic review process as effective in securing the academic standards of its awards.

External examiners

48   In its Briefing Paper the University stated that 'the role of external examiners is to report on whether standards are appropriate…; on the comparability of student standards of achievement to those of similar programmes…at other UK institutions…; and on the extent to which the University's processes for assessment, examination, and the determination of awards are sound and have been fairly conducted'. In fulfilment of their role, external examiners are not required to assess student work or give final approval to academic decisions. The University explained that such involvement in assessment would compromise an impartial judgement on the quality of assessment. However, the University further explained that an exception occurs where a PSRB requires the involvement of an external examiner in the assessment process, and that in this circumstance an additional external examiner is appointed for this, so as to maintain the impartial view of the external examiner in the University's model. The audit team viewed this arrangement as appropriate.

49   There are appointments as subject external examiners who are associated with cognate groups of units and report to unit assessment boards, and award external examiners who report on named awards at meetings of boards of examiners. Award external examiners must also be subject external examiners. Unit assessment boards confirm student marks at the unit level, and boards of examiners consider and make decisions on the progression of students and the award of degrees. The 'External Examiners: Regulations and Procedures' document lays out the roles, powers and responsibilities of external examiners, and is supplemented by Guidance Notes for External Examiners, which details their role. The audit team regarded these University documents as clear and accessible, and noted their close fit with the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*.

50   The University stipulates criteria for the appointment of external examiners, contained in the External Examiners: Regulations and Procedures document. External examiner appointments are proposed by heads of department and considered by the relevant associate dean (academic) before passing to the External Examiner Appointments Panel, which is chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor. The panel makes a recommendation for ratification by the Academic Council, by consideration at the panel's parent committee, the QAC. The audit team regarded the criteria and procedures for the appointment of external examiners as explicit and robust, and noted significant discussion on individual proposals that had taken place at the QAC.

51   The Academic Registry maintains a database of external examiners and monitors appointment scheduling and report production, although the relevant head of department is responsible for ensuring that all units are allocated an external examiner, and the relevant associate dean (academic) is responsible for the appointment and deployment of external examiners, and for dealing with their reports.

52   External examiners are strongly encouraged to attend an induction event and approximately 70 per cent of the University's external examiners at September 2008 had done so. External examiners also have access to a website that supports their activities. In order to enhance an understanding of the regulations and procedures by external examiners, detailed case studies of practice are used at induction and are available on the internet. The audit team examined the case studies and noted the comprehensive way in which they brought into sharp focus the interaction of the regulations of the University with the role of the external examiner. The team considered the provision of case-studies for the training of external examiners as a feature of good practice.

53   The University views external examiners' reports as 'an important component of the University's quality assurance processes'. The 2004 Institutional audit of the University recommended that the mechanisms to monitor the scope and range of external examiners' reports were developed further to inform reporting mechanisms more fully. The University responded by modifying the procedure for the preparation and consideration of reports. Reports, to a standard format, are returned to the Academic Registrar and then copied to the

Pro Vice-Chancellor and the relevant associate dean (academic) and head of department. Negative responses to questions concerning standards trigger action by the Pro Vice-Chancellor. Heads of department are responsible for responding formally to each external examiner and copies of responses go to the associate dean (academic) who has responsibility for ensuring consideration at faculty and department levels. Responses inform the Chair of QAC's annual report to the Academic Council. Reports and responses also inform the annual monitoring and periodic review processes where they are considered as part of course leaders' and heads of departments' reviews. In addition, subject external examiners' reports are considered at unit assessment boards, with the outcome informing the annual monitoring process. Associate deans (academic) produce a summary of the substantive points of each report, which is considered by the QAC. The audit team came to the view that the University makes good use of external examiners' reports at various levels of the University.

54   A sampling of external examiners' reports by the audit team indicated that while external examiners were diligent in answering the direct questions asked by the University where a short summary response is required, in many cases they had provided little written description or analysis of their findings. The team considered the effect of the nature of the template that external examiners are asked to complete. Although the template asks for commentary, the issues on which commentary is required are not specified in detail, and some external examiners have responded very briefly within the template. The team further considered that the University was missing an opportunity to gain a full, independent appraisal of the assessment process at course level, and concluded that it was desirable for the University, in order to strengthen the enhancement value of external examiners' reports, to revise the report form with prompts for more detailed comment, in particular about learning opportunities.

55   In its Briefing Paper and in the External Examiners: Regulations and Procedures document, the University indicated that award external examiners' reports are shared with students through their consideration at boards of study. A scrutiny by the audit team of the minutes of boards of study revealed the consideration of matters raised by both subject and award external examiners through the presentation of a digest rather than the reports themselves.

56   The audit team came to the conclusion that the University was making strong and scrupulous use of its external examiners in securing the standards of its awards.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

57   In its Briefing Paper, the University indicated that its 'approach to the requirements of the Academic Infrastructure is set out in the Framework for the Maintenance and Enhancement of Academic Standards and Quality' document, that 'key external references that inform our approach to standards include the Academic Infrastructure, PSRB requirements and other nationally accepted standards' and that the University engages fully with all aspects of the Academic Infrastructure. A scrutiny by the audit team of the Framework for the Maintenance and Enhancement of Academic Standards and Quality confirmed that the University's Framework was aligned with the FHEQ, and took into account the expectations of the *Code of practice*.

58   Consultations on, and revisions to, elements of the Academic Infrastructure, and new elements of the *Outcomes from Institutional audit* series, published by QAA, are discussed as they become available at university-level committees. In its Briefing Paper, the University stated that it uses gap analysis as part of 'a systematic process to ensure that practices and procedures map against the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points'. Revisions to policies and procedures produced from gap analyses are submitted to the relevant University committee for discussion and approval. By examining a sample of the gap analyses and tracking their impact through the University's committees, the audit team confirmed the systematic use of gap analysis. This contributed to the team's conclusion that the regular review and updating of University policies with consistent use of gap analysis was a feature of good practice.

59   In both its Briefing Paper and the document External Examiners: Regulations and Procedures, the University indicated that in coming to a conclusion about the appropriateness of standards set, external examiners are asked to report on the engagement with subject benchmark statements, programme specifications and the FHEQ. Although the audit team noted strong and clear links between the University's document External Examiners: Regulations and Procedures and the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*, the template used for external examiners' reports does not prompt commentary on engagement with the Academic Infrastructure.

60   Programme specification documents make reference to the FHEQ, the *Code of practice* and subject benchmark statements, and show clearly the relationship between learning outcomes, assessment and the standards of awards. The audit team also noted strong, explicit and implicit correspondence between the University's Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students and the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*, and that the University's Code of Practice takes into account the FHEQ. Similarly, the team noted that the University's Curricula Framework Document is built around the Academic Infrastructure.

