QAA

University of Bath

November 2008

Annex to the report

Contents

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Bath (the University) from 24 to 28 November 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 that the University offers.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

- confidence can be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit team concluded that there was clear institutional promotion of quality enhancement, with quality enhancement firmly embedded within processes of quality assurance.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The University provides a high quality research environment and the audit team found the policy and procedures for managing postgraduate research students to be sound and aligned with the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 2; Postgraduate research programmes.*

Published information

The audit team concluded that reliance could generally be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes about its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the use of the SAMIS student record system to provide consistent data for a range of academic processes, such as undergraduate monitoring reports and the monitoring of research student progression (paragraphs 36, 85 and 89)

- the Student Experience Strategy Group, led by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning), which is enhancing learning opportunities at the institutional level (paragraphs 104 and 148)

- the quality and range of support that is available to Foundation Degree and top-up honours students studying for University awards in partner institutions (paragraphs 121 and 160)

- the formulation of the University's Quality Assurance Code of Practice in a clear and accessible format which includes a series of examples of good practice to illustrate policy and procedure (paragraphs 145, 168 and 176)

- the University's effective working partnership with the Students' Union which supports the enhancement of the student experience in a variety of ways (paragraph 147)

- the support that the Division of Lifelong Learning and the departmental link tutor role provides to collaborative partners in the initiation and oversight of Foundation Degrees (paragraph 152)

- the role of the Postgraduate Research Ombudsman in offering students the opportunity to discuss with a disinterested party their concerns: an activity which has provided the ability to aggregate information from individual cases for use in enhancement (paragraphs 175 and 176).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- ensure sufficient externality in panel membership for periodic review (the Degree Scheme Review), in particular a chair independent of the host faculty and an academic or other external member familiar with UK academic standards in relation to the programme (paragraph 46)

- keep under review the extent to which the implementation and operation of the range of new policy initiatives (such as the assessment framework, personal tutoring, peer observation and staff appraisal) are producing the intended outcomes in terms of the management of academic standards and quality (paragraphs 58, 83, 131, 139 and 141).

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- to consider whether the practice of independent assessors making the final recommendation for transfer of students from MPhil to PhD registration should be implemented across the University (paragraph 169).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 The University of Bath (the University) was awarded its Royal Charter in 1966. Before this it was the Bristol College of Science and Technology, one of the 10 Colleges of Advance Technology created in 1960, although its history can be traced back to the Bristol Trade School of 1856. The University is located on a modern campus at Claverton Down, two miles from the city centre. While retaining its emphasis on sciences, engineering and technology, the University has extended its subject base in the humanities and social sciences, management and health.

2 In the academic year 2007-08, there were a total of 9,222 undergraduate students of which 277 were part-time, and 3,801 postgraduate students of which 2,253 were part-time. At the time of the audit, the University had a total of 1,035 full and part-time postgraduate research students. International students account for 26 per cent of all students at the University. The University has a strong emphasis on the education of professional practitioners through applied learning and this is reflected in the proportion, around 55 per cent, of first degree students registered on programmes that provide placement opportunities and the number of programmes accredited by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

3 In 2008-09 the University had a range of collaborative teaching provision accounting for a total of 675 undergraduate and 98 postgraduate students registered at collaborative partners. Most of its collaborative programmes are Foundation Degrees and related honours top-up years provided by regional further education college partners. Foundation Degree programmes have been developed within the Western Foundation Degree Consortium - a collaborative partnership involving other higher education institutions, further education colleges and employers. This area of provision represents an area of substantial development since the previous Institutional audit in 2003. There is no overseas collaborative provision at undergraduate level. A few postgraduate programmes are delivered jointly with groups of universities, including some in Europe. A small number of, mostly recent, collaborations exist with a range of partners to facilitate the delivery of distance-learning programmes.

4   At the time of the audit, the University was structured into 15 academic departments which were grouped into three faculties (Engineering and Design, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Science). There were also two schools (Health and Management) and the Division of Lifelong Learning. The strategic coordination between the disciplines and the University's senior management team was provided by the deans of faculty and schools, and the Director of the Division of Lifelong Learning.

5   The Briefing Paper explained the mission of the University as 'to advance knowledge through high quality research and teaching in partnership with business, the professions, the public services, the voluntary sector and other research and learning providers'. The long-term aims of the University that underpin its vision and mission are set out in its Corporate Plan 2006-07 to 2008-09 as follows:

● raise its international profile and thereby strengthen its national standing

● promote research of international excellence through appropriate investment, strategic collaborations and cutting edge facilities

● deliver flexible, high quality teaching and professional education that is student centred and accessible, offering equality of opportunity to anyone with the ability to benefit

● maximise the economic and social development impact of the University's knowledge and expertise for the benefit of the University and its partners locally, regionally and internationally

● develop strategic partnerships within the South West region, including the South West Regional Development Agency, local authorities, business and industry, Health Trusts and the Lifelong Learning Network that will help foster economic growth and vibrant communities

● attract and retain high quality staff through appropriate recognition, development and promotion opportunities and effective leadership.

The information base for the audit

6   The University provided the audit team with an institutional Briefing Paper (the Briefing Paper) and supporting documentation including material related to the sampling trails selected by the team. The Briefing Paper contained references to sources of evidence that illustrated the University's approach to managing the security of its awards and the quality of its education provision. The team had access to both electronic and hard copies of all documents referenced in the Briefing Paper. The team was also provided access to the University's intranet site.

7   The Students' Union produced a student written submission setting out the students' views on the accuracy of information provided to them, the experience of students as learners and their role in quality management. The audit team is grateful for the students' engagement with the audit process.

8   In addition, the audit team had access to the University's internal documents, the report of the previous QAA Institutional audit (2003) and the report on the Review of research degree programmes which was conducted by QAA in July 2006. The team met groups of staff and students, according to the programme agreed with the institution.

Developments since the last audit

9   The Institutional audit in October 2003 resulted in an overall judgement of broad confidence in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards. A number of features of good practice were identified.

10   The Briefing Paper gave a detailed description of the actions the University had undertaken to address the five recommendations made in the 2003 report. These recommendations related to the impact of the quality assurance systems on student experience; the impact of structural and organisational changes on the quality of the learning experience; the introduction of wider cross-faculty representation; the development of programme specifications; and the collection of management information at programme level. Developments made by the University in responding to these recommendations have included a move to a more student-centred approach, illustrated by the launch of the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office in 2006, the creation of an integrated student experience team and the stronger presence of the Students' Union in the University's strategic development. The present audit team found that the University had addressed or made considerable progress in implementing the recommendations.

11   The 2006 QAA Review of research degree programmes confirmed the University's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree provision as being appropriate and satisfactory, and four aspects of the provision were cited as examples of good practice. Three recommendations were made concerning the use of interviews in the selection process, the monitoring of supervisor workload, and feedback from external stakeholders, to which the University has responded satisfactorily.

12   Other significant developments since the Institutional audit in 2003 include the reaffirmation of the University's commitment to science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects, as exemplified by investment in a £3.4 million teaching building for chemistry; the transfer from HND provision to Foundation Degrees and the development of a range of partnerships for the delivery of these degrees; and the development of professional doctorates. Developments in relation to the management of academic standards and learning opportunities include the replacement of the Graduate Studies Committee, which dealt with both taught and research students, by the University Research Students Committee and the funding of posts to support the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (PVC) (Research) in providing training opportunities for postgraduate research students. Another significant development has been the decision to withdraw from the Swindon Gateway project sited at the Oakfield Campus, on the grounds of financial sustainability, refocusing ambitions for new building projects on the present Claverton Down Campus.

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

13   Ultimate institutional responsibility for quality and standards rests with Senate, however, responsibility for detailed oversight of the student learning experience is largely delegated. The Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) is responsible to Senate for ensuring that the University has a 'rigorous and responsive quality management framework in place, and undertakes detailed scrutiny of taught provision'. It is supported by the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office (LTEO) and has an independent chair who is a member of Senate. For research degrees, the University Research Students Committee (RSC) is responsible for 'developing a framework of standards and monitoring procedures to support and promote the delivery of high quality postgraduate research provision, for recommendation to Quality Assurance Committee'.

14   An important role is also exercised by the University Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC), chaired by the PVC (Learning and Teaching). This is responsible to Senate for the development and implementation of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy. It formulates new policy and procedures in response to regional, national and international developments and has responsibility inter alia for identifying staff development needs and for promoting innovation in learning, teaching and assessment and for the dissemination of good practice. The audit team learned that consideration is being given to merging LTC with QAC.

15   The PVC (Learning and Teaching) is a member of QAC. He is described as having responsibility for the University's academic strategy, 'specifically including all matters relating to learning and teaching', and he has executive responsibility for the LTEO, the Registry and Student Services. As noted above, he chairs the LTC and he is the line manager of the General Manager of the Students' Union which affords an especially close relationship between the University's senior management and the Students' Union.

16   At faculty/school/division level, the board of studies (or Standing Committee in the case of the Division of Lifelong Learning) is responsible to Senate for all matters relating to the organisation of learning, teaching and research, including all examination matters. Faculty/school/division teaching and quality committees (TQCs) are responsible to the respective board of studies for the detailed scrutiny of the academic standards and quality of the relevant taught provision, while faculty/school RSCs perform a parallel role in overseeing research provision.

17   The head of department (or equivalent) bears general responsibility for the management of learning and teaching, 'taking a particular lead on resource and strategy issues' while directors of studies take much of the day-to-day responsibility for managing academic processes and programmes.

18   The University's framework for managing academic standards is set out in its Regulations and its Quality Assurance Code of Practice (the University Code of Practice). The latter is described in the Briefing Paper as 'the central reference point that describes the academic processes and policies through which the University develops and implements an effective and efficient quality management framework'. The University Code of Practice was developed through a 'deliberately consultative review process' from its predecessor Quality Manual to ensure that: 'quality management mechanisms are credible in the University community; that the student voice is heard' and to be 'applicable across the range of the University's provision'.

19   The management of the quality and standards of Foundation Degrees delivered in collaboration with local partner colleges is based upon the University's practice with regard to its campus-based awards, for example, with regard to programme approval and review and external examination.

