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Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Nottingham Trent University (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 Nottingham Trent University is that:

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers
- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

As Nottingham Trent University will be subject to a separate audit of its collaborative provision, these judgements do not apply to that provision.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University has a clear strategy for enhancement of the student learning experience. The audit team found this strategy, which is well supported by its structures and processes, to be increasingly effective.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The audit found that the University's management of support, supervision and assessment of its postgraduate research students to be rigorous and effective. The University's policies, procedures and regulations meet the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic standards and quality in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the comprehensive nature and clarity of the Academic Quality and Standards Handbook and the way in which its currency is maintained (paragraphs 17, 19, 26)
- the continued development of links with employers and the embedding of employability across much of the curriculum to which this has led (paragraphs 61, 62)
- the University's commitment to research informed teaching and the approach it is taking to ensure that the curriculum is informed by research (paragraphs 81 to 86)
- the use of the University's Welcome Week as an institutional approach to enhancing the induction and retention of a diverse student body (paragraphs 111, 112, 114)
- the structured, strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities across the University (paragraphs 124 to 132)

- the effectiveness of supervision, support and monitoring of postgraduate research students (paragraphs 85, 141, 142, 149).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- consistently apply the policies and guidance provided in the Academic Quality and Standards Handbook with respect to feedback to students on assessment (paragraphs 50 to 52)
- remain mindful of the recommendation of the previous Institutional audit with respect to programme oversight, as it assesses the comprehensiveness and fitness for purpose of its new periodic School review process (paragraphs 69, 70).

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- consider how to make the process for responding to changes in external reference points more systematic (paragraphs 41, 45).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 The origins of the University can be traced back to the establishment of the Nottingham Government School of Design in 1843. In 1966, Nottingham College of Art and Design linked with the Nottingham Regional College of Technology as a Polytechnic designate, which became Trent Polytechnic in 1970. Nottingham College of Education at Clifton was amalgamated with Trent Polytechnic in 1975. The institution was redesignated Nottingham Polytechnic in 1989 before becoming The Nottingham Trent University in 1992. In 1999, Brackenhurst College was added to the University as its Brackenhurst Campus, which lies approximately 14 miles from the city centre. The original two sites of the University, the Clifton Campus and the City Campus, are about four miles apart within the city of Nottingham.

2 In August 2004, the University put in place a structure of four colleges, which between them embrace the nine schools of the University. The colleges (and schools) are the:

- College of Business, Law and Social Sciences (Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Law School, School of Social Sciences)
- College of Art and Design and Built Environment (School of Art and Design, School of Architecture, Design and the Built Environment)
- College of Arts, Humanities and Education (School of Arts and Humanities, School of Education)
- College of Science (School of Animal, Rural and Environmental Sciences, School of Science and Technology).

As stated in the University's Briefing Paper, 'The Colleges provide business and administrative functions, whilst the Schools are the focus of academic activities'.

3 In 2007-08, the University had 18,738 undergraduate students, 4,352 taught postgraduate students and 464 postgraduate research students. Nearly 22 per cent of the University's students study part-time.

4 The University's Strategic Plan 2004-2010 states that the institution's mission is 'To deliver education and research that shape lives and society'. This mission is supported by six aims to:

- develop confident and ambitious graduates equipped to shape society
- provide education that promotes both intellectual initiative and the highest academic standards to prepare students for life and career
- be the university of choice for business, industry and the professions in our areas of expertise
- be recognised both nationally and internationally for the effectiveness of our teaching and the relevance of our research
- transform the learning and working environment to create an inspiring and innovative culture
- have the courage and the will to implement change.

The information base for the audit

5 Nottingham Trent University provided the audit team with a briefing paper and supporting documentation, including that related to the sampling trails selected by the team. The index to the Briefing Paper was referenced to sources of evidence to illustrate the institution's approach to managing the security of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its educational provision. The team had access to hard copy of all documents referenced in the Briefing Paper; in addition the team had access to the University's intranet.

6 The Students' Union produced a student written submission, which set out the students' views on the accuracy of information provided to them, the experience of students as learners and their role in quality management.