61   Course approval and review processes make scrupulous use of external advice, and engage fully with the Academic Infrastructure.

62   The University affirms that its focus on alignment with the FHEQ provides confidence of accord with the expectations of the Bologna Process. The University is at an early stage in responding to the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, published by ENQA; discussions at the APQG demonstrate that the University is aware of developments.

63   Approximately 50 per cent of the University's undergraduate provision is engaged with PSRBs. Associate deans (academic) maintain oversight of engagement at faculty level, reporting to faculty executives and boards. The theme of interactions with PSRBs is a standing item on boards of studies' agendas, and interactions are reported in course leaders' and heads of department's annual reviews. University oversight is though the QAC, which receives and discusses review reports prepared by PSRBs and approves resulting action plans. The audit team viewed the University's engagement with PSRBs as effective in both meeting PSRB requirements and maintaining award standards.

64   The audit team concluded that the University is making effective use of all aspects of the Academic infrastructure and other external reference points in securing the standards of its awards.

Assessment policies and regulations

65   In its Briefing Paper, the University stated that its Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students provides a common framework for assessment practices and that its local Code of Practice 'supports the tenets that assessment should be explicit, reliable, consistent, reproducible, facilitative, equitable, valid and just'. The University affirmed that its Code of Practice had been mapped against the *Code of practice* element of the Academic Infrastructure published by QAA. Assessment policies and regulations are made available to staff through the intranet, and changes are communicated to staff by email. The audit team was able to confirm a good correspondence between the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students* and the University's Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students, and it considered the University's documents concerning assessment to be full and accessible.

66   The Academic Registrar presents an annual review of examinations and assessment process to the QAC. The review gives a summary of external examiners' concerns, assessment offences and degree classifications by faculty and department, with comparable data for the two previous years. The audit team noted a full discussion at the QAC of the contents of the review with suitable action planning.

67   The University operates a two-tier system of formal meetings to agree assessment outcomes. The marks from units are confirmed at unit assessment boards. Boards of examiners then recommend awards and make decisions on the progression of students, based on the confirmed unit marks. Both types of meeting may consider units or awards grouped into cognate areas.

68   In its Student Handbook, the University includes a section on academic honesty and integrity, stating that it 'will not tolerate academic dishonesty in any form', and gives information on plagiarism and its avoidance. The students whom the audit team met were aware of the University's views about academic misconduct and, specifically, of the need to avoid plagiarism in their work. The students also confirmed that, in general, assessment criteria were issued to them in an understandable form, and students in their final year were aware of the methods for calculating their final degree grade.

69   In its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2005-2010, the University identified a strategic objective as 'the further development of assessment that is engaging, promotes learning and enables continuous development'. A further objective concerns 'the explicit use of assessment and feedback to promote learning by providing useful, timely and relevant feedback' to students on their work. The students whom the audit team met confirmed that feedback to them was, in general, valuable, but indicated that there was considerable variability in both the quality and the timeliness of that feedback. Some feedback was issued after the University's target period of 20 working days without reason for the delay, and after the time when feedback could be used in preparation for subsequent coursework. Some students met by the team were unaware of the University's expectation concerning the timely return of work. The students were also concerned about the variability between departments in the issue of receipts to students for work submitted. In some cases, receipts had been issued after a few days' delay, and in others, no receipt was issued. Students also stated that in a minority of cases students could, while collecting their assessed work, access the work of other students. In its Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students, the University indicates that 'departments must make provision for systems to ensure that coursework submission is secure, documented and that receipts are made available'. A scrutiny by the team of committee minutes indicated that the University was aware of the issues the students had identified; the team considered that effective remedies had not been actioned in all cases. Against this background, the team concluded that it was advisable for the University to ensure that its policies for the management of the submission, security and return of student coursework are followed consistently.

70   Overall, the audit team found that the University's assessment policies and regulations make an effective contribution to its management of standards, and that they take into account the precepts of Sections 4, 5 and 6 of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA.

Management information - statistics

71   The ultimate responsibility for the integrity of management information lies with the Academic Registry. Since the 2004 Institutional audit, the University has implemented a new single student record system. The system is accessed by administrative staff to produce standard reports on student admissions, assessment and achievement, which are monitored by the associate deans (students), and inform annual monitoring and periodic review. Reports are prepared for both unit examination boards and boards of examiners; decisions at the former affecting the reports produced for the latter. Where the regulations allow more than one method of calculating the final degree classification of students, reports indicate the outcome of each method. The University affirms that this promotes consistency in grading decisions. However, particularly for those courses that are structured in non-standard ways, difficulties have been encountered in generating course reports to yield the information required to maintain an adequate overview. In meetings with staff, the University explained that the difficulties in part arose owing to unfamiliarity with the capability and functioning of the new system. Through a scrutiny of University documents, including committee minutes, the audit team was able to confirm that the University was aware of the difficulties and was acting to resolve them.

Further, the team came to the same conclusion as the University which, in its Briefing Paper, stated that the challenges had been managed 'so as not to impact upon standards'.

72   Course leaders and heads of department may also access student data that is compiled at defined census points through the reporting function 'At-A-Glance'. At-A-Glance is a means of accessing certain data held on the management information system. At-A-Glance provides a broad range of information, for example, class lists and summary progression and achievement data. Data generated through At-A-Glance is principally used to support annual monitoring by informing annual standards and quality evaluative reviews. By examining documents associated with the annual and periodic review processes, the audit team came to the view that the University was using management information effectively to support both processes.

73   In maintaining institutional oversight of activity, higher level committees receive reports that are generated from data held by the University. The Academic Registrar presents an Annual Review of Examinations and Assessment Process to the QAC. The Academic Policy Committee and the Learning and Teaching Committee receive the Destination and Leavers from Higher Education Report. This report gives information disaggregated by faculty. Similarly, the Department for Curriculum and Quality Enhancement coordinates the production of a series of reports and data sets concerning widening participation that are presented to faculties. Key information on widening participation is also presented at staff forums including, in 2008, at the Admissions Conference. The audit team noted discussion of data with suitable action planning within the University.

74   The audit team confirmed that the University was using the data available to it in a suitable manner, in order to secure the standards of its awards.

75   The audit team concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

76   In its Briefing Paper, the University considered that its policies and procedures take good note of external reference points such as the *Code of practice*. The University also stated that it engages with all aspects of the Academic Infrastructure and has a systematic process of gap analysis, regular review and update of its policies and procedures to take account of external changes, and to ensure that its procedures meet the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points. The University's use of gap analysis has already been described and commented on in Section 2, above.