20   Having examined the minutes of a number of meetings of the Senate, the QAC, the LTC, faculty/school/division boards and TQCs, and faculty/school RSCs, and from their various discussions with senior academic and administrative staff, the audit team took the view that the framework established by the University made a sound contribution to managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

Programme approval

21   Procedures and templates for the approval of new programmes are defined in the University Code of Practice, 'Approval of New Programmes of Study'. This process has two main stages: Initial Approval, seen as 'strategic consideration of a proposal', and Full Approval, a closer consideration of the detailed academic case for a proposal.

22   Boards of studies (or the Standing Committee of the Division) are responsible for Initial Approval which, as well as defining the programme title, level and outline structure, focuses on the business case for the proposed programme. The recommendation of the board of studies is then considered by Senate for final decision. According to the University Code of Practice, Initial Approval must be renewed if Full Approval is not obtained within 18 months. If a programme crosses internal boundaries, all relevant boards of studies must approve the proposed programme.

23   Within the frameworks defined by Senate and the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), the faculty/school/division-level teaching and quality committees (TQCs) are responsible for the detailed consideration of all new programme proposals and collaborative activities. This includes their academic content and coherence, academic standards and quality, relationships with existing provision, and conformity with the University's academic framework. Following consideration by the relevant TQC(s), a programme approval panel is responsible for full approval of new programmes under powers delegated by Senate. The ability to allow exemptions from elements of the University's academic framework has been delegated to QAC.

24   Full Approval focuses more on the 'academic detail' of the proposed programme. The fully developed proposal is reviewed by TQCs and the proposal is then scrutinised by a programme approval panel. The panel membership includes a member from another faculty/school/division and at least one external participant. The panel makes the final decision, which is reported to Senate. The chair of the panel signs off the programme specification as a record of the approval of the programme.

25   The approval of new units is also specified in the University Code of Practice and, although it is based on a comprehensive template describing the content, level and other aspects of the unit, the process did not appear to the audit team to be as clearly specified as that for new programme approval. For example, while approval is clearly required from a board of studies, the more detailed scrutiny and recommendation is from 'an appropriate committee'. In an example seen by the team, this approval was undertaken appropriately by the TQCs.

26   From the review of documentary evidence, the audit team found that the operation of programme design and approval followed the appropriate processes, including involvement of independent assessors and explicit consideration of the requirements for the academic standards of the award. In one example seen by the team, full consideration was given to the master's-level nature of units by the Programme Approval Panel which included both an external academic and a professional member, as well as internal members from outside the department.

27   Overall, the audit team concluded that the processes prescribed for programme design and approval meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 7; Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*, published by QAA. Appropriate cross-reference is made when programmes involve collaborative provision, which is covered in more depth in Section 5, paragraphs 154 to 157.

Programme modification

28   Programme modifications are known as 'amendments' and are divided into three categories. Minor amendments, for example, changes within a unit, may be made at any time if approved by the relevant board of studies (or Standing Committee). Intermediate amendments are also approved by the relevant board of studies but in line with a semester-dependent timetable designed to give students sufficient notice of changes, for example, making a new unit available or withdrawal of a unit. Changes to the structure or title of a programme or withdrawal of a programme are examples of major amendments that must be approved by QAC by the end of January for implementation in the next academic year.

29   The University Code of Practice covers the processes for amendments to, as well as withdrawal of, a programme or units within it. TQCs are responsible for detailed consideration of proposed changes to units, programmes and schemes of assessment - this role includes reviewing the impact on resources and other stakeholders, for example, in collaborative provision. The boards of studies (or the Standing Committee of the Division) are responsible for the approval of minor and intermediate amendments; and the approval of major amendments are the responsibility of QAC.

30   The audit team examined minutes of TQCs which showed that they exercised their responsibility for scrutinising proposed amendments. In theory the Committee then makes recommendations to the board of studies for decision. In practice the power of decision-making appeared to have been devolved to the TQC in the documentation examined for the Faculty of Science. In this case there was evidence that the TQC reported their action to the next Board of Studies. This practice was confirmed as regular practice by those responsible for quality assurance, which was noted by the team not to match the process as documented in the University Code of Practice.

31   Overall, the audit team considered that procedures for programme modification were substantially in accordance with the expectations for quality assurance in the *Code of practice, Section 7* and that they help to ensure the academic standards of the University.

Programme monitoring

32   Annual monitoring of units and programmes is seen by the University as a major part of quality assurance and quality enhancement. At unit level, the Unit Convenor is responsible for undertaking the annual monitoring and coordinating actions arising. Directors of studies are responsible for ensuring unit level annual monitoring takes place and for programme level monitoring.

33   In the view of the audit team, this process provides a coherent structure for ensuring that annual monitoring takes place and is subject to oversight as well as enabling school and institutional level overviews of the outcomes of annual monitoring. In parallel, the Learning and Teaching Committee is responsible for coordinating review and action from the National Student Survey and similar student surveys.

34   The format for recording the outcome of annual monitoring at unit level can vary between departments/schools/division. While a common template for programme annual monitoring was introduced in 2008-09, the University Code of Practice provides 'good practice examples' of different practices. The director of studies must draw up an annual monitoring report for a programme or group of programmes. Partners are responsible for producing their own report and the content of these reports is specified.

35   Registry is responsible for providing statistical data relating to the admission, retention, degree classification and first destinations of students. Student retention rates of less than 90 per cent in the first year of undergraduate programmes (80 per cent in the Division of Lifelong Learning) require explicit attention in annual monitoring.

36   The statistical data for use in annual monitoring as well as a number of institution-level reports are available on an internal management information website. The audit team examined the effectiveness of the system and found that the website provided the information required for undergraduate programmes promptly, providing substantial benefits of time saving for academic staff and consistency of statistical reporting. The team considered this use of information from the central SAMIS student records system to be a feature of good practice.

37   Programme teams should consider the annual monitoring report before it is considered by the relevant TQC. This committee is responsible for quality assurance of programme annual monitoring, sharing good practice across the faculty/school/division, addressing issues and monitoring implementation of actions arising at programme level. TQCs report to the QAC on good practice and themes identified, as well as on programmes where there are particular issues for concern and the actions that are being taken in response. The team found evidence that the annual monitoring reports were systematically and effectively considered by TQCs.

38   At an institutional level, QAC receives the minutes of these faculty/school/division-level meetings as well as an annual quality report from TQCs that reflect on themes arising over the whole year. In 2008, QAC also received separate summary reports of annual monitoring outcomes

from the TQCs. This is now an integrated part of the annual monitoring cycle under the University's revised process and it ensures the institutional oversight of the annual monitoring process for collaborative provision.

39   The audit team concluded that there were appropriate mechanisms for annual monitoring of programmes, together with systems of institutional review and oversight.

Periodic review

40   The periodic review of programmes is known as Degree Scheme Review (DSR). This should take place every five years for each programme, including collaborative provision. This is designed to be a thorough review of a programme or group of related programmes. The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office (LTEO) maintains and monitors a register of reviews and their timescales.

41   While the underlying process of DSR has existed for some time, the processes have been updated, in particular in 2007 and most recently in August 2008. The audit team noted that a significant element of these changes was to increase the degree of externality in DSR panels. Previously in the 2004 procedure, the requirements were that 'The Review Panel must include at least one student member, one external member and/or a representative from prospective employers'. In addition, members of the panel were selected by the head of department/school being reviewed.

42   The current University documentation states that there should be a mix of academic staff from inside and outside the faculty/department as well as 'at least one student member from within the home Department/School/Division' and 'at least one member external to the University, but not current or previous External Examiners'. The audit team noted that the chair of the panel need not be independent of the 'home' department/faculty and that there was no requirement that the external be familiar with UK academic standards.

43   The audit team in its examination of documentation for DSRs, under both the old and new systems, found the process thorough and effective, including additional elements to strengthen the process, for example, surveys of students and employers and meetings with staff and students. Documentation examined by the team provided evidence of a robust and reflective process, leading to thorough review complemented by a follow-up after six months.

44   The audit team noted that the composition of the review panel did not always follow the requirements of the University Code of Practice. On one occasion, there was no internal University representation on the panel from outside the department/faculty. Furthermore, the external member, although well qualified in both academic and professional grounds, was also the external examiner. The University had subsequently clarified that current or previous external examiners should not be an external member of a review panel.

45   In a more recent DSR examined by the audit team, the Panel Chair was the Head of Undergraduate Programmes from within one of the two faculties involved, and there were no internal members from outside the two faculties/schools running the programme. The two external members did not include an academic expert. The team also understood from the Chair of the Panel that the two externals (from a partner school and an employer) were involved at a distance rather than taking part in a full panel discussion in person. The team noted that QAC had been concerned about accepting the review report on the grounds of the issue over panel membership, but had accepted it given the 'excellent exercise of evaluation' in the review.

46   In this context, the audit team considered that the limited degree of externality in composition of the review panels in both cases that it examined had the potential to put academic standards and quality of learning opportunities at risk even under the new process. The team found no evidence of compromise of standards but nonetheless considered that the practice of DSR did not fully meet the expectations of Precept 3 in the *Code of practice, Section 7; Programme*

design, approval, monitoring and review. The team therefore concluded that it was advisable for the University to ensure sufficient externality in panel membership for periodic review (the DSR), in particular a chair independent of the host faculty and an academic or other external member familiar with UK academic standards in relation to the programme.

47   Institutional oversight of the DSR process is provided through review of all the panel reports by the relevant TQC, followed by the University's QAC. Minutes of meetings from the meetings of QAC and the Faculty of Science TQC demonstrated that these were regular agenda items with consideration given to both the reports of the review panel and wider issues raised. The audit team considers that this faculty and institutional oversight was an effective mechanism for the management of periodic review.

48   The audit team found in one clear example that the DSR had been delayed beyond the five year period, apparently without good reason. Institutional oversight by QAC and LTEO had identified this case which was a result of issues in planning at a faculty and departmental level. In identifying practice in the Faculty of Science as providing greater transparency and better monitoring, LTEO and QAC demonstrated their role in exercising institutional oversight as well as highlighting good practice.