7 In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the previous Institutional audit (May 2004)
- the report of the audit of collaborative provision (March 2006)
- reports of reviews by QAA at the subject level since the previous Institutional audit
- reports produced by other relevant bodies (for example, OfSTED and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies)
- the University's internal documents
- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students
- the report of the QAA Review of postgraduate research programmes (2006).

Developments since the last audit

8 The University was subject to an Institutional audit in May 2004. There had also been a number of QAA audits and reviews of specific areas of activity:

- July 2005, Foundation Degree review of Sports Horse Management and Training
- March 2006, audit of the University's collaborative provision
- July 2006, Review of research degree programmes
- April 2007, audit of the University's collaborative provision in Russia.

Developments since the Review of research degree programmes are addressed in Section 6. Pertinent recommendations from the other engagements are dealt with below.

9 The Institutional audit of 2004 highlighted a number of features of good practice, in particular, the University's student-centred approach to academic support and its activities, designed to add to the employability of its graduates. In the Briefing Paper prepared for this audit, the University reported further developments in both these areas of good practice. A student-centred approach is defined by the University's Strategic Plan as the central driver of strategic objectives, which was noticeably reflected in the structure and objectives of the Institutional Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy 2006-10. The University has also continued to develop ways to include work experience in the learning programmes of its students. The success of this strategy is demonstrated by the high levels of employment among its graduates: in 2006, 97.5 per cent of its full-time students had either obtained employment or continued to further study within six months of graduation.

10 The 2004 audit advised the University 'to refine the detailed regulations of the internal subject review process so that the Academic Board can be assured that the full range of University programmes align with the appropriate reference points'. The audit team had been concerned that some programmes would not receive full and detailed external scrutiny on a periodic basis, thereby leaving the Academic Board unsighted on some potentially important matters.

11 Two recommendations for action that was considered desirable were made in the 2004 audit. The first encouraged the University to 'assure itself through Academic Board monitoring that the revised quality assurance framework continues to be fit for purpose and supports enhancement'. The audit team had noted the plans to restructure the University into four colleges and a number of schools and that the structure below Academic Board level had not

been finalised. The second recommendation suggested that the University 'continue to develop centrally-held data used for the monitoring of quality and standards which is robust and accurate and has the confidence of staff'.

12 The University reported its responses to these recommendations in its Institutional Audit Follow-up Report to the QAA in April 2006. This pointed out that changes had been made in November 2004 to the internal subject review process that provided for all programmes to be reviewed over a six-year period. However, the University subsequently re-examined its periodic review procedures and conducted a consultation on a new model, after which it put in place a different system called periodic school review. The first review using this procedure, which focuses on schools rather than subjects, is scheduled for April 2009. The periodic review process is discussed in more detail in paragraphs 65 to 70.

13 The University was also advised 'to develop specific guidance for the quality assurance, including approval, monitoring and periodic review, of programmes delivered through flexible learning'. The audit team had noted that some programmes had not been fully included in reviews that had used a sampling approach. The advice that it would be appropriate to develop guidance on the approval, monitoring and review of flexible and distributed learning programmes led to the development and publication of a set of guidelines (updated in October 2008) on the website of the Centre for Academic Standards and Quality. The audit of collaborative provision in 2006 concluded that it would be desirable for the University 'to apply through its approval and review processes the recently issued flexible and distance-learning guidelines to all relevant programmes at the first opportunity'.

14 The 'desirable' recommendation to develop more robust data sets for the monitoring of quality and standards has been dealt with by the University through the development of its student record system as a source of programme information that can be drawn on by a variety of staff. These changes are assessed elsewhere in this Annex (see paragraphs 53 to 58).

15 Since the Institutional audit in May 2004, the University's framework for the management of academic provision and support services has changed substantially. These changes have been driven by the Strategic Plan 2004-10, which informed the restructuring of academic provision and support services within a framework of four colleges and nine schools. This arrangement has clearly distinguished the structures responsible for the business and resource management of the University. Essentially, the colleges and central registry offices are responsible for academic administration, financial operations, marketing and human resources, while the schools develop and deliver the educational programmes of the University. The committee structure was aligned with the new organisation of the University. The Academic Board continued to oversee academic provision throughout the process. However, the Executive Board was phased out and replaced by the four college management teams, each led by a Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College, who is a member of the Senior Management Team and reports directly to the Vice-Chancellor. This structure began operating in August 2004 and remained in place at the time of the audit.