77   The audit team learnt that review of revised sections of the *Code of practice* is led by an officer of the University and involves a small team of experienced staff. It includes a gap analysis which is submitted to the Academic Policy and Quality Group (APQG) for consideration and informs consideration of changes that might be necessary. A summary of the actions identified is kept by the Quality Management Division of Academic Registry, and progress on actions is periodically checked by the APQG. The results are made available on the University's intranet. Policies and procedures revised as a result of this process are submitted to the corresponding University committee such as the Academic Policy Committee (APC) or the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) for consideration. When University policies reach the time of their three-yearly review, the relevant *Code of practice* section is one of the reference points.

78   The audit team examined examples of reviews of University practice in relation to *Code of practice* sections, and was able to confirm that the reviews had been carried out rigorously, with modifications made to University policy and procedures as necessary. Whereas the gap analysis of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining* identified no gaps in policy and procedures, and

therefore raised no actions, the gap analysis for the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education* resulted in recommendations which were reported to the APQG. Progress on actions was tracked by the APQG, and informed the revision of the University's Admissions Policy and the production of an Admissions Code of Practice. The proposed amendments to both documents were then submitted to the APC for consideration, and were subsequently approved by the Academic Council.

79   In the Briefing Paper, the University stated that course development, approval and review processes also take into account the *Code of practice*, and programme specifications include cross-references to the *Code*. The audit team examined programme specifications and was able to confirm that these refer to sections of the *Code*.

80   The audit team formed the view that the way in which the University reviews changes in the *Code of practice* ensures that there is complete coverage, and that any changes proposed relating to management of the quality of learning opportunities receive well-informed consideration for incorporation into revisions of the University's policies and procedures, where these changes are then made transparent to staff. The team concluded that the University makes effective use of the *Code* and other external reference points, and it considered the regular review and updating of University policy, with consistent use of gap analysis, as good practice.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

Approval

81   The approval procedures of the University ensure that learning opportunities are considered, with resourcing being one of the major themes. Guidance is given to staff through associate deans (academic), and documentary requirements for the expression of course proposals are specified in a document checklist which is available on the course approval website of the Academic Registry. Training is provided for approval panel chairs and internal panel members. This training is viewed as effective by staff.

82   Course approval involves consideration of strategic, resource, financial and policy issues, the market demand and the programme title. All proposals going to university-level consideration must have prior approval of the faculty executive and be agreed by the dean. On occasion, proposals were not supported or approved because of resource concerns.

83   For distance and online learning courses, additional issues are considered, such as the soundness of the information technology delivery systems; the appropriateness of the induction arrangements for students; action plans for the design and implementation of the curriculum with timescales for course development; academic, administrative and pastoral support arrangements; arrangements for feedback to students, and staff training and development for those involved in the delivery and assessment of the programme. Approval committees must normally include at least one member who has experience in the delivery and support of distance or online learning provision, and the panel must have access to some intended teaching materials prior to the approval event.

84   The audit team examined how the University ensured that programme approval decisions were made independently from the programme delivery team and found that this was achieved through the composition of approval committees. The committee chair is external to the faculty, and faculty committee members are external to the department in which the programme is offered. The approval committee reports its decision to the QAC, which has oversight of the outcomes of all curriculum approval events, including all conditions and recommendations, and which formally agrees all approval decision.

85   Through its reading of documentation the audit team formed the view that the procedures for the approval of courses with regard to learning opportunities operated as intended by the University. The process is rigorous and effective.

Annual monitoring

86   Key evidence to be considered in monitoring the effectiveness of courses with regard to learning opportunities is clearly specified in the document Programme Monitoring and Review: Policy, Procedure and Guidelines. It includes the evaluation of learning opportunities at boards of study and staff-student consultative committee meetings.

87   The remit of boards of study is the review and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities and ensuring that internal and external requirements for learning opportunities are met. Membership of the boards includes student representatives. Boards meet twice each year, operating to a standard agenda which requires the consideration of reports from staff-student consultative committee meetings. Examining documentation from the boards of study, the audit team found that this item in particular provided a good opportunity for the consideration of learning opportunities.

88   Staff-student consultative committee meetings take place in advance of boards of study. The recommended agenda focuses on learning opportunities in units, information technology, library provision and student support. The audit team confirmed that these committees work as intended. Themes in learning opportunities had been the focal point of discussions.

89   Course leaders' annual standards and quality evaluative review (ASQER) reports include an evaluation of the quality and enhancement of learning opportunities, and are considered and approved by boards of study. The audit team found evidence of clear, analytic and evidenced reporting. Reports are produced to the University template, and are considered by higher committees and boards.

90   The annual standards and quality evaluative reviews conducted by heads of department serve the purpose of identifying issues affecting standards and quality. Their reports are informed by course leaders' reports. Heads' reports particularly address the need to enhance the quality of learning opportunities, the effectiveness of learning resources in meeting reasonable expectations for the quality of learning opportunities, and resource allocation themes. All reports are considered within the faculty mechanisms and then by the QAC. The audit team found evidence of very full reporting and consideration of themes such as feedback from students, employability and communicating with students. The team also confirmed that due consideration is given to reports at faculty level.

91   Overall, the audit team formed the view that the course leaders' and heads' ASQER reports are an effective tool for evaluating the management of learning opportunities on programmes and enabling discussion of this at programme and departmental level. On the basis of the evidence presented, the team concluded that the annual monitoring process represented an effective means to review each programme and to encourage planning for enhancement at programme, departmental, faculty and university level.

Periodic review

92   To ensure the continued validity and relevance of programmes, the University uses its periodic review process. Where relevant, this is combined with reviews by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). The periodic review process is similar to that of course approval. The arrangements are set out in the Programme Monitoring and Review: Policy, procedure and Guidelines document including review criteria and documentary requirements.

93   In the Briefing Paper, the University stated that the scope of each review and the periodic review schedule were determined centrally by the QAC. Periodic reviews draw on documentary evidence about learning opportunities such as annual monitoring reports, programme specifications, National Student Survey (NSS) data, PSRB reports, external examiner comments, admissions, progression and achievement information, departmental commentaries on the evidence, and a commentary on incremental changes since the last review.