49   In summary, the audit team considered that DSRs have been undertaken appropriately, together with sound mechanisms for institutional oversight. However, the degree of externality in panels requires further attention in order to meet current standards in higher education to avoid potential risks to academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, and to obtain the full benefits that independent expert comment can bring.

Professional body accreditation

50   A large number of programmes are accredited by professional bodies. LTEO keeps a register of accreditations at institutional level. The process for such accreditations is that the department concerned is responsible for the preparation of the accreditation documentation, which is then reviewed and approved by QAC before submission.

51   The accreditation outcome and feedback is reviewed by QAC which must approve any exemptions from the University's academic framework that result from the demands of a professional body. It should also identify any good practice that should be shared and institutional issues identified from the professional accreditation. The actions should be monitored through the annual monitoring process.

52   One issue raised in the accreditation process was the link between DSR and professional body re-accreditation, in particular their relative timing. For example, the Department of Electronic and Electrical Engineering in undertaking both DSR and accreditation by the Institution of Engineering and Technology in the same year, was allowed to delay its DSR by QAC. This was requested on the grounds of longer than anticipated times for data gathering and processing; documenting the link between programme learning outcomes and units; and slower feedback than anticipated on drafts. As a result, the audit team suggests that LTEO coordinates schedules for DSR and professional accreditation together with faculties/departments.

53   On the basis of the evidence available, the audit team considers that the process for professional accreditations provides a good balance between departmental responsibility and institutional oversight.

External examiners

54   External examiners are seen by the University as a key element of its quality assurance framework, by providing assurance of academic standards and comparability with other institutions. In addition, they are seen as an independent view on the conduct of boards of examiners. High level principles are in Ordinance 15 'Examiners and Examinations' and the

'Regulations for Students'. The framework also sets out more detail for external examining of taught provision and research degrees. At least one external examiner must participate in the examining process that leads to an award by the University.

55   The 'Handbook for External Examiners' makes the role of external examiners explicit with respect to academic standards and other areas. A distinctive aspect of the role of external examiners is their explicit role in enhancement. The audit team found evidence of such use of external examiners, for example, in DSR.

56   Overall responsibility for nominating external examiners lies with heads of department/schools. Appointments must be confirmed by the relevant board of studies. Criteria for their appointment are set out in the University Code of Practice.

57   Appointment letters are sent centrally by LTEO, together with a briefing pack. Further briefing is then the responsibility of departments. For external examiners on taught programmes, the common Handbook for External Examiners provides, in the view of the audit team, an accessible guide to their role in the University and many aspects of their role.

58   The Handbook for External Examiners documents clearly the role of external examiners from their viewpoint as does other documentation from a general viewpoint. The audit team also noted the communication with external examiners regarding the New Framework for Assessment, in particular from LTEO. Given that the introduction of the new assessment regulations had only just started, the team was not able to judge the effectiveness of the efforts to support external examiners in the transition to the New Framework for Assessment as few would have been involved directly by the time of the audit visit.

59   Since 2008, the external examiners' annual reports have been in a two part template. Part 1 is intended to be shared with students through staff-student liaison committees (SSLCs) while Part 2 is not. This may contain sensitive comments and/or those pertaining to individual students or staff. In Part 1, the report format covers the main areas on which an external examiner would be expected to report through a variety of clear questions, followed by a free format for Part 2.

60   External examiners communicate their annual reports in the first instance to the Vice-Chancellor. Reports are passed from the Vice-Chancellor to LTEO and on to departments/schools/division and faculties. The audit team was informed that the content of reports is scrutinised institutionally as well as within departments/schools/division and faculties. Departments respond to external examiners and develop action plans, sometimes prompted by LTEO with respect to particular issues. Also external examiners' reports feed into the annual monitoring and DSR processes.

61   Programmes are required to respond to the comments in the external examiners' annual reports, providing feedback from programmes to external examiners on actions taken and issues considered.

62   External examiner reports are made available to the TQC and SSLC, and in one example seen by the audit team, in Pharmacy and Pharmacology, the reports are available to students through the virtual learning environment.

63   Formal responsibility for monitoring external examiners' reports and actions arising lies with TQCs through the annual monitoring process. At an institutional level, QAC is responsible for taking an overview of issues raised by external examiners, and recommending appropriate action. The audit team found clear evidence that this was happening at institutional level, with summary reports for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes submitted to QAC, and those for research degrees submitted to the University Research Students Committee.

64   Overall, the audit team considered that the University had an effective system for the appointment, induction and reporting of external examiners and that appropriate use was made of their reports at both programme and institutional level.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

65   The University Code of Practice is the major mechanism through which QAA's Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points are integrated in policies and processes inside the University. For example, in relation to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), the Code contains a table relating qualifications to the FHEQ and levels that embeds key aspects of the FHEQ in the programme approval process. With respect to subsequent amendments, the University Code of Practice specifies that proposers of amendments are responsible for taking note of the FHEQ and other aspects of the Academic Infrastructure.

66   The Briefing Paper stated that the University's QAC had reflected upon the purpose and content of programme specifications in 2007, defining more explicitly their role in the approval and review of programmes as well as their relationship to other primary sources of information to students. The University has a standard template for programme specifications that is in use for taught programmes. This makes explicit key features of the programme at unit and programme level, including curriculum and assessment as well as learning outcomes in different categories. It also includes explicit reference to the level of the programme in relation to the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements. The audit team noted the further development of, and incorporation of, programme specifications in descriptions of programmes and, from their meetings with students, their awareness as to their function and where they were located.

67   LTEO clearly documents and encourages the use of subject benchmark statements in relevant areas of the University Code of Practice. The audit team was informed by the LTEO that when benchmark statements were first introduced, the University undertook a benchmarking exercise and that the position is reviewed as new and revised statements are published. In addition, the team saw evidence of the monitoring of amendments to the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, for example, in relation to admissions.

68   The use made of subject benchmark statements was analysed through the audit team's reading of documentation for such areas as programme approvals and DSRs. In this analysis, the team found that relevant subject benchmark statements were not always explicitly considered within these processes, although in some instances it was obviously integral to the process.

69   In the view of the audit team a strength of the University, and linked to its strategy, is the integration of professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements into its processes and the practice of quality assurance in such areas as programme approval and DSRs. This is embodied in the section on professional accreditation in the University Code of Practice.

70   Another area to which the University has paid significant attention is the impact of the Bologna Process, particularly in relation to its academic credit framework which is based on the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.

71   Overall, the audit team considered that effective use was being made of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points, and the University had responded appropriately to the FHEQ, programme specifications and the *Code of practice*. Professional accreditation was a strong point in this area. However, the team found some variability in the use of subject benchmark statements.

Assessment policies and regulations

72   The area of assessment regulation was one of substantial institutional change at the time of the audit team's visit to the University. In particular, almost all undergraduate programmes will be covered by the New Framework for Assessment and its associated Assessment Regulations. The new framework applies to new students from 2008-09 onwards and so will be the basis of future assessment for the majority of students at the University.

73   Assessment policies are covered in the University Code of Practice. There are 'Assessment Procedures for programmes not compliant with the New Framework for Assessment: Assessment Regulations' as well as the 'New Framework for Assessment: Assessment Regulations'. These policies and procedures include those for boards of examiners for units and boards of examiners for programmes. Guidance to chairs and those supporting boards of examiners is available; these make extensive reference to the University Code of Practice.

74   For programmes not covered by the New Framework for Assessment, the composition of boards of examiners is specified by the University in the original procedures and their actual membership should be confirmed by the relevant board of studies. However, in the one faculty whose documentation was examined by the audit team, there was no evidence in the minutes of the board of studies that the composition of the board of examiners had been formally confirmed.

75   From a student viewpoint, overall assessment policies and programme-level provisions are set out in the Regulations for Students and programme handbooks. The programme handbooks seen by the audit team were generally clear and comprehensive with respect to assessment and such issues as late submission. However, the team noted that student feedback had indicated that there were some inconsistencies between departments and for students on joint programmes and studying units in other departments, differences in procedures, for instance, word limits and referencing systems, could be confusing.

76   The audit team was told that further mechanisms used by LTEO and QAC are their oversight of student complaints and academic appeals, combined with their personal reading of reports from external examiners. In addition, there would be oversight by the boards of studies at faculty/school/division level.

77   As noted above, the University takes extensive account of the requirements of professional bodies in assessment and this forms an integral part of programme approval and amendments.

78   The Teaching Efficiencies Working Group was formed by the University to consider, amongst other work, one of the recommendations of the Institutional audit in 2003 which was the impact of quality assurance systems upon the students' learning experience. The report of the Working Group identified gains that could arise from reduced diversity of programme regulations and a consistent approach to assessment. These gains included reduced administration of complex varying assessment regulations, faster response (for example, in production of transcripts) and a more equitable approach to classifications. Its recommendations were agreed by Senate in 2005.

79   Discussion continued during 2005 and 2006 leading to what became the New Framework for Assessment and its associated Assessment Regulations. These core common assessment regulations were approved by Senate in February 2007.

80   The new assessment regulations apply to students starting study for a first degree (with a bachelor's or master's award) from the academic year 2008-09 (including anyone restarting a programme in 2008-09). Programmes are split into three parts and each part is weighted differently for assessment purposes. Programmes are divided into Stages of study. Students must pass each stage in order to proceed to the next. The new assessment regulations include common rules for condonement; supplementary assessment for those who narrowly fail to meet criteria for progression; and for compulsory retaking of a stage or withdrawal.

81   Internal communication of the new assessment regulations has been extensive with substantial information on the University's website. This includes the background of internal consultation and evolution of the New Framework for Assessment into which there had been very wide input as the assessment regulations evolved.

82   Requests for exemption from the new assessment regulations have been considered in depth at institutional level, in particular by QAC at a special meeting where nine requests were considered together with two cases where clarification of interpretation were requested. Based

upon the documentation provided, the audit team was satisfied that the cases were dealt with appropriately considering the balance between institutional requirements and specific departmental needs.