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

16 As noted in the preceding paragraph, the University's strategic plan and governance structure illustrate a distinctive approach of separating a corporate structure, which reports to the Board of Governors, from an academic structure of colleges and schools that reports to the Academic Board. The Academic Board, therefore, has ultimate responsibility for the standards and quality of educational provision as the senior academic committee of the University. It has a range of responsibilities relating to the organisation of learning and teaching, research, scholarship, standards, students and programmes. It also advises the Vice-Chancellor on academic matters.

17 The Academic Board executes its responsibilities for the standards and quality of educational provision for taught programmes via the Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC), and for research programmes via the University Research Degrees Committee (through the University Research Committee), to which committees it delegates appropriate authorities. The Academic Board, which meets quarterly, receives detailed reports from each college and makes decisions on recommendations forwarded to it from ASQC and University Research Degrees Committee. The Academic Board is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and its membership includes heads of colleges and deans of school. Registry undertakes the administration associated with the board and is the source of information for standards and quality management, such as student data and regulatory material. The University's policies, procedures and regulations are set out in the Academic Standards and Quality Handbook, which the audit team found to be comprehensive and clear.

18 The ASQC, which is chaired by the Senior Pro-Vice Chancellor, is the key committee that integrates the management of academic standards, quality assurance and the enhancement of learning opportunities. The central department that supports all aspects of the work of ASQC is the Centre for Academic Standards and Quality. The ASQC's terms of reference include advising Academic Board on policy relating to the management and enhancement of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. Schools manage and oversee quality and standards in their areas via the School Academic Standards and Quality Committees (School ASQC), which have common terms of reference. The ASQC operates and monitors the systems for programme approval, the five-year cycle of periodic school reviews, and oversees collaborative arrangements to assure the Academic Board of the maintenance of academic standards and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities within programmes of study. The ASQC is supported by two subcommittees, the Standards and Quality Management Subcommittee (SQMSC) and the Delegated Collaborative Provision Subcommittee.

19 The SQMSC reports to ASQC its activities associated with programme approval, programme monitoring and annual reporting. The SQMSC considers proposals that have been approved by each School ASQC and makes recommendations to ASQC. In effect, SQMSC is an operational bridge between School ASQCs and the Centre for Academic Standards and Quality, and is a forum for the debate and consideration of new policy initiatives that are then forwarded to ASQC and may result in changes to the Academic Standards and Quality Handbook to maintain its currency. The SQMSC, therefore, has the deliberate function of reviewing the appropriateness of the Academic Standards and Quality Handbook and recommending changes, such as alignment with changes to the *Code of practice*, a function that the audit team found to be carried out highly effectively. In addition, the SQMSC receives and considers external examiners' reports and issues associated with school-based collaborative activity.

20 While the SQMSC oversees the approval and monitoring of taught programmes delivered by the University, Delegated Collaborative Provision Subcommittee has responsibility for overseeing the approval and monitoring process for programmes at the University's Delegated Centres. It is responsible for advising ASQC on the development of collaborative strategy, and for overseeing the health of collaborative programmes through its responsibility for programme monitoring, annual reporting, student evaluation, external examining, new programme development and quality enhancement at the University's Delegated Centres. As the University's collaborative programmes will be subject to a separate audit, the audit team did not consider this committee further.

21 Each School ASQC includes officers from the Centre for Academic Standards and Quality to help ensure a consistent approach to the operation of the committee. Additionally, each School ASQC includes the school's Standards and Quality Manager (who works closely with the Centre), the learning and teaching coordinator, academic administration manager, academic staff and representatives from Libraries and Learning Resources, Professional Services and students. School ASQCs have a remit for advising the dean on the development of strategy relating to the maintenance of standards and the enhancement of quality. They monitor the achievement of the

school's learning and teaching enhancement plan and seek to support academic programmes through the dissemination of good practice in learning and teaching. School ASQCs take responsibility for the oversight of continual monitoring and annual reporting. The report is forwarded to ASQC to be checked for consistency with university strategy. In addition, at a school level, School ASQCs monitor student assessment, student evaluation, make recommendations to the University's External Examiner Appointments Panel on external examiner nominations, evaluate new programme proposals and oversee school-based collaborative provision.