94   The audit team confirmed that the University's periodic review process for maintaining the quality of students' learning opportunities was robust and comprehensive. Through the audit trails, the team verified that the University's procedures had been respected and review events had been conducted in a rigorous manner. The team found that review panels included external assessors as required, and had carefully considered the evidence. Reports clearly identified the outcomes, key strengths of the provision and any conditions and recommendations. Action plans arising from the reviews stated the actions to be taken and by whom. The minutes for the QAC demonstrated scrutiny of the reports, recommendations and the associated responses and action plans.

95   The audit team heard that the University periodically assessed the effectiveness of its course approval, monitoring and review processes. The team was informed that until recently review meetings took place annually, convened by the Quality Management Division of the Academic Registry, and considered feedback from members of approval and review panels. As no major issues were raised in the previous year, at the time of the audit, no meeting had been required for some while. There is also an annual internal audit to check that programme approval and review processes have been completed.

96   Overall, the audit team found the University's arrangements for approval, monitoring and review to be effective, and had taken into account the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*. These arrangements make an important contribution to the University's management of learning opportunities.

97   The audit team concluded that the University has a comprehensive set of policies and procedures for programme and unit approval, revision and review that are operated effectively. As such, they serve to ensure the continuing provision of programmes of study that help students to achieve the intended learning outcomes of their programmes and attain their awards.

Management information - feedback from students

98   The University's arrangements for student feedback are set out in the Student Feedback Policy. The Policy requires the systematic collection of feedback at unit and course level for all undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision, and selectively on aspects of provision at university level through user surveys. These surveys aim to gather quantitative data on student awareness and use of services. Qualitative survey data on specific aspects may be obtained through focus groups and student user panels. The audit team heard that the University regularly reflects on its Student Feedback Policy as part of its policy review cycle, and in response to student requests.

99   The Briefing Paper stated that as a result of the introduction of the NSS course feedback was no longer required at final-year undergraduate level where NSS data were available. All departments are expected to use the University's unit and course questionnaire templates, but there is flexibility to add specific questions. Course questionnaires must cater for particular categories of students, for example, distance-learning and combined honours students.

100   The audit team examined the process of collection and analysis of student survey feedback, and the use made by the University of the findings. The team found that unit questionnaires were used consistently across programmes, and included part-time, distance-learning and postgraduate students. The University told the team that responsibility for the analysis of unit and course feedback rests with faculties. The team established that the focus of unit questionnaires is on student satisfaction with teaching and assessment. Course questionnaires cover academic guidance and support, learning and teaching, learning resources and overall satisfaction with the course. They also elicit comments on placements, dissertations, projects, distance-learning and online learning study modes. Questionnaire templates clearly state the purpose and evaluation process of the questionnaire.

101   The audit team found evidence of careful consideration of feedback results. The outcomes of unit feedback are incorporated into unit evaluation reports together with a summary of unit satisfaction averages, and are considered by unit assessment boards and boards of study.

The team saw some proposals for changes to units. In discussions with staff, the team heard that associate deans (students) collate results for all units in the faculty and produce a report each semester. Heads of department are also informed of issues arising. The team found that course-level results were appropriately considered in course leaders' ASQER reports, and that heads of department commented on student feedback in their ASQER reports.

102   In the student written submission (SWS), students particularly valued unit questionnaires as a way for them to suggest changes. The audit team explored how students are informed of actions taken as a result of feedback made to the University. Staff who met the team explained that they discussed any issues at boards of study, where students are represented, and communicated changes made through staff-student consultative committees, through notice-boards and the intranet. Some students, although acknowledging that many of their suggestions were adopted, expressed the view that there was insufficient consistency across the University in informing them about actions taken.

103   In its Briefing Paper, the University stated that it had made comprehensive and systematic use of the findings of the NSS. The audit team examined documents on consideration of NSS data, and confirmed the University's view. The outcomes of the NSS at the University demonstrate continuous improvement in the perceived student experience over the last three years.

104   The Department of Curriculum and Quality Enhancement (DCQE) produces an initial analysis of NSS results. The analysis compares the University's overall results with those for the sector and examines the results for each subject code grouping. This results in the identification of issues to be addressed at institutional and subject level. The audit team also saw evidence that the report and progress on actions taken at faculty level had been considered by the University Learning and Teaching Committee, APC, QAC and the Academic Council. A brief report summarising the results, recommendations and actions taken had also been submitted to the Governors' Student Advice and General Affairs Committee. In addition, the Student Support and Advice Committee considers an analysis of student satisfaction by gender, age, ethnicity, domicile and social class.

105   Faculty learning and teaching committees consider relevant parts of the initial analysis and heads of department are provided with summary data and student comments, which they are expected to consider as part of their ASQER. The audit team found evidence, however, that this had not occurred in all cases. In 2006, action taken in response to the NSS was also the topic of a thematic report written by heads of department for consideration by the QAC.

106   The audit team also examined the collection and analysis of student feedback through service user surveys, and the use made by the University of the findings. University service departments conduct different types of user surveys ranging from small to large-scale surveys. Depending on the type, outcomes were discussed at departmental meetings or at University committees. Student feedback through user surveys has informed major planning decisions. For example, the outcomes of the 2004 library survey contributed to the development of the design brief for the library extension, and a more recent follow-up survey informed modifications to the zoning areas in the library. Another survey contributed to the planning of the redevelopment of the information technology suites.

107   Overall, the audit team confirmed that student feedback is sought from students across the University through a variety of means. The results of local, institutional and national student feedback inform the critical evaluation and enhancement of units, courses, services and practices. The team concluded that the institution's arrangements for student feedback are effective and make a significant contribution to the quality of learning opportunities. The team considered the use of systematic feedback from students to inform major planning as good practice. Feedback is also sought through departmental, faculty and University committees. This process is explained in the section below.

Role of students in quality assurance

108   The University's arrangements and expectations for student representation at course and departmental level are clearly laid out in the Programme Monitoring and Review: Policy, Procedure and Guidelines document. Students are represented through course representatives at staff-student consultative committees and boards of study. The former deal exclusively with student matters and are held three times each year before boards of study. Course representatives make up half of the membership. There are also a few cross-University staff-student consultative committees, for example, for combined honours degree programmes, with student representation from all combined honours programmes. From the SWS, the audit team learnt that course representatives can also report their concerns and issues to the Course Representative Executive meeting of the Students' Union each month. Course representatives are also members of boards of study. These meet twice each year to review academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities of cognate programmes or related pathways within a given department; they ensure that University and faculty requirements are implemented. Staff-student consultative committees and boards of study have standard agendas.

109   The Briefing Paper stated that the student representation system worked consistently for on-campus full-time students. The audit team reviewed its operation and confirmed that it operated as intended at the required times, following the standard agendas. Actions arising were clearly identified. Adaptations had been made for part-time and distance-learning students whose views were sought through email or the virtual learning environment. Staff-student consultative committees produce a brief report of issues raised by students; this is made available to boards of study.