83   The audit team considered that it was too early to reach firm conclusions on the operation of the New Framework for Assessment. However, the team considered that the process behind its implementation had included substantial debate among key interested parties and its introduction was well-considered. Through greater consistency across the institution, it should have a significant positive impact on the efficiency and consistency of assessment as well as reducing in the complexity of assessment arrangements. More broadly, the team considered that the institution's overall arrangements for the assessment of students were effective.

Management information - statistics

84   Student statistics are compiled primarily from the University's student records system, known as SAMIS, which covers academic processes in the following broad areas: enquiries, including support for specific areas of the University; admissions, both undergraduate and taught postgraduate; students, online registration and unit choices, as well as integration with online unit evaluation, personal development planning and other processes; assessments, including recording of marks and progression, including research students; and alumni, including support for Higher Education Statistics Agency 'Destination of Leavers from Higher Education' returns.

85   A noteworthy use of SAMIS data is the use of statistics in programme annual monitoring. The relevant statistics are available on an internal website for undergraduates. This site was in the view of the audit team comprehensive and very usable with data available in both report formats and also for Excel analysis. As well as programme-level data, the internal website also provides institutional-level data (for example, on entry standards). Progress is being made on the tracking and status of postgraduate research students (see below, paragraph 168)

86   A 2006 Internal Audit revealed no major issues with respect to the integrity of the data and the views expressed in meetings were that the information in SAMIS was accurate and comparable. In meetings, the audit team was informed that input assessment information was checked extensively to ensure its accuracy.

87   A number of enhancements to management information have been identified, especially in the reporting of statistics for programmes that did not fit the pattern of study of a typical undergraduate programme. The University is seeking to improve the usefulness of statistical information through a 'Vital Statistics' project that covers the various areas of provision and a range of uses for such management information. This is being overseen by QAC.

88   The University has also established a Policy and Planning Office 'in order to take a more integrated and coordinated approach to the development and of the quality and quantity institutional management information'.

89   The audit team concluded that the University made effective use of management information in relation to academic standards. Further, the team considered that the use of the SAMIS student record system to provide consistent data for a range of academic processes, such as undergraduate monitoring reports and the monitoring of research student progression, is a feature of good practice.

90   Overall, the audit team concluded that the University had regulations and processes in place so that confidence could reasonably be place 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

91   See section 2, paragraphs 65 to 71 for discussion of the use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points in the management of academic standards and quality of learning opportunities.

92   The audit team noted, as above in Section 2, that the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office (LTEO) plays a key role in ensuring that effective institutional oversight is maintained of the use of elements of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points, which includes the areas of the management of the quality of learning opportunities.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

Programme approval

93   The programme approval process is discussed in detail in Section 2, paragraphs 21 to 27.

94   Heads of department/school are responsible for including new programme plans in the annual planning process, although it is recognised that some may be developed within the year of the planning cycle. The University's Executive Committee approves any plans that involve new disciplines or expansion of home/EU student numbers. The audit team observed that this policy should assist in integration of programme development with overall planning while maintaining a level of flexibility in responding to emerging needs.

95   The process for approving new programmes involves two formal stages, Initial Approval and Full Approval. It is the Initial Approval stage which concentrates on the resource implications of the proposed programme and ensures the appropriate provision of learning resources. The Full Approval stage, primarily focusing on the appropriateness of academic standards, also includes consideration of the nature of the learning opportunities offered by the programme, and the accessibility of these learning opportunities to a diverse student body.

96   The evidence required for both Initial and Full Approval is specified and there are templates available for particular aspects of Initial Approval that require documentation, namely for resource implications and market Information and programme title. These need to be signed off by the Directors of Finance and Academic Registrar respectively. There is also a standard template for a programme specification which is included in the Full Approval stage.

97   In conclusion, the audit team was satisfied that the planning and approval processes was managed to take full account of resources for learning and thus contributed to the effective management of the quality of learning opportunities.

Annual monitoring

98   The annual monitoring process is explained in detail in Section 2, paragraphs 32 to 39. The audit team concluded that the University's procedures contribute effectively to the management of learning opportunities, by promoting critical reflection at departmental level.

Periodic review

99   The periodic review process, known as Degree Scheme Review, is also discussed in detail in Section 2, see paragraphs 40 to 49, including the audit team's recommendation on the externality of review panels.

Management information - feedback from students

100   Taught provision is evaluated through unit level questionnaires by academic departments. A small number of core questions common to the whole institution are utilised, around which academic departments have flexibility to formulate questions about particular aspects of the unit. The University has developed a tool for undertaking unit evaluation online, which has facilitated a quicker turnaround of student feedback by academic departments. The audit team heard that this was in use in all academic departments bar one but steps had been taken to so it would now be implemented in full. The Unit Convenor provides students with a summary of the outcomes of unit evaluations and the actions being taken. This feedback is acted upon at departmental level, reported to the staff-student liaison committees (SSLCs), and recorded in annual monitoring of programmes. Student evaluation is seen as an important input to annual monitoring.

101   The University solicits student opinion at an institutional level through its internal triennial Student Experience Survey, jointly owned by the University and the Students' Union, as well as through participation in externally owned surveys, such as the International Student Barometer, Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education and the National Student Survey (NSS).

102   The University Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) has responsibility for reviewing the outcomes of the NSS and other student surveys, and ensuring that data is distributed to departments. Each department then reviews its outcomes and prepares a response and action plan to address any areas of concern. In 2007 a particular focus was placed on assessment feedback with LTC and LTEO ensuring that all departments had in place and had communicated to students the process of feedback and the nature of feedback that could be expected. Departments are expected to compare year-on-year scores and benchmark progress against other universities. The view of the audit team was that these processes produce a thorough and effective response to the NSS outcomes.

Role of students in quality assurance

103   The Briefing Paper stated that the University offers students a wide range of opportunities to contribute to the ongoing process of enhancement of the student experience, and that the University is committed to working in partnership with students as citizens within the academic community.

104   The University has developed an effective and close working relationship with the Students' Union. The Council/Senate/Students' Union Committee is a high-level forum chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and dedicated to the discussion of issues relating to the student experience, for which student representatives share ownership of the agenda. Furthermore, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (PVC) (Learning and Teaching) meets on a regular basis with Students' Union sabbaticals and key service staff. The audit team learned from students that this group known as the 'Student Experience Strategy Group' has proved very effective in identifying and moving issues forward at a university level. Examples of important changes are the introduction of the 'Bath Award' (a certificate awarded in recognition of student achievement in extra curricular activities) and the new Student Service Centre. Meetings with staff and students confirmed that the student voice is seen as an important part of the quality management framework within the University. The team considered that the Student Experience Strategy Group, led by the PVC (Teaching and Learning), which is enhancing learning opportunities at the institutional level, was a feature of good practice.

105   Students are represented on institutional committees, including Senate, LTC, the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), and University Research Students Committee (RSC). From discussions with students the audit team concluded that the student participation in such institutional-level committees ensured student input into the development of institutional strategies for learning and teaching and quality management. Institutional level representation is paralleled by student representation on boards of studies and faculty/school RSCs. A number of faculties/schools include a student representative on their TQC, and as part of the review of

faculty/school committee structures, the University is consulting the academic community on the potential for strengthening this provision.

106   SSLCs are one of the key mechanisms for the development of an ongoing dialogue between staff and the student body about all aspects of academic provision and the student experience. Outcomes from these committees feed into the formal quality management processes, such as the provision of evidence for the annual monitoring of programmes. SSLCs are also a forum for the discussion of action planning in response to issues raised in survey data and for consultation on proposed programme amendments. A recent innovation is the sharing of external examiners' reports with students at the liaison committees. The audit team heard from students that these committees are the main focus at programme level for making minor changes and that staff are receptive to their views. Students also reported that they are aware of changes to programmes that have occurred as a result of feedback from students in earlier years.

107   While the current arrangements work well for students studying on-campus, it was not always clear to the audit team how the University ensured that part-time and distance-learning students were able to feedback in a similarly effective manner. The University is currently examining ways in which further attention can be given to the ways in which greater engagement could best be facilitated across the whole range of the student body. For example, drawing upon the experience in the School for Health and the Department of Education in using the virtual learning environment (VLE) to support communication with distance learners, provision has been made to encourage the use, where appropriate, of virtual SSLCs.

108   Student representatives from the department and subject under review are also participants in key quality management processes such as Degree Scheme Review panels. Students are consulted as part of the gathering of evidence to support the periodic review process. Students are selected to act as panel members and are provided with a briefing paper prior to the review. Students reported to the audit team that they felt their views were taken seriously through these processes.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

109   The University stated that it values and promotes links between teaching and research and views this as an important characteristic of its programmes. The close connection between staff research and programme design and content was evident in a number of areas. The University has recently held (May 2007) a 'Good Practice Discussion' on the theme of Linking Research and Teaching. The audit team saw many good examples of the influence of research on both curriculum design and teaching as well as examples of ideas for new courses. For example, the new programme in Medical Engineering arising from research in the Department of Mechanical Engineering. The outcomes of this process have been published on the LTEO web pages.

110   The University encourages staff from partner organisations to register for higher degrees by offering a generous discount scheme and has recently made available a Scholarly Activity Fund to support the development of scholarship within the partner college network. This will enable the development of links between research, scholarship and teaching within programmes offered at partner colleges.

Other modes of study

111   The University stated that it has taken an organic approach to the development and growth of e-learning, advocating its adoption where it is academically appropriate to the topic, and where there are demonstrable enhancements to learning opportunities. There is no separate e-learning strategy, the University having incorporated its approach to e-learning into its Learning and Teaching Strategy. Oversight of e-learning institutionally is undertaken by LTC. This approach is reflected in the central support mechanisms for e-learning, with the e-Learning Team being integrated into the LTEO at its inception in 2006. The role of the e-Learning Team is to support academic departments in making informed pedagogical choices about use of e-learning as

another means of delivery rather than to support a particular target on adoption of e-learning across the institution. For example, the e-Learning team is currently working with the Department of Economics and International Development to deliver a training programme on the use of the VLE that is tailored to particular departmental needs and levels of knowledge.