22 Below school level, the committee structure focuses on the enhancement of learning opportunities. Practice between schools varies to some degree to reflect local requirements. However, all schools have a senior management team, a learning and teaching committee, and programme committees for each programme of study. These committees monitor the standards and quality at programme level and produce an annual programme standards and quality report. Some programme areas have additional staff-student liaison committees. Learning and teaching coordinators from each school meet regularly at the learning and teaching coordinator network to share practice and discuss new initiatives.

23 The audit team's scrutiny of recent minutes of ASQC showed resolutions being forwarded to the Academic Board for approval, for example, in respect of Academic Appeals and the student complaint procedure and for the exemption of honours degrees for professional stages of legal training. Such examples suggested to the team that, while ASQC is the key subcommittee as far as standards and quality are concerned, the Academic Board retains an appropriate level of oversight as the senior forum for the management of standards and the quality of educational provision.

24 A similar scrutiny of minutes showed activities consistent with the terms of reference and reporting mechanisms between SQMSC and ASQC, and from the nine School ASQCs to both SQMSC and ASQC. In particular, each School ASQC produces an annual school standards and quality report based on the programme standards and quality reports within the school and other enhancement activities and action planning. The ASQC then considers an annual report for the previous session, which enables the institution to take an overview of all activities undertaken within the remit of the ASQC. The audit team found the ASQC annual report to be a comprehensive and detailed factual review of activities, summary of actions taken and a thorough evaluation of progress made.

25 The Academic Standards and Quality Handbook notes the importance of the School ASQCs in terms of monitoring standards and enhancing quality at the school level, and identifies the Dean or other senior member of the school's executive to be the chair of this committee. The audit team noted that deans have a specific function in the assurance and enhancement of their school's teaching and learning activities. In meetings with staff, it became clear to the team that a variation in practice associated with the chairing of the School ASQC was apparent. Further examination indicated that while the Dean or Associate Dean chaired the School ASQC in some schools, in others this had been delegated to other members of the school such as academic team leaders, Standards and Quality Manager, Principal Lecturer or Learning and Teaching Coordinator. Given the importance and centrality of the School ASQC, the team considered that closer compliance with the Academic Standards and Quality Handbook guidelines regarding the chair of the School ASQC would significantly reduce any risk of inconsistency that might otherwise arise in the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

26 Overall, its scrutiny of documentation and discussions with key staff provided the audit team with considerable evidence of the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of the University's framework for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. The transmission of reporting through committees was clearly being undertaken routinely and consistently. The team considered the comprehensive nature and clarity of the Academic Quality and Standards Handbook and the way in which its currency is maintained to be a feature of good practice.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

27 As noted in paragraph 17, the Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC), has delegated authority to implement and monitor policy, procedures and regulations in respect of taught provision. Research degrees and higher awards are governed by separate policies, procedures and regulations and are overseen on behalf of the Academic Board by the University's Research Degrees Committee. The University's management of research degrees and higher awards is examined in Section 6.

28 The University's Briefing Paper prepared for this audit states that programme approval assures the University and its stakeholders that awards are of an appropriate standard and that the review of awards and standards occurs through: the external examiner process; the boards of examiners; monitoring at programme level and annual reporting, and through periodic school review.

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

29 The Academic Board delegates to ASQC the specific responsibility of overseeing the approval of new programmes. As noted in paragraph 19, ASQC, in turn, delegates operational responsibility to the Standards and Quality Management Subcommittee (SQMSC) to act as a standing approval panel and to monitor the conduct and outcomes. The Centre for Academic Standards and Quality (CASQ) manages the approval process, and monitors and reports on the fulfilment of conditions. Membership of SQMSC comprises individuals with quality management expertise drawn from across the Schools. The approval process is designed to exercise proportionality through combining appropriate rigour with the efficient use of staff time.

30 Proposals for new programmes are presented to and approved by School ASQCs before the development of a business plan and progression for formal approval by the College Management Team and commencement of programme development. The CASQ supports the programme team to ensure that the emerging programme fits with University policy and practice. Teams are required to consult with external parties during programme planning. Details of external involvement in programme planning are required to be provided within the contextual document for approval.