110   Students confirmed that the representative system generally worked well. They reported that their comments are taken seriously, but that, as with questionnaires, the consistency of responses to course representative suggestions varied across the University. Some students reported that updates on actions taken were provided in writing. Students also reported that they were informed about the student representative system at induction, and received training, which they rated very highly, by the Students' Union for the role of student representative. The SWS stated that uptake of training in the past had not been satisfactory, and the Students' Union had therefore made some significant changes to the training programme. Attendance had since improved, and the audit team saw evidence from the Students' Union that about 40 per cent of representatives had received training. The University records that about twice this percentage of registered course representatives has been trained.

111   In the previous year, the Students' Union also undertook a review of the student representation system. As a result, a bi-annual meeting of the Course Representative Executive with a pro vice-chancellor and associate deans (students) had been introduced. This gave course representatives direct access to senior management. Recommendations made in the review included the establishment of mechanisms which ensure that all courses have at least one representative; the creation of an online directory that enables easy access by students to their representatives and their contact information; making staff-student consultative committees student-led meetings with minutes circulated to the Students' Union Education and Representation Officer, and the implementation of a democratic election system for representatives. At the time of the audit, satisfactory progress had been made to implement these recommendations.

112   The arrangements for student representation on committees at faculty and university level are specified in the Committee Handbook. The audit team established that course representatives, one from each department or school, are members of the faculty board. Faculty course representatives also attend the Course Representative Executive Meeting of the Students' Union and form a student council. In its Briefing Paper, the University stated that student interest in faculty business was not as great as at departmental and course level, and that some students considered it remote from their experience. Attendance at meetings had therefore been

inconsistent. The team was informed that, together with the Students' Union, the University was taking steps to address this issue.

113   At university level, student representation in committees is primarily through sabbatical officers of the Students' Union. The Students' Union viewed these opportunities as highly valuable. The President and the Education and Representation Officer are members of the Academic Council. By virtue of office, the President is also a member of the Board of Governors. Students' Union officers are members of key University committees. The President also liaises with the Vice-Chancellor in a more informal manner. The audit team found evidence of the involvement in, and contribution of, students to these committees, but also noted the pattern of irregular attendance in some cases.

114   The audit team reached the view that, overall, the arrangements for student involvement in quality management processes are effective, and the way in which the University engages with students makes a valuable contribution to the management of the quality of learning opportunities.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

115   The University hosts an annual learning and teaching conference, and this is supported by annual learning and teaching conference events at faculty level. The conference themes have included the incorporation of research and scholarship into learning opportunities. The Research and Knowledge Transfer Strategy 2008-2012 makes a distinction between research, knowledge transfer and scholarship, and these activities are expected to inform teaching.

116   The approach to embedding research in the curricula is through staff research expertise and experience, teaching and learning conferences, faculty research seminars and the involvement of associate deans (academic) in faculty learning and teaching committees. Faculties encourage research-informed teaching, and the audit team noted the criminology subject area as an example of teaching and curricular design being based on staff research. The DCQE has a significant role in ensuring that the student learning experience is underpinned by staff development in research, knowledge transfer and scholarship.

117   The periodic review process requires that departmental submissions include consideration of how current research and scholarship have been reflected in the curricula since the last periodic review. The audit team checked that this requirement is met in practice, and found it to be so. The University has made a new appointment in the DCQE to support staff in developing student research in the curricula. Evidence and examples of research and knowledge transfer were also seen by the team, indicating the importance of practical and specialist professional knowledge transfer in programme design and the cyclical development of the curricula. The associate deans also play a role in ensuring this policy of research-informed teaching, through the faculty learning and teaching committee and the faculty learning and teaching strategy.

118   The institution's overall strategic arrangements and approach are effective in encouraging and maintaining contributions from research, knowledge transfer and staff scholarship to teaching and students' learning opportunities.

Other modes of study

119   The University has a small number of programmes that are delivered through distance or online learning. The University defines distance learning as a mode of study conducted either through print-based learning materials or online learning materials. In the Briefing Paper, the University stated that it had incorporated its Code of Practice of Distance Learning into its regular quality policies and procedures in 2007.

120   There are additional requirements for distance-learning provision at the programme approval stage, particularly for learning resources. The audit team was provided with an example for the approval of an online learning course, and confirmed that the University's requirements had been met fully.

121   The audit team explored the University's mechanisms for supporting staff in the delivery, support and assessment of distance-learning and online provision. The team was informed that there was a central e-learning team based in the DCQE. Each faculty also has an e-learning coordinator. Together, they provide support for staff in the development of printed and online learning materials, and pedagogy, and they provide technical support. Some departments also have e-learning mentors who advise staff. Staff met by the team particularly valued the quality and breadth of the support provided in this way.

122   Staff were aware of the need to maintain the security of student work submitted for assessment. The audit team heard that distance-learning students were encouraged to use recorded delivery in the posting of their materials. Electronic submission of coursework is currently being piloted. To help students develop good academic practice, they submit their work to a plagiarism detection system at the point of submission.

123   From students, the audit team heard that the quality of study materials was excellent, and that these were supplied in good time. Information and support were also rated highly, as was feedback on work submitted. Arrangements also exist for the collection of feedback from students and the team heard that distance-learning students were invited to provide feedback to staff-student consultative committees by email. The team found evidence that this mechanism was used consistently for this type of provision, and that it worked well.

124   The University has developed a new e-learning strategy which applies to on-campus provision but excludes print-based distance learning and collaborative provision. E-learning is defined as learning 'facilitated and supported through the use of information and communication technologies in teaching, learning and assessment and includes learning resources, local software and electronic teaching resources'. The strategy sets out key objectives such as the strengthening of e-learning in the curricula, the use of e-assessment and feedback, the use of e-learning to support student learning, staff support in the production of e-learning resources, and the development and maintenance of an infrastructure that facilitates all of the above provision.

125   The University has only a few programmes provided purely through online learning (as distinct from blended learning). E-learning is supported by a virtual learning environment that includes communication and assessment tools. A web portal provides access to a range of information. The audit team found that all students were involved in some form of e-learning (primarily blended learning) but that the extent to which this was the case varied by department. The virtual learning environment was seen by students as a useful and convenient learning tool, and they commented that access was usually reliable.