112   University participation in Phase 2 of the Higher Education Academy/JISC e-Learning Benchmarking Initiative has helped to shape further institutional thinking on e-learning and identified a need for the profile of e-learning to be raised within wider strategies, policies and processes. Following a report into the current use of Moodle produced by the Head of e-Learning, the University is in the process of drawing up an Operational Plan to examine priorities for the continued roll out of e-learning over the period 2009 to 2011. This will involve dialogue with a range of constituencies to ensure that the technology and support needs of staff who wish to adopt this method of delivery are met as well as the development of mechanisms to measure the effectiveness of Moodle as the University's VLE.

113   To support academic departments involved in the delivery of e-learning, the University has adopted an 'e-tools' approach whereby staff have access to a multifunctional environment, such as a VLE, as well as single use tools, such as discussion boards and wikis. Events, such as the Directors of Studies Forum, Innovations in Learning and Teaching Week and the Summer Seminar Series provide a range of opportunities for disseminating practice across disciplines, support academic staff in developing use of e-learning tools beyond simple content storage and widen engagement beyond expert users. The commitment to 'main-streaming' e-learning will be further supported by the inclusion of e-learning within the new Postgraduate Certificate in Academic and Professional Practice. At programme level, e-learning is monitored and reviewed through standard quality management processes. The audit team met students who had had experience of the Moodle VLE and they were very positive about the contribution it makes to their learning and welcomed well thought through opportunities to learn in this way. The team concluded that there are sound examples of quality e-learning in place and that there is a substantial infrastructure of both technology and staff development to facilitate the increased use and range of e-learning.

114   The University has a small portfolio of distance-learning programmes, spread across the Departments of Education, Pharmacy and Pharmacology, the School for Health and the Faculty of Engineering and Design. The approach taken is generally one of blended learning, where learning at a distance is usually supported through intensive campus conferences. A number of these programmes are currently exploring ways of transferring from paper-based delivery to use of e-tools. Thus the School for Health is currently building professional development resources in Moodle, including e-workshops, for distance-learning tutors. The audit team also explored the management and support of a large programme delivered through a variety of modes: full and part-time, on and off-campus and through distance learning. The team considered that this complex suite of programmes was very effectively managed in order to maintain comparability of standards across cohorts and the way in which programme monitoring had been adapted to match the student's experience of the flexibility of provision.

115   The University has established a Distance Learning Network as a cross-institutional peer support network and forum for the sharing of this practice among staff involved in the delivery of distance learning. The University also has a Code of Practice for Distance Learning which seeks to address the particular challenges in supporting students at a distance. This is scheduled for review in 2008-09 as part of the broader review of the University's Quality Assurance Code of Practice. External examiner reports provided evidence to confirm the quality and standards of the courses delivered by distance learning.

116   Placement and work-based learning are a feature of the University's academic provision. The University has two categories of undergraduate placements, 'standard' and 'enhanced', which are characterised by differences in level of student support. In its Code of Practice, recently updated to take account of the revised QAA *Code of practice, Section 9; Work-based and placement learning*, the University has made explicit the principles for the support of students during

work-based and placement learning. Placement provision is monitored through annual monitoring and Degree Scheme Review, and there is a peer network of placement tutors that provides an informal forum for sharing good practice. In discussions with staff and students the audit team noted variations in practice between departments. For example, some departments assist students in obtaining placements while others do not, and some departments offer students conference days to access tutorial support during the placement at locations around the country while others do not. While many of these could be explained by discipline needs and differences between the two placement categories, it was evident that opportunities for sharing good practice were not always exploited in full. In particular, the team noted good practice in the use of 'conference days' for students held at Bath or key locations around the country, and the publication of a newsletter to keep students in touch with what was happening at the University were not universally practiced.

117   Students reported that they received good support during their period away from the University. This is supported by data from a recent Students' Union survey and NSS data on placement provision. The University has identified the need for further improvement regarding support for students' re-integration into the student community and the clarity of communication of learning outcomes relating to placements. These findings have already been presented to heads of departments to prompt local action, and will be fed into the broader thematic review of placement and work-based learning planned for 2008-09. The audit team encourages the University to ensure that all placement practice is operating in line with the expectations set out in its own Code of Practice and that opportunities for sharing good practice are exploited in full.

Resources for learning

118   There is an institutional strategy for the development of the University's Estate, as well as plans for the development of major services. An annual planning round is in place at departmental level to provide appropriate levels of human and physical resources to deliver the curriculum. In addition, ad hoc capital purchases can be made to cover unexpected problems via this funding stream.

119   The University's policy is to provide a physical environment that supports a high quality student learning experience. This policy needs to be read in the context of current pressures on space following significant growth in student numbers, limited space for expansion and the legacy of 1960's and 1970's buildings with significant maintenance requirements. The University is addressing these issues in a comprehensive manner via the implementation of a 12-year Master Plan (2008 to 2020) which will provide 'additional academic, social and residential space while improving the overall environment of the campus'. HEFCE Capital Funding has been earmarked to continue a programme of major refurbishment of large lecture theatres and to support a five-year rolling programme for ongoing upgrades to teaching spaces. Student feedback on the need for more flexible work and social spaces is also being addressed, through the development of e-lounges and provision of PCs in informal workspaces across the campus. The audit team noted that the impact of this latter development on student satisfaction is already being reflected in the latest NSS.

120   The 1960's and 70's buildings are acknowledged not to have been designed with good levels of accessibility for disabled students. A recent review of levels of accessibility has been undertaken by the University in partnership with 'Disability Go', a not for profit organisation specialising in access reviews. Disability Go's website provides a very detailed analysis of levels of access on a building-by-building basis. The audit team noted that although the University has undertaken and continues to undertake works to improve accessibility, work remains to be done to ensure ease of access to all teaching and social space as well as suitable conditions once access has been gained.

121   The Library and Learning Centre provides a 24-hour service to students at the heart of the University campus. Each academic department nominates a member of academic staff to act as a formal point of liaison with the Library, and is also assigned a senior member of Library staff who acts as Subject Librarian and is responsible for the delivery of Library services to the department. The audit team observed that there are good and effective working relationships between the Library and the academic community. Since 2003, there have been major developments in Library provision. The availability of electronic resources has been expanded considerably, partly funded through the University's Strategic Investment Fund. In response to the growth in student numbers and changes in the patterns of student learning, the Library has been redeveloped to provide more study and group work spaces as well as social learning space and a postgraduate study room. Ongoing development of provision is informed by user feedback, received though SSLCs, the Information Services User Forum, an annual internal library quality questionnaire and the biennial national LibQual survey. Students at partner colleges have access to the library at the Claverton Down Campus as well as access to the electronic resources from remote sites. Students who met the audit team were very positive about the resources available from the University as well as the support from library staff in library induction sessions which are available at the partner college or at the Claverton Down Campus.

122   The Computing Service provides institutional access to information technology (IT) facilities. Computer provision in the Library and Learning Centre is supplemented by additional IT laboratories that are bookable for teaching purposes. The Student Residences Network supplies services to all student rooms on and off-campus, and enables students to connect (using their own PCs/laptops) to a similar set of services as are available in the Library. The University has also established a wide coverage wireless network environment. In order to understand user expectations, the Computing Service undertakes an annual user survey that alternates between surveying staff and students; participates in the Information Services User Forum; and has a series of 'IT supporters' in academic departments who meet on a regular basis with the Assistant Director (User Services) to inform service development. Students who met with the audit team expressed general satisfaction with available access to IT provision.

123   As academic services, the Library and Computing Services report annually to the Executive Committee and new developments are addressed through the Annual Planning Cycle. The provision for the Librarian and the Director of the Computing Service to attend QAC, and for their representatives to attend LTC, provides additional linkage into the broader quality management and learning and teaching agenda, as does the scope for the Librarian and Director of Computing Services to comment upon the resource implications of new programme proposals. A resource audit of prospective collaborative partners occurs as part of the course approval process. The audit team concluded that the University's mechanisms are effective in ensuring adequate levels of resourcing for students.

Admissions policy

124   The Briefing Paper stated that the University aims to offer equality of opportunity to anyone with the ability to benefit from its programmes and provision, and to ensure that its recruitment, selection and admissions processes are transparent and focused towards their intended audiences. The Admissions Policy and the University Code of Practice focus upon the principles underpinning the recruitment and admission of all students and also clarify the respective responsibilities of institutional and departmental staff.

125   Responsibility for oversight of the implementation of the Admissions Policy rests with the Recruitment and Admissions Committee while central management of recruitment and admissions is overseen by the Recruitment and Admissions Office (RAO) in Registry. Admissions tutors are responsible for recruitment and admissions activity within academic departments. Admissions criteria for students entering the University's courses offered at partner colleges are set by the University and operated by staff in the colleges in conjunction with University admissions staff. Departmental entry criteria are reviewed every year. The audit team was informed that a

University review of the general entrance requirements was undertaken in 2008 along with the regulations for admissions. RAO supports the development of admissions tutors through the provision of written briefing information and regular targeted briefing sessions. This training covers not only the mechanics of the admissions process but a range of other relevant topics such as equality and diversity training. These sessions are also available to staff from partner colleges. Oversight of recruitment and admissions activity is supported through monthly monitoring reports provided to academic departments and through periodic reports to the relevant University committees. The team concluded that the admissions policy is effectively implemented and managed.

126   The University is committed to a wide range of activities aimed at widening access to and broadening the range of its academic provision. In 2007 nearly one-third of students who entered the University did so with qualifications other than A-levels. The University's approach, both to outreach work and to the student support essential to maintain access, is set out in the University's Access Agreement with the Office for Fair Access. RAO coordinates a wide range of aspiration-raising activity through Aimhigher, including mentoring and tutoring programmes and curriculum enrichment days aimed at those with little previous experience of higher education. RAO also works hard to minimise barriers to progression to the University for those who come from groups less well represented in the student population. This complements the work of the Division for Lifelong Learning's Broadening and Developing Participation Team which supports increased access to the Division's distinctive work-based learning programmes and aims to raise the profile of higher education in the region.