31 Approval may take place over one or two stages according to the nature and scale of the proposal. Stage 1 is undertaken by the School ASQC and stage 2 by the CASQ. The panel for Stage 2 will comprise a chair, one or two internal members of the University's staff (who are not linked to the programme) and a CASQ officer. In the case of 'breaking ground' proposals, or any proposal that involves professional, statutory and regulatory body accreditation, the panel may include one or two members external to the University. Written evidence of external consultation by the team is taken into account in determining the need for external membership on the panel. On occasion, an external member may be invited to submit written comments rather than attend the event. In 2007-08, of 58 final validation and review events reported, 14 had no external member present, although two of these did include written comments from externals. This would appear to dilute the University's statement in its Briefing Paper that the key features of the University's approach to approval include the 'incorporation of external academics on validation panels'. The audit team understood the University's intention for programme approval processes to be proportionate and flexible but felt that the University might benefit from continuing to assure itself that external participation is proportionate to the level, importance and complexity of the approval in hand.

32 The SQMSC monitors the fulfilment of conditions of approval through a live rolling report presented by the CASQ. Evidence of careful scrutiny of conditions and their fulfilment was seen by the audit team. Minutes of the SQMSC are endorsed by ASQC and received by the Academic Board.

33 The approval of programmes delivered through flexible learning is discussed in paragraphs 87-88.

34 The University's processes for monitoring and review are discussed below in Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities.

External examiners

35 External examiners are appointed to monitor academic standards, moderate assessment processes and to report on their findings. They determine whether standards are appropriate and in line with national subject benchmarks, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), and institutional programme specifications. External examiners comment on moderation, review samples of assessed work and provide advice where differences in marking are highlighted, but they do not arbitrate. They consider the form and content of assessments set.

36 External examiners are appointed by the External Examiner Appointments Panel after approval at school level through School ASQCs, or for collaborative provision, through Delegated Collaborative Provision Subcommittee. It is the Dean's responsibility to ensure that there are sufficient examiners to cover the breadth and volume of provision. Clear guidance is provided for internal staff and for potential and existing external examiners through an easily navigable website. The website includes: criteria for appointment; restrictions on appointment; guidance for committees; guidance for programme leaders; information on induction events; notes on liaising with external examiners, including a schedule of activities; a link to the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*, as well as useful contacts and web addresses.

37 An induction event, which is shared with new academic staff, is held for new external examiners. The day includes input from senior management and CASQ, together with the opportunity to work in schools with the appropriate programme team.

38 An online report template is provided for use by external examiners. External examiners' reports are received by the appropriate programme leader. All reports are read by the Vice-Chancellor. Features of good practice and issues identified in these reports, and any subsequent actions, are reported through the programme standards and quality report prepared for annual monitoring (see paragraphs 63 to 64). The programme standards and quality report is considered by programme committees, which include student representatives as well as by School ASQCs, that had just secured student representation across all schools at the time of the audit. School ASQCs provide feedback on the reports and ensure that all actions raised by external examiners have been appropriately followed up. Where external examiners raise questions with respect to University regulations and policy these are reported from School ASQC to the main ASQC. The Centre for Academic Standards and Quality completes an annual summary report on external examiners' reports, which includes an evaluation of whether the system is still fit for purpose, together with qualitative and quantitative summaries of all reports received. External examiners receive a copy of the approved programme standards and quality report. A summary of external examiners' reports and the feedback they receive is included in the school standards and quality reports.

39 On the basis of the documentation provided to it and the responses it received in its meetings with staff, the audit team found that the systems and processes for the appointment and use of external examiners at the University are robust and appropriately implemented, and thereby make a significant contribution to the security of academic standards.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

40 The CASQ is responsible for reviewing the University's policies and practice against external standards and benchmarks to ensure that they remain relevant and current. The last review was conducted in September 2008. Changes to the Code of practice are reviewed under the guidance of CASQ, which convenes a working party to consider the implications and make recommendations to the ASQC for a University response. The CASQ also conducted a mapping exercise of the Academic Standards and Quality Handbook to the *Standards and Guidelines for*

Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (published by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) during 2007-08 and reported congruence as a result.