126   The audit team confirmed that the University has effective mechanisms to ensure that staff involved in the delivery, support and assessment of distance and online learning provision are competent, and understand their role. It also has sufficiently robust systems to ensure the security of assessment for such provision. The team concluded that the University's arrangements for other modes of study are effective and make a significant contribution to the quality of students' learning opportunities.

Resources for learning

127   The University's definition of learning resources includes the Library and facilities such as lecture theatres, seminar and other teaching rooms, workshops, laboratories and studios, private study and group work facilities, and information technology facilities. Since the last Institutional audit, significant improvements have been made to the learning resources infrastructure through investment in buildings and new technology. The extension of the Library has resulted in a substantial increase in space and computer access points, so, for the first time, enabling the provision of the total stock of books, journals, maps and documents from the Library. Remote access to the intranet has also been improved, and the wireless network has been extended so that all students have access to broadband in student residence rooms. Three open-access facilities

provide computing and printing facilities. There is also a scheme that allows students to buy laptop computers at discounted prices. Internet kiosks provide access to the internet and email.

128   There is a clear separation between the Library and Information Services Department; each service provider has its own development strategy integrated into University strategies. The University's Strategic Plan identified the development of blended learning as a priority for the further development of learning resources for the period of 2007 to 2012. For example, since 2004, the development of the Library has included consideration of the provision of electronic resources and user support for them, in particular the development of the virtual learning environment.

129   The allocation of funds to faculties is made by the University Librarian based on an assessment of need. Factors considered in determining allocations include, for example, the range and number of courses and users, costs and expenditure of stock, adequacy of existing collection, external and internal quality reports and user survey results. Faculties and departments take decisions on how to spend their devolved budgets. Each faculty has a dedicated faculty librarian and a faculty library committee. Some departments also have library representatives. Faculty library committees take note of student feedback from staff-student consultative committees and boards of study when making spending decisions. Resources required for new academic programmes are identified and approved by course approval committees during programme approval.

130   The Academic Skills Unit provides a range of additional learning resources, printed and online, to support students' study-skills development. The audit team heard from students that the majority of students make use of the University's skills website, an interactive website piloted in 2006-07 that provides guidance on academic skills, and also contains a range of worksheets.

131   The audit team explored how the University monitors the operation of its learning resource providers and was informed that Library and Information Services are evaluated regularly through service reports. The Library also produces an annual report which is considered by the Library Committee. Reports focus on the development of e-resources, academic support and development of facilities.

132   Students who met the audit team expressed satisfaction with the quality and accessibility of resources and facilities. Library and information technology facilities were rated as good, with dedicated information technology support available if needed. The study-skills materials were seen as very useful. Students particularly appreciated the improvements made to the library and, as a result, usage of learning resources and facilities had increased. NSS results also show that student satisfaction with learning resources had increased consistently over the last three years.

133   On the basis of the information provided and talking with staff and students, the audit team found that the University's arrangements for the provision, allocation and management of learning resources were effective in maintaining the quality of the student learning opportunities.

Admissions policy

134   The Academic Registry is responsible for the overall admissions policy. The University admissions policy was reviewed in 2007 as part of an Admissions Code of Practice. The new Code takes into account the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education*, published by QAA, and sets out the requirements for admission to different levels of programme including research degrees. It also details admission on the basis of previous learning and admission with advanced standing. The policy covers the admission of students with disabilities.

135   Information on admission requirements for each programme is clear and available to students on the University's website. The University has a policy on the accreditation of prior learning. The University takes an interest in the age14 to 19 years diplomas: all faculties are defining their admissions requirements for diploma applicants alongside A and AS-level requirements.

136   The audit team heard very positive comments from students about their experiences of the application process. The University has a clear widening participation strategy, and participates in the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Lifelong Learning Network and Aimhigher Consortium.

137   The University has schemes to encourage applications from international students, including articulation arrangements with overseas institutions, a wide range of exchange arrangements, as well as international preview days. International students are supported by pre-sessional and in-session language courses.

138   As a result of the discussions and reading, the audit team formed the view that there was fair, effective and consistent implementation of the admissions policy.

Student support

139   The aim of the University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (LTAS) is to promote an excellent learning experience for all students, and to promote educational and personal success and independence in an inclusive, accessible, relevant, supportive and learner-focused environment. The SWS reported that students find that academic support at the University is of a high standard, and that extra support services provided by the University were performing well in their respective areas and providing necessary key services to students.

140   The University provides clear information and guidance about its expectations about student support both to staff and to students. The significance of the induction period for new students is clearly recognised, and the University has reflected on the balance between academic and wider elements in the process. For the University, the process begins well before students' arrival, with support from the time that they confirm their place at the University. This process was supplemented in 2007-08 by a pre-entry website piloted in the Portsmouth Business School. The pre-entry website will be used throughout the University in 2009. Specific sections of the website are designed for various categories of student, including mature, international and postgraduate. For students with specific needs there is a process whereby support can be arranged before arrival. The audit team saw on the website examples of a wide range of materials for both personal and academic support.

141   The audit team heard from the students whom it met positive views about the care and thoroughness of University support from the time of open days and applications through to arrival and integration during the first term.

142   Personal tutors are an essential part of the University's LTAS, and the University is committed to all students having a named personal tutor. Personal tutors take responsibility for overseeing and providing general academic and pastoral support for their personal tutees. They also liaise with course leaders and student advice and support services. Personal tutors' responsibilities are set out in the Personal Tutor Handbook. Training is provided for personal tutors, and those new to the role are supported by their head of department, faculty staff such as the associate dean (students), and other experienced colleagues. The DCQE offers initial and continuing briefing sessions on personal tutoring.

143   The SWS raised some concerns about variations in practice in personal tutoring, and this view was reinforced by some students whom the audit team met. The team concluded that the personal tutoring system was available and well communicated to students, although many students did not take advantage of the opportunity. The students informed the team that staff are often available informally, which complements the formal arrangements.

144   The University has long involvement in using personal development planning (PDP). Staff informed the audit team that some students are not fully engaged with PDP where it is not integrated into the curricula, and therefore the University is working on customising and embedding within the curricula an emphasis on developing and demonstrating employability skills.

145   The University's Department for Employability was established in 2008. It offers a wide range of services to students, and has been charged with developing an employability strategy, encompassing careers advice and guidance, volunteering, work experience opportunities and employability through the curricula. This initiative is branded 'Set UP for Life' and aims to develop the skills that students need for employability. Professional careers advisers are linked to each faculty and provide activities at faculty, school and course level. The University's cooperation with the Students' Union is particularly strong in this area. The audit team judged that the vigorous pursuit of the employability themes was an aspect of good practice in the context of the University's commitment to professional and vocational development.