127   Students who have special learning needs are identified during the admission process and are invited to attend a meeting with staff from student services. Students can be referred for a professional assessment and the University continues to provide support to ensure they receive appropriate equipment and financial support to embark on their studies. Ongoing support is available to students throughout their course to ensure that any arrangements remain appropriate and effective. Students reported good levels of satisfaction with the individual arrangements for support.

128   The University Code of Practice sets out a framework of practice for the recruitment of overseas students. The Senior Assistant Registrar, in conjunction with the Deputy Head of the International Office, is responsible for ensuring that admissions are conducted in accordance with the Code. The Overseas Recruitment Steering Group monitors recruitment activity.

129   Overall, the audit team concluded that the University has well developed admissions policies for all its provision which are regularly reviewed to ensure their continued effectiveness.

Student support

130   The University's approach to students' support is based on its desire to encourage them to fulfil their potential personally, academically and socially, and to take individual and collective responsibility for their own affairs. An institutional Employability Strategy has been established to give an additional coherence to the University's multifaceted work in producing graduates of the highest calibre. The impact of the University's approach is evidenced by strong institutional student retention and completion rates, high student employability and positive feedback from students upon their experience.

131   At departmental level, personal tutors play an important role as a first point of contact for pastoral and academic support and in signposting the wider network of institutional academic and pastoral support. In response to feedback from students about the perception of variability in levels of support, the University has reviewed the operation of the personal tutorial provision. In October 2008, LTC agreed a minimum set of expectations that each department would be asked to implement to enhance practice across the institution, as well undertaking broader consideration of the induction of students to their programmes and the student learning

experience. At the time of the audit, the audit team considered it too early to assess the effectiveness of the new arrangements.

132   Students can access a range of university-level support services which include skills and careers, counselling and health, learning support and disability, financial support, accommodation and immigration. These are delivered through a network of structures provided by Student Services, the Students' Union, and the Registry (through the Careers Advisory Service, the International Office and the Graduate Office). The Students' Union provides support for academic appeals. The central support services provide a framework of support to departmental staff through the provision of online resources and workshops for staff involved in personal tutoring or other roles involving student support. The Careers Advisory Service plays a significant institutional role in providing careers counselling for students, supporting personal development planning (PDP) for employability, providing skills training, and managing contacts with employers. The Careers Advisory Service has also taken the lead in extending placement and work-based learning opportunities outside academic programmes, developing a University summer internship programme for students, and offering Enterprise bursaries to enable students to take on unpaid work experience or start their own businesses. The effectiveness of the links between academic departments and central student support services is tracked through the annual monitoring reports on academic programmes and monitored through annual reporting to the Executive Committee, the Council/Senate/Students' Union Committee and feedback from students in the Student Experience Survey, the International Student Barometer as well as local service-level questionnaires. Students reported to the audit team good levels of satisfaction with the central support services.

133   The University continues to work to address the equalities and diversity agenda and to strengthen services to support the needs of specific student groups. For example, for students with disabilities or specific learning difficulties, a long-term commitment has been made through the development and ongoing monitoring of the institutional Disability Equality Scheme. In recognition of the increasing diversity of the student body, the University has also established the Diversity in Academic Practice Project. The Project Leader advises on revisions to the University Code of Practice to ensure consideration of inclusivity and a range of the outputs of the project have also been the subject of a dissemination event to staff.

134   The International Office (Registry) provides a well-developed programme of support that begins prior to students' arrival and continues through provision of practical advice, orientation and mentoring. These include an airport 'meet and greet' service, a cultural and academic induction scheme and a buddying scheme, 'Amity', whereby second and third-year UK and international students buddy with new arrivals for the first year of their course. In addition, a jointly held adviser post has been established between the international office and the Students' Union. The audit team considered these arrangements to provide good levels of support.

135   The audit team came to the view that there was a range of effective services available to support enhanced academic skills. The Students' Union plays a leading role in the provision of training, enterprise and volunteering opportunities through its SORTED skills training and its Volunteer Centre. The Library and Learning Centre works with SORTED and with academic departments in the provision of information literacy and plagiarism awareness training. A range of other skills support is available including mathematics and statistics support, academic writing skills, and writing coaching for science and engineering and design students and staff. Online resources supplement face-to-face development opportunities, with the joint development with the Students' Union of an online induction resource, and the provision of an online plagiarism awareness tutorial.

136   In line with national expectations, a web-based PDP tool linked to the student records system was developed and was formally launched to students in October 2005. In 2007, the University undertook an evaluation of the web-based PDP tool, and agreed that in line with the original University vision for PDP, the focus of future development would concentrate upon PDP as a reflective process rather than upon provision of a single system or tool, and would support a variety

of modes of learning and functions of PDP. In addition to institutional opportunities for PDP, a variety of opportunities for PDP are offered to students as appropriate to the discipline. These may be integrated into the curriculum (particularly in relation to placements and work-based learning), offered as part of academic skills training within programmes, or related to the requirements of professional accrediting bodies. During the course of the audit the team saw evidence that where PDP was linked into the curriculum or required by relevant professional bodies it worked well, but for courses where this was not the case there was little take up of PDP opportunities by students.

Staff support (including staff development)

137   The University views the recruitment, development and retention of high quality staff as a key objective in ensuring a high quality learning experience for students. Staff development has been recently reviewed and a new, wider-ranging model has been introduced. The Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Professional Practice for newly appointed staff now seeks to develop academic practice across the full range of academic work equipping staff to tackle the challenges of managing research, leading academics and managing change, as well as promoting the development of learning and teaching. This approach is aligned with the revised probation and promotion criteria. Staff confirmed that the new model is better aligned with their needs as developing teachers and researchers. There are also strands of the programme that are relevant to the University's internationalisation and e-learning agenda, and to the role of staff delivering higher education in a further education environment.

138   The University provides training for graduate teaching assistants undertaking teaching activities. The use of postgraduate research students to undertake teaching activity has recently been reviewed by the LTEO and a full review of the University Code of Practice covering this activity is planned for 2008-09. Pending completion of that review, the University has made provision for scrutiny of new appointments by boards of studies. The audit team learned that this approach was successful in ensuring that all postgraduate teaching assistants received training for their teaching activities.

139   Staff development needs are routinely identified through appraisal. The Vice-Chancellor's Group has undertaken a review of academic staff appraisal mechanisms and a new appraisal system has been agreed for academic staff for 2008-09. The scheme includes a review of past performance, as well as a focus on future objectives and development needs. The University's merit pay system offers reward for exceptional performance. Early signs indicate that take up is much higher than the previous scheme but the audit team considered that it was too early to report on the effectiveness of the new process.

140   In February 2008 Senate approved a new Academic Career Progression Scheme staff. The new scheme sets out clear criteria for promotion for staff who can demonstrate not only excellence in research but also in teaching and academic leadership. The scheme includes annual promotion rounds as well as a facility to apply for a personal chair at any point in the academic year. The new scheme introduces a clear career path for those who want to develop a teaching as opposed to research orientated career. At the time of the audit it was too early for the audit team to judge the effectiveness of the new scheme. Additionally, there are a number of teaching awards, open to all staff who apply on a competitive basis, which are awarded on the basis of the following criteria: significant contributions to teaching and learning, curriculum development and excellence in teaching and learning.

141   The University has recently reviewed its Peer Observations scheme and recognised that a wider range of activity encompassed in learning and teaching is worthy of review. This new approach moves away from peers observing peers and providing feedback on a snapshot of their teaching, to a form where a clear purpose of the exercise is established in advance, and the emphasis of the process is on achieving learning from practice by both peers. An online resource will form the basis for the review and will be fully operational in 2008-09. At the time of the audit the team considered it too early to judge the effectiveness of the new scheme.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

142   The Briefing Paper stated that the University has no enhancement strategy per se. It stated that its approach to quality management 'encourages ownership of enhancement activity by staff and students at the level of the discipline, whilst providing institutional structures through which enhancement can be supported and disseminated'. The University described itself as taking 'an integrated approach to quality assurance and quality enhancement, encompassing both academic standard and quality of learning opportunities'. The Briefing Paper also stated that 'the institutional quality management principles - reliance on sound academic principles, peer review and the informed student voice - underpin our approach to quality management'.

143   Both the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) and Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) have a role in the consideration of quality enhancement matters, with the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office (LTEO) effectively acting as the operational arm of both committees. Representation of LTEO and cross-membership between QAC and LTC ensures that LTC also overseas LTEO's enhancement activities. LTC is responsible for the Learning and Teaching Strategy that aims 'to provide students with opportunities to contribute to the ongoing process of enhancement of the student experience'.

144   The LTEO has a specific remit for disseminating good practice and, according to the Briefing Paper, it does this through a number of mechanisms, including published guidance and resources and a 'wide-ranging programme of events'. The audit team learned that examples of the latter included week-long annual innovations in a learning and teaching event offering opportunities to disseminate outcomes from projects sponsored by the Teaching Development Fund; and an annual Good Practice Discussion around a theme chosen by QAC culminating in publication of a report. The team read examples of these reports (for example, Good Practice guides on Linking Research and Teaching (2006-07) and Externality including Employer, Engagement (2007-08)) and noted that they incorporated contributions at departmental school/faculty and institutional levels. A further example of institutionally-led enhancement example was provided by the development of the University teaching timetable.

145   The comprehensiveness, design and layout of the University Code of Practice, developed by the LTEO, was found by the audit team to provide an instance of the promotion of good practice in University procedures; thus many elements of the Code are interspersed with boxes illustrating good practice in implementing that particular element. Examples of this approach include the Codes for Recruitment, Selection and Admission of Students and the operation of staff-student liaison committees. The team considered that the formulation of the University Code of Practice in a clear and accessible format, which includes a series of examples of good practice to illustrate policy and procedure, constituted a feature of good practice.

146   The development of an overview report of external examiners' reports had led to the University giving serious consideration at institutional level of issues raised in individual reports, for example, the desirability of considering appointing an independent chair or convenor to examination boards for research degrees.

147   Students have the opportunity to contribute to the enhancement agenda in a variety of ways, not least via various forms of student feedback; the audit team noted in particular the level of collaboration between the Students' Union and the University, and student membership of panels in Degree Scheme Review events. The team regarded this as a further example of the University's effective working partnership with the Students' Union, which collectively provides a feature of good practice.