41 Compliance with the FHEQ and subject benchmarks is evaluated at programme approval. Updates and revisions to subject benchmark statements are communicated to schools via the Head of the CASQ. The University's Briefing Paper stated that continued alignment with subject benchmarks is checked through periodic review. However, given the nature of that process, which is not programme-focused (see paragraphs 69-70), the audit team felt that a more systematic means of responding to changes in subject benchmarks was needed. This view was reinforced when staff were unable to articulate to the team a systematic mechanism for ensuring that changes to external reference points are mapped against programmes and any relevant changes implemented. Evidence of a clear process was not apparent from the minutes of School ASQCs or in programme standards and quality reports.

42 At the programme design stage, teams are required to produce a programme specification that provides succinct and accessible summaries of the key features of the programme, focusing on its outcomes. Programme specifications are described as public documents primarily for use by the students, who can access them on the intranet. Programme handbooks seen by the audit team included all relevant details contained in programmes specifications in an amplified form. The team found that there did not appear to be access to programme specifications for prospective students or other people external to the University.

43 A template and guidance are provided to support the development of programme specifications and further accessible advice is provided on the intranet. A standard condition of programme approval is that programme specifications are regularly updated to take account of University policy and any changes arising out of monitoring and annual reporting. The audit team saw evidence that this happens.

44 A significant number of programmes is governed by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. A comprehensive database has been established that includes all programmes by school, year of approval, and date for re-approval. Programmes that receive University approval may be approved indefinitely. Where professional, statutory and regulatory bodies validate a programme, however, interim approval events are held to ensure that programmes conform to the University's standard assessment regulations and that there are procedures for the interpretation and variation of those regulations to comply with the relevant professional, statutory and regulatory bodies' requirements. Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies' reports are received by programme teams and are reported in programme standards and quality reports.

45 The use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points was judged by the audit team to be effective in setting and maintaining academic standards of the provision offered by the University. However, a strengthening of tracking systems for implementation of external subject benchmarks at a programme level would ensure continued engagement with external reference points. The audit team considered it desirable that the University consider how to make the process for responding to changes in external reference points more systematic.

Assessment policies and regulations

46 The University clearly sets out in the Academic Standards and Quality Handbook its established principles and policies for the provision of assessment, which incorporates the ideas and precepts contained in external guidance documents such as the FHEQ and the *Code of practice, Section 6 Assessment of students*. The principles underlying assessment policies, practices and regulations are: appropriateness to learning and to level; reliability; validity; openness; fairness and the maintenance of standards. The CASQ has responsibility for distributing information to staff and this is carried out through dedicated CASQ officers, who work with schools.

47 Assessment boards are conducted in line with the processes and regulations set out in information and guidance for boards of examiners' meetings. From the documentation it saw, the audit team found that regulations are applied consistently. The team also saw evidence of reviews of the regulations in response to concerns raised by external examiners.

48 Information and guidance for assessments is provided to students in module specifications and programme handbooks. Programme specifications make reference to the assessment regulations. Some programme handbooks also provide detailed information on assessment regulations including calculation of classifications. Any special assessment arrangements that may be required, such as assessment for 40-credit modules, must be explicitly stated in all relevant student documentation, with clear statements as to what is needed for the student to pass the module successfully.

49 Improved accessibility and inclusivity of assessment for disabled students has been addressed through 'Achieving Accessible Assessment', a project funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) from 2003 to 2006. This project aimed to develop and disseminate transferable resources to improve access to assessment. Staff and students view this as an enhancement of the student learning experience.

50 The University's policy on feedback to students states that students should be given guidance on the expected timeframe for providing feedback and that normally work will be given back within a maximum of four weeks from the date of submission. The quality and timeliness of feedback to students have not been well rated in either the University's student surveys or the National Student Survey. In November 2008, the ASQC reported 'the need for more timely and informative feedback'. The student written submission indicated that assessment feedback was an issue for students in terms of timing and quality, with 59 per cent indicating that faster feedback would be a priority for improvement. The audit team asked students about their experience of the timeliness of feedback, and a variety of practice was apparent across the institution at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. All students who met the team indicated that the time for return of marks for assessed work was not published in programme handbooks. The team's scrutiny of a sample of 10 programme handbooks confirmed this to be the case.

51 The Institutional Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy includes a priority to establish a minimum standard for formative and summative feedback, which has been determined. However, the audit team found that implementation at school level is variable with some schools having developed their own guidelines. Two examples that were seen did not include reference to either the need to provide an expected timeframe for return of feedback or the normal timeframe for return. The team found that in some cases, rather than augment and amplify the Academic Standards and Quality Handbook guidelines, these were simply duplicated, or even abbreviated at school level.