146   Other initiatives led by the DCQE include e-counselling (in addition to the University's other counselling facilities), the development of electronic study skills and study-skills recorded materials for students with disabilities. Students reported to the audit team satisfaction with their experiences with the counselling services available. Postgraduate research students whom the audit team met were generally very positive about the support and supervision that they received.

147   The International Office provides specialised advice for international students. This includes advice on immigration and visas, an international welcome service, and support for international students' families. The International Office pre-entry documents 'Essential Information for International Students' and 'Joining the University for International Students' are reviewed and updated annually. The Office also provides a point of contact for international students throughout their time at the University, and has established a mentoring scheme that offers overseas students opportunities to be paired with a UK student. The International Office arranges many social and other activities for participants. A week-long special induction is provided for international students. In the form of English for Academic Purposes, language classes are provided for students needing assistance with English; units are offered at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The audit team met international students who were very happy with their experiences at the University.

148   The students expressed high levels of satisfaction with the range and provision of support services and the quality of academic support. The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for student support were effective and maintained the quality of students' learning opportunities.

Staff support (including staff development)

149   The Institutional audit report of 2004 identified 'the quality and range of opportunities for staff development and the processes underpinning them' as one of the three areas of good practice. The University has taken effective and deliberate steps to further this good practice by basing staff development around annual strategic themes, the development of the DCQE as a vehicle for enhancement impacting on the staff development policy, and the annual cycle of learning and teaching conferences at faculty and university level.

150   The University's strategic coordination of staff development is through the Staff Development Group (SDG), which has responsibility for ensuring the provision of development opportunities for the knowledge and skills needed to contribute to University activity. The SDG membership and terms of reference indicate the reporting lines through to the Directorate.

151   The DCQE underpins the development, delivery and coordination of programmes of staff development. Courses and events are led by both internal and external facilitators. These events are reinforced by an annual learning and teaching conference held at faculty and university level. The learning and teaching conferences are themed to address aspects of enhancement, and these activities are supported by learning and teaching awards. The DCQE has played a significant role in ensuring that the student learning experience is underpinned by staff development in these areas. This contribution represents good practice.

152   Associate deans lead the management of learning and teaching conference activity at faculty level. Funding at faculty level for staff development activities is supported from learning and teaching, research, or development funds. Support and administrative staff are financially supported from central funding. A Foundation Degree in Education Administration is offered, with support staff enrolled.

153   The University operates an annual learning and teaching award scheme that is being revised to offer further application opportunities to a broader range of staff. Academic staff new to the University and without the requisite teaching experience are expected to attend a Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching, and performance on this programme forms part of the process of probation and appraisal. A personal induction plan is produced for the first formal appraisal.

154   The learning and teaching conferences are supplemented by other staff development events such as the annual Heads and Course Leaders' Forum, which provides regular opportunities for staff to gather from across the University to debate; agendas are available on the University website.

155   The DCQE plays a pivotal role in coordinating enhancements to staff development, supporting staff in practical developments in e-learning, and reporting on student services. The DCQE workshops ensure due regard for QAA guidelines on the development and delivery of various aspects of support, such as the development of distance-learning material.

156   In the view of the audit team, the institution's use of strategic themes to direct a wide range of staff development activities, and the integrated arrangements for staff development, are effective and an aspect of institutional good practice.

157   The audit team confirmed a judgement of confidence in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of learning opportunities in its non-collaborative provision.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Management information - quality enhancement

158   In the operation of its quality assurance committee structure, the University has deliberative structures for considering the enhancement of student learning opportunities. It also has individual and group roles for the operation of the University's intentions. Examples of these include the establishment in 2004 of the Department of Curriculum and Quality Enhancement (DCQE) and the implementation of a new virtual learning environment, an extension to the library and a Department for Employability, as discussed above.

159   The remit of the DCQE is to enhance the quality of students' learning experiences and promote student success. The DCQE is structured in six sections: Academic Skills Unit; Academic Development; Additional Support and Disability Centre; The 'E' Learning Centre; Counselling; and the Student Advice Services.

160   Quality enhancement is an integral part of the University's approach to quality management, and the University therefore aims to use the processes that provide assurance about the standards and quality of its provision, such as programme approval, periodic review, student feedback, the National Student Survey and external examining, as vehicles for the enhancement of student learning. The DCQE has direct contact with all schools. This is through its role in the faculty learning and teaching committees, as well as through the provision of staff development.

Good practice

161   The Briefing Paper stated that students played a key role in assisting in the identification of areas for development as well as in identifying good practice. They are involved in the monitoring of provision and in quality assurance and enhancement generally through their representation on faculty and University committees. The audit team reached the view that, overall, the arrangements for student involvement in quality enhancement are effective with students making valuable contributions

162   In addition to examples of enhancement provided in the Briefing Paper, the audit team noted instances where institutional processes, which had an enhancement dimension, illustrated the University's approach as one where the management of the quality of learning opportunities involved enhancement initiatives. Examples of these include the Annual Learning and Teaching Conference and the Faculty Learning and Teaching Week. These two events serve the purpose of bringing together staff from academic and support departments along with staff from collaborative partners. The team found the annual conference to be an inclusive approach to staff development, and an effective mechanism for enhancement and sharing good practice.

Staff development and rewards

163   The University's Learning and Teaching Awards scheme rewards staff who have made exceptional or innovative contributions to enhancing the quality of the students' learning experiences. It facilitates the dissemination of excellence through giving staff opportunities to contribute to learning and teaching events. It provides funding to undertake research, attend conferences or engage in other scholarly activity. The University stated that it may identify individuals who might subsequently, with support, be nominated by the University for a National Teaching Fellowship.

164   The audit team found that the University had a structured and strategic approach within its committee structure and management processes to the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

165   The University will be subject to a separate audit of its collaborative provision. The judgements, commentaries, points of good practice and recommendations contained in this report apply to the University's non-collaborative provision only.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

166   Under the Academic Council, the University Research Degrees Committee (URDC), chaired by the University Director of Research Degrees, delegates authority as necessary, for debating and implementing the policies and regulations that support registration, supervision, monitoring and confirmation of awards in the research degree programmes of the University. The URDC takes a strategic overview of research degree provision at the University. Its terms of reference include agreeing policy and strategy, keeping under review academic regulations, quality assurance and enhancement. The URDC considers student feedback and annual standards and quality evaluative reviews of assistant deans (research). The URDC delegates to faculty research degrees committees (FRDCs) responsibility for the approval, supervision and examination of individual candidates. FRDCs are chaired by faculty research degrees coordinators, and focus on the student life cycle and implementing the academic regulations for research degree programmes.