148   The audit team concluded that, while there was no specified institutional enhancement strategy, the monitoring and review processes, which included student feedback and connections between quality assurance and enhancement through committee connections, meant that there was clear institutional promotion of quality enhancement. The claim that the University had taken

an approach to quality management that integrated quality assurance and quality enhancement was considered to be justified by the team. The team further noted the key role played by the Student Experience Strategy Group, led by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) which is enhancing learning opportunities at the institutional level, and this was considered by the team as a feature of good practice.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

149   While the University has a corporate aim to seek collaborations, including international ones, which enhance its reputation, in practice this aim is largely in the context of research and opportunities for staff and student exchange. The audit team heard that the University does not intend to make significant increases in collaborative taught provision except in the area of professional engineering doctorates and Foundation Degree programmes.

The institution's processes for managing collaborative provision

150   A range of University officers and committees may provide advice and decisions on the development of new collaborative provision, depending on the nature of the innovation proposed. For example, the Executive Group may make decisions on the strategic fit of proposed collaborative partners, but ultimately it is Senate that has the responsibility for approving new partnerships. A prerequisite for successful development of collaborations is support at the level of the discipline. It is possible for new partner institutions to be approved independently of specific programmes to be delivered by that partner.

151   The Briefing Paper stated that the University applies the same principles of quality management to its collaborative provision as for all its programmes. A separate section of the University Code of Practice deals with issues pertaining to matters directly affecting collaborative provision. There is also a separate document provided by the Division of Lifelong Learning, the Quality Management of Learning Partnerships Provision, that supplements the Code for new partners. The Code contains an institutional definition of collaborative provision that coincides with that of the *Code of practice, Section 2; Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, published by QAA. The University Code contains, in the view of the audit team, a helpful classification matrix of types of collaborative arrangement, defining some of the key parameters. This section of the Code was substantially revised in 2006-07 and at the time of the audit visit, associated guidance documents were under review. The Code also contains a comprehensive description of the various processes, roles and responsibilities relating to the complete lifecycle of both partnership arrangements and collaborative programmes.

152   The majority of programmes delivered by partner institutions, including Foundation Degrees and their associated honours years, are the management responsibility of the Learning Partnerships Office within the Division for Lifelong Learning. Programmes involving collaborative arrangements are generally managed and governed via the same departmental, faculty or school structures, as are all other programmes. In the particular case of the Learning Partnerships Office and provision from within the Division for Lifelong Learning, the role of a faculty board of studies is taken by the Standing Committee, the bulk of whose membership is made up of representatives from the other faculties and schools. A key role in the link between the Learning Partnerships Office and disciplinary expertise is that of the link tutor. Link tutors are appointed from faculties or schools on initiation of a collaborative programme with a partner outside the higher education sector and work to an extensive role definition maintained by the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office (LTEO). While the Learning Partnerships Office is responsible for quality assurance of many collaborative programmes, link tutors have an important responsibility in monitoring academic standards. The link tutor has a wide range of activities that contributes to the effectiveness of collaborative partnerships, including a place on the relevant Curriculum Working Group, the staff-student liaison committee (SSLC) for the programme concerned, the Teaching and Quality Committee (TQC) of the Division of Lifelong Learning and programme meetings in

the relevant colleges. The audit considered that the support that the Division of Lifelong Learning and the departmental link tutor role provides to collaborative partners in the initiation and oversight of Foundation Degrees to be a feature of good practice.

External examiners and assessment

153   External examiners for collaborative provision are appointed by, and report to, the University, operating on the same basis as other external examiners. Typically the programme team in the partner would nominate a potential external examiner to the Division of Lifelong Learning. The appointment of an external examiner for provision via the Learning Partnerships Office follows the same route as for other external examiners, but for the replacement of board of study consideration by that of the Standing Committee, after the relevant link tutor has commented upon the suitability of the proposed external. The formal appointment of external examiners is made by the Division's Standing Committee for Lifelong Learning on which representatives from faculties and schools sit. Induction material is provided by the LTEO and the Division of Lifelong Learning. There is a strong expectation that external examiners will attend an annual induction event as well as holding informal discussions with the partner organisation. If they are unable to attend, then alternative methods of briefing are found. The audit team heard that the initial external examiner was often the same person as was employed to provide externality in the approval process. The team thought that the University would benefit by the consistent use of external examiners independent of the approval processes.

Approval, monitoring and review of collaborative arrangements

154   The processes for approval of new programmes are described in Sections 2 and 3 (above) and those involving collaborative provision are the same. However, in the case of new partners, the partnership itself must also receive approval through the stages of Initial and Full Approval. The Briefing Paper stated that 'The increasing diversity of the University's portfolio of partners is recognised, with a certain flexibility accorded in the documentary requirements, based upon an assessment of risk' and refers to the University Code of Practice. The Code provides details of which University bodies are involved in strategic and detailed consideration according to the particular combination of circumstances, new programme or new or existing partner.

155   As with other new programmes, Senate delegates full programme approval powers to programme approval panels. In 2008, a separate Collaborative Provision Approval Panel was established, which, among other things, gives detailed scrutiny to new provision through partners, proposed or current, of existing programmes. A Curriculum Working Group that includes representatives from the University, partner college/s and other relevant stakeholders develops the curriculum for a new partnership programme. The audit team, through its discussions with staff and by means of studying samples of approval documentation, formed the view that the procedures as documented were conscientiously followed. Curriculum working groups are able to provide significant opportunities for the informal development of the staff from partner organisations and the University is alert to the need to support fully new partners. In considering the evidence, the team came to the conclusion that the University gives considerable support to its collaborative partners.

156   The University Code of Practice applies to the annual monitoring of units and programmes for all taught programmes of study leading to an award of the University and is explicit about its application to collaborative as well as home provision. Link tutors, appointed according to the Code to liaise with partner organisations that are not in the higher education sector, are also expected to comment upon the annual monitoring reviews of relevant programmes. There is a separate template for collaborative annual monitoring reviews, including a request for a link tutor comment. As part of the monitoring of a newly established collaborative programme, the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) receives the first annual monitoring review of a new collaborative programme.

157   Periodic review (known as Degree Scheme Review (DSR) and outlined in Section 2 above) also applies to collaborative provision of all taught programmes and professional doctorates. It is permissible to add areas to the core aspects of periodic review when the review is of collaborative provision. Both link tutors and, in the case of overseas collaborations, the Study Abroad Office, have a continuous monitoring role and are obliged to bring issues to the relevant department/school/faculty/division. Collaborative arrangements are subject to a five-yearly review that would normally be informed by a DSR held in the preceding year.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

158   The briefing paper stated that the *Code of practice, Section 2, Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* was used when reviewing its approach and procedures, as reflected in the relevant parts of its own Code. The audit team found that the section on collaborative provision and related paperwork, for example, on new programme approval, makes due reference to the relevant parts of the Academic Infrastructure. Some of the University's collaborative provision is subject to scrutiny by external agencies and QAC receives and considers reports thus generated. In the case of Foundation Degrees, curriculum working groups may include representatives from relevant Sector Skills Council and employers. Programme specifications for the Division for Lifelong Learning's programmes are readily available via their website and supplement other information provided on each programme. The team saw evidence that the University's practices and Code of Practice in this area appropriately reflected the *Code of practice* published by QAA.

Management information

159   A central register of collaborative arrangements is maintained by the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office, and is received annually by Senate. Reviews of partnership arrangements that result in non-renewal are reported from department/school/division to the University TQC, following which the report will be received and noted by QAC. Information generated through annual monitoring and DSR is reported through the standard routes described in Section 2 above. Student retention levels for first-year undergraduate programmes, for which the Division for Lifelong Learning is responsible, are subject to a lower threshold of concern than that applies to on-campus provision (80 per cent compared to 90 per cent). This lower figure was decided on the basis of considering the retention on typical precursor programmes and the differing nature of the student intake.

Staff and student support

160   The audit team was told by both staff and students of a rich variety of support and resources available within the context of collaborative provision. For example, while partners would provide front-line support for students, students may also access more specialist services from the University. Provision at a partner institution gives students access to various on-campus resources, such as sports facilities and the Library, to which they have online access. The Library has a post of librarian with responsibility for collaborative provision and, if collaborative partner students are unable to attend campus-based inductions and study skills sessions, this librarian may go out to partners to deliver such sessions. The team considered the quality and range of support that is available to Foundation Degree and top-up honours students studying for University awards in partner institutions to be a feature of good practice.

161   Staff at partner institutions are able to access a wide range of development opportunities, from the informal through to registering for research degrees at the same discounted rates as the University's own staff. Programme Leaders from partners are able to attend specific half-day development events; they are informed about opportunities through a newsletter produced by the Learning Partnerships Office. There is further support online via a specially designed web portal intended for partner staff and a specific staff development fund for action learning research at a partner.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

162   The framework for the quality management of research degree provision is set out in the University Regulations and the University Code of Practice which has been recently updated in this area. Responsibility for the institutional oversight of research degree provision is vested in the University Research Students Committee (RSC), while at faculty/school-level monitoring the quality of the research student experience is the responsibility of the corresponding faculty/school RSCs. The University has decided, at least at present, not to adopt the model of the institutional Graduate School.

163   Institutional leadership for research student provision is the responsibility of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), recently reinforced by the appointment of a Director of Postgraduate Research Development. The Graduate Office is responsible for matters relating to current graduate students as well as to graduate admissions; overseeing admissions procedures; entry requirements and registration of new postgraduate research students; studentship applications and nominations; regulations and fees; thesis submissions; and postgraduate student records. The presence of postgraduate research student data on the student records system (SAMIS) affords ready accessibility to information relating to student registration and progress.

164   At departmental/school level, day-to-day management of the postgraduate research student experience is vested in directors of studies. Directors of studies meet in a forum to share practice, offer peer support and contribute to the development of institutional policy. The audit team was informed that the University viewed this as an important forum for enhancement. The University has recently introduced a system of annual reporting by directors of research postgraduates, covering inter alia, student progression statistics; a summary of student monitoring reports; staff support; generic comments raised by external examiners; enhancement and innovation plans, a development welcomed by the audit team.