167   To ensure consistency across faculties, the University has an institution-wide set of regulations and a University Code of Practice (August 2008) to which all faculties must adhere.

168   The admission and induction of research students is managed by the schools and departments within the faculties. Entrance requirements, recruitment procedures and admission decisions are clear and well documented. Information on programme and admission procedures is made available to applicants through the postgraduate prospectus, departmental literature, and on the University's website. Guidance is given to staff in the Handbook for Postgraduate Research Student Supervisors, and in training workshops. Inductions take place after registration and include a faculty induction which is complemented by induction at departmental and school level. Students who met the audit team commented that they felt the practice of second and third-year postgraduate research students assisting with the induction was highly valuable.

169   The University allocates each student to a supervisory team, consisting of a director of studies and a maximum of two additional supervisors. Students confirmed that where specialised expertise or industrial experience was required, but was not available within the supervisory team, further specialist advisers were made available. The University provides regular training for supervisors; this consists of a one-day introductory workshop supported by a series of three half-day workshops. Members of academic staff who are new to the role of supervisor are not permitted to be part of a supervisory team unless they have attended an introductory workshop.

170   Procedures for monitoring supervision were reviewed by the audit team. Students are subject to an annual appraisal from both their own perspective and that of the supervisory team. The completed appraisal form is countersigned by the departmental representative on the FRDC; this process is designed to ensure that the forms are consistently and fully completed, and that any significant issues affecting student progress are identified at an early stage. The appraisal form is produced with an extra page that students can confidentially submit with comments on the quality of supervision direct to FRDCs. Appraisal forms are the main basis for the management of students; the forms are scrutinised by FRDCs, and the Academic Registry relies on them to authorise student enrolment for the next year.

171   The audit team established that the responsibilities of students and supervisors are well documented in the University's Code of Practice. The students who met the team confirmed that they were satisfied with the regularity of supervisory meetings, although these varied slightly between discipline groups.

172   There is a varied programme of transferable skills available, ensuring that the training opportunities suggested in the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, are available to all postgraduate research students. Postgraduate students whom the audit team met indicated awareness of the availability of such opportunities. Research students are required to undertake the Postgraduate Certificate in Research Methods. This course is offered by faculties and departments and customised by subject area. Schools are responsible for setting up subject-specific training sessions each year for both staff and students. Students' comments to the team on these programmes were very positive, with the majority indicating satisfaction with the impact on research skills and future careers.

173   At induction, postgraduate research students are given a list of training events, and record their progress through the courses in personal development planning files. Students also attend events held within the general staff development programme offered by the University.

174   The audit team found that the University publishes clear criteria for the assessment of research degrees. The University provides detailed guidance for the use of internal and external examiners. Oral examination preparation is an integral part of the supervisory process. All supervisors are trained to prepare their students for the oral examination by a standard University course. Supervisors are expected to deliver a practice oral examination to their students approximately two weeks prior to the full examination. These students are informed of this

requirement in the handbook and in their research training. The team heard very favourable comments from the students about this process.

175   Appeals about assessment decisions are handled by the Academic Registry. The formal arrangements for dealing with student appeals are those for all students at the University.

176   Research students are offered the opportunity to provide support teaching on undergraduate and master's programmes. The University affirmed that students will receive formal training in such duties prior to commencement. However, the audit team found that this was not always the case. Students told the team that in some instances training had been arranged but not yet delivered, and that in a few cases, students were already teaching without any training having been arranged. The team, therefore, considered it desirable for the University to ensure that postgraduate research students are given training prior to taking up a teaching role.

177   The audit team found that the University has a sound framework for its arrangements for postgraduate research students. The University has taken appropriate action in response to the report of QAA's Review of research degree programmes, 2006. The framework for postgraduate research programmes and the postgraduate experience meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*. Overall, the team concluded that the University's procedures for postgraduate research programmes make an effective contribution to its management of the quality and standards of those programmes.

Section 7: Published information

178   The University makes a wide range of information available for prospective students and other stakeholders through its websites and in a printed form. Publications include formal documents, such as the University calendar, policy papers, programme specifications for all taught programmes, and additional material for prospective and current students.

179   The University provides information that includes University-wide policy and procedural documentation, departmental documentation, course handbooks, guidance on University policy and regulations, prospectus and committee minutes. The University's Marketing Department is responsible for producing prospectuses and other marketing material. Information about course content is provided by departments and edited by the Marketing Department. Staff of the Admissions Division within the Academic Registry read and cross-reference this information to check regulatory and entry requirement information.

180   The audit team examined course handbooks for undergraduate and postgraduate taught and research courses, and found them to give a good coverage of themes, with accurate and useful information about course structure, assessment and support services available to students.

181   The audit team also established that information on appeals, complaints and academic infringements is clearly documented in the handbooks for taught awards and postgraduate research students, and that these are easily accessible to students.

182   The University's Teaching Quality Information for both external stakeholders and staff members is published through a dedicated home page on the University website. The system directs the enquirer through easily navigable links to information. The decision about what data is published is formulated and endorsed following interpretation of funding council requirements, by a working group commissioned by the Chair of the Quality Assurance Committee, and reports to the Academic Policy and Quality Group. On the recommendations of the Group, processes have been established for collecting and verifying the information before web publication. The University's information placed on the Unistats website includes information on entry standards, progression, assessment results, graduate destinations and National Student Survey (NSS) results; it meets the expectations for information on higher education institutions.

183   In meetings with the audit team, undergraduate students confirmed that the publicity material and prospectuses, including the international materials, both printed and on the University website, gave an accurate account of the institution that reflected their experience since arrival as students. More detailed course literature distributed during open days was also mentioned as being very helpful in determining choice of degree programme.

184   The student written submission (SWS) stated that the University had informed students by means of published information from the application stage as early as two years before enrolment. Undergraduate students met by the audit team were generally supportive of the conclusion in the SWS that the information provided to students was extensive, reliable and accurate. Postgraduate research students met by the audit team were satisfied with information provided by the University, and confirmed that the handbook published by the Academic Registry made it clear what was expected of them.

185   The University stated in its Briefing Paper that its NSS data confirm that students have no criticisms of the range and quality of information provided to them, with the exception of that relating to timetabling. The University has investigated timetabling themes and has established that the criticisms were largely about timetabling arrangements rather than the publication of timetable information.

186   The audit team established that the University provided an extensive and accessible range of published information for prospective and current students, both electronically and in hard copy. The team considered the quality and accessibility of information provided by the University to be a feature of good practice.