The research environment

165   The University offers a high-quality research environment, evidenced by its performance in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise and completion rates for both home and overseas research students. The University is investing in a new graduate centre and it supports the work of the Postgraduate Association in organising an annual institutional postgraduate conference, now called 'A Meeting of Minds', which provides opportunities for group work and skills development.

Selection, admission and induction

166   The University's Admissions Policy, Regulations and the postgraduate prospectus set out the institutional position on the selection and admission of postgraduate research students. The University's expectations for the induction of research students are set out in the University Code of Practice. Following the recommendations of the 2006 Review of research degree programmes, the University strengthened its expectations of academic departments to publish clear information to students on the use of interviews in recruitment; made explicit the requirement for two people to be involved in making admissions decisions; and clarified its commitment to the support of staff involved in admissions to undertake their role. All offers are monitored and approved by the Graduate Office and a record of the involvement of two staff in these decisions is available via the offer pro forma. Postgraduate students met by the audit team stated that they had found the information provided at the time of application to study for a research degree was accurate and their expectations had been met. The team viewed the University's arrangements for admissions and induction of new research students as satisfactory.

Supervision

167   The Briefing Paper stated that the University is committed to the provision of high quality research supervision and has a number of mechanisms to support supervisors in their role. These include the placing of staff new to supervision in supervisory teams to learn from experienced supervisors; all such inexperienced staff are also required to attend a short intensive session delivered by the Staff Development Unit. Recently appointed staff met by the audit team were able to confirm that their development needs had been identified in a meeting with the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office (LTEO) and they had attended a series of one-day courses relevant to their role as a research supervisor and had also been appointed to act as second supervisor in a supervisory team to gain experience. Despite the 'strong encouragement' for the appointment of supervisory teams given in the University Code of Practice, the audit found that the concept of the supervisory team has not been universally accepted at the departmental level. One research student met during the audit was not supervised by a team but rather a single supervisor. However, discussions with staff responsible for different aspects of the postgraduate research experience indicated to the team that the prevalence of the supervisory team model was rapidly gaining ground and was now much more prevalent, which the team found reassuring.

Progress and review

168   University expectations, of regular supervisory meetings, annual progress reports and the degree transfer process are set out in the University Code of Practice Statements for Research Degrees. In common with many other sections of the Code, the audit team found that those dealing with research degrees to be clear and effective, contributing to an overall judgement of its being a feature of good practice. Annual progress reports and the operation of the transfer process are monitored by the faculty/school RSC. Currently an online tool is being piloted in the Faculty of Engineering and Design to enable departments to track the progress of their students through key stages of their programme. Professional doctorates are subject to periodic review through the Degree Scheme Review process. During 2007-08 annual monitoring of research degree programmes was piloted in two academic departments; the results of this pilot were evaluated by the University RSC and informed new mechanisms for 'light-touch' annual monitoring and triennial review of research degree provision across the institution for introduction in the current academic year.

169   One area where the audit team noted a degree of interfaculty variability was that of the process of transfer of registration from MPhil to PhD. In the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences the recommendation for transfer is made by two independent assessors after considering reports from supervisor(s) and student, and interview of the student; in at least one department in the Faculty of Science, this recommendation is made by a panel of two persons, namely the supervisor and an independent assessor. The team considered this procedure in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, whereby the roles of supervision and assessment are separated, as an example of good practice. The team therefore considered it desirable for the University to consider whether the practice of independent assessors making the final the recommendation for transfer of students from MPhil to PhD registration should be implemented across the University.

Development of research and other skills

170   The 2006 Review of research degree programmes identified as good practice the provision of generic skills training and the University has aimed to build on this. Thus a Postgraduate Skills Coordinator has been appointed to work with faculties, schools and departments to embed skills development into research degree programmes. Regarding the training of postgraduate students for any teaching role they might be requested to undertake, the Briefing Paper stated that postgraduate teaching assistants have been 'offered the opportunity to attend events organised as part of the Initial Teaching Development Programme'. In discussion with staff, the audit team learned that training of postgraduate students for even modest teaching roles is mandatory. A review of the use of research students to undertake teaching

activity has been made by the LTEO and a full review of the University Code of Practice relating to this activity is planned for 2008-09. Pending completion of the review, the University has made provision for scrutiny of new appointments by boards of studies. This enables the University to assure itself that postgraduate students have been given appropriate training and development for teaching roles.

Assessment

171   The key information relating to the assessment of research students, together with accompanying advice for internal and external examiners and the criteria for assessment and the process for appointment of examiners, is set out in the University Code of Practice and the University Regulations. The issue of appointing independent chairs of examination boards, or of using audio-recording of viva voce examinations, is under consultation within the University.

Feedback mechanisms

172   In addition to the staff-student liaison committees, the main means for postgraduate students to make their voice heard is through faculty/school RSCs and the Postgraduate Association, the responsibilities of which cover both student representation and the organisation of social events.

173   Analysis of the annual survey of supervisors and students (PRES) conducted by the Higher Education Academy, is undertaken by the University, the results of which are evaluated by the Graduate Office and monitored by the University RSC. Further feedback is provided by the broadened expectations of external examiners with regard to feedback, which is considered by boards of studies and a summary overview considered annually by the University RSC. The results of the PRES Survey 2007 provide further insights into the students' perception of their experience; in general, the University scored well in comparison with the sector average, particularly with respect to supervision, infrastructure and examination, while areas where the scores were lower than the average related to social contact and involvement in the broader research culture.

174   The University is responding to the problem of the relative isolation of students in departments with small numbers of research students identified in the PRES survey by encouraging as much cross-disciplinary activity and support as possible, for example, by supporting the Postgraduate Association in mounting an institution-wide postgraduate conference (now renamed as 'A Meeting of Minds'). The opening in 2009 of the Postgraduate Centre is regarded as offering enhanced opportunities for research postgraduate students to meet each other.

Representations

175   The University's procedures for 'academic reviews' (the launching of appeals) and student complaints are set out in the University's Regulations. The aim is to resolve student concerns and complaints speedily and at departmental/school level if possible. When this route proves ineffective, or where the student regards it as inappropriate, recourse can be made to the Postgraduate Research Ombudsman. The Ombudsman makes an annual report of his activities and the audit team read the most recent of these from which it was clear that the Ombudsman plays an important role in offering concerned students advice from a dispassionate quarter in order to help them resolve their concerns. In addition, it was also clear that discussions between the Ombudsman and faculty/school staff over issues of a type that reoccurred had stimulated a change in procedures which had resulted in a reduction in the number of such issues. The team viewed the role of the Postgraduate Research Ombudsman in offering students the opportunity to discuss with a disinterested party their concerns, an activity which had provided the ability to aggregate information from individual cases for use in enhancement, as a feature of good practice.

176   In summary, the audit team found the policy and procedures for managing the postgraduate research student experience were sound and met the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Postgraduate research programmes*. The team made one recommendation concerning the parity in the assessment of research students transferring from MPhil to PhD programmes. The team considered the activities of the Postgraduate Research Ombudsman and the clarity of the sections of the University's Quality Assurance Code of Practice dealing with postgraduate students to be features of good practice.

Section 7: Published information

177   The Briefing Paper stated that 'delivery of accurate and complete published information supports delivery of one of the University's key principles of quality management, the informed student voice, and supports the development of students as independent learners'. The responsibility for published information follows the institutional culture of distributing responsibility between departments and the institution. Registry is the main provider of statistical data regarding students on the intranet. Information is managed within the overall context of a brief Information Strategy published on the University website. This strategy works alongside several related strategies, not all of which had been developed at the time of the audit visit. One consequence of the Information Strategy is that a range of material is available in accordance with national guidelines on Teaching Quality Information. The University believes that it has opportunities within its quality management processes for routine scrutiny of published information. This is by virtue of both programme specifications and handbooks being part of the evidence base of Degree Scheme Review.

178   Through the Recruitment and Admissions Office and the International Office, Registry liaises with departments on the production of prospectuses, both printed and online, and pre-arrival information. Departments are responsible for a range of information including detailed recruitment information, programme handbooks and programme specifications. Within this context, it is heads of departments/schools/division that have responsibility for the accuracy of the relevant web presence and printed information. More generally, there is, in the view of the audit team, comprehensive information available via the University website.

179   Students met by the audit team, and as expressed in the student written submission, were generally positive about the accuracy and range of information provided by the University. However, the team, through discussion with students and from reading the student written submission, formed the view that there were a number of examples where information for students could have been clearer. For example, information on facilities for students with disabilities needed enhancing in order that a clear picture was conveyed prior to recruitment. Similarly, the team felt that information about potential barriers to placements faced by overseas students needed to be clearer in recruitment literature. This is particularly so in light of the evident attraction that the University's reputation for such opportunities has and the difficulties that may exist for overseas students. The team also felt that the documentation on the University's credit system could be made clearer. While based on the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), like most universities in Europe, the University has not formally obtained the 'ECTS label' so the use of the term 'ECTS credit' in documentation risks misinterpretation.

180   The University has defined explicit requirements regarding the provision of definitive programme information to students in the University Code of Practice. This defines key roles and responsibilities regarding the production of programme specifications and programme handbooks. All students are required to receive handbooks containing the defined contents. The Code also outlines the institutional approach to programme specifications, with directors of studies having the responsibility to keep them up-to-date and make them available on the University website. The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office (LTEO) provides common content and another section of the Code provides guidance on the production of programme specifications.

181   The audit team was able to study a sample of programme handbooks, for both on-campus and collaborative provision. Handbooks contained programme specifications or a key subset of specification information. The team considered the coverage in these handbooks and the use made of the standard text provided by the LTEO to be both extensive and thorough. The Student Records and Examinations Office is the coordinating user of the University central student record system (SAMIS) and maintains an online programme and unit catalogue. This website provides information about most units and programmes and provides comprehensive information on the modular system and the way in which programmes are structured. The team heard from students that they make extensive use of the unit database.

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