52 The audit team found that appropriate assessment policies are in place to secure the academic standards of the institution's provision. However, the implementation of policy with relation to feedback was variable and in the main did not meet the University's own recommendations. Consequently, the University is advised to consistently apply the policies and guidance provided in the Academic Quality and Standards Handbook with respect to feedback to students on assessment.

Management information - statistics

53 The previous Institutional audit recommended that the University continue to develop centrally held data for the monitoring of quality and standards. In April 2007, a strategic implementation plan for information management and information systems for the next three to five years was established, which built upon the University's strategic plan. The implementation of the plan is overseen by the Information Management Steering Group. More specifically the plan included two relevant major initiatives, to bring together consistent, accurate and timely

information to facilitate improved decision-making and inform business decisions and to improve the management of the student recruitment process.

54 The University's central record system is used by Registry to provide reports in a common format to programme teams and schools. The reports summarise intake, progression and completion data over the last five years. Information is provided at programme level or for clusters of programmes, but do not provide module-level information.

55 Schools are required to provide an analysis of the data and emerging trends at a programme level within the programme standards and quality reports, and at school level within school standards and quality reports. The school's quality managers analyse data at a school level. However, although data are received by programme teams and schools there are ongoing concerns with respect to the timeliness of the data, its accuracy and accessibility. Data are not received prior to submission of programme standards and quality reports or the monitoring of diversity and equality. Although the development of the student record system has begun to improve the quality of data that can be provided, there was evidence that there is room for further improvement to be made in its accuracy. Data are presented in the Higher Education Students Early Statistics format, which staff do not find helpful. Particular problems were reported to the audit team with respect to progression data for postgraduate research students, which have led to the need to maintain college-based systems.

56 Summary information relating to instances of academic misconduct is considered by ASQC with a report produced by the Chair of the University's Academic Appeals Committee. Data are reviewed at school level and, for the first time in 2006-07, the University analysed information on equality and diversity across all reported cases that indicated a higher proportion of reported academic misconduct among certain groups when compared against the Higher Education Statistics Agency data set for the University.

57 Notwithstanding the problems mentioned above, the audit team saw evidence that the data received are considered within schools and at an institutional level. They inform business planning, the monitoring of standards and student progression. The team found that the use of statistics is contributing to the management of standards but that the quality and timeliness of the data provided to programme teams could be strengthened. The University acknowledges this and is working on improving the data and its use.

58 The audit found that the University's management of academic standards is robust and operating as intended. The consistent application of the University's regulations and policies and associated guidance reflect consideration of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure. The systems in place clearly contribute to the establishment and maintenance of the academic standards of awards, although the use of external input in approval processes could be clarified and the provision and use of management information could be strengthened. There is strong and scrupulous use of external examiners in the summative assessment of provision. All of these features support a judgement of confidence in the soundness of the University's current 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

59 The University's engagement with external reference points and the positive impact this has on the student experience is clearly discernible in the minutes of the Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC), School ASQC and in school standards and quality reports. Changes to the *Code of practice* and FHEQ are carefully monitored by the Centre for Academic Standards and Quality (CASQ) so that they inform the development of practice and policy. For example, the review of the *Code of practice, Section 5: Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters*, led to a revised academic appeals and complaints procedure that aligned with the

outcomes of an internal review of special circumstances. Students reported to the audit team that this revision had made the procedures more accessible.

60 Reports are presented to the ASQC on external publications and key speeches on higher education to inform the development of practice within the University. As part of the University's consideration of the Burgess Report, a review of the extent to which it is engaging with the Bologna agenda was discussed. As a result of this review, a diploma supplement was introduced in 2008.

61 The University states that it has links with more than 6,000 employers world wide. The audit team found evidence at all levels of access to work-based opportunities, the development of employability skills and the involvement of employers in the development of curricula, research and enterprise. The University has clearly set out to ensure that all students are prepared for the world of work, with opportunities to apply their learning in a work context. Challenging work placements are central to the Nottingham Trent University learning experience, with all courses providing students with opportunities to translate theory into practice in a work setting. The University featured in the top 10 UK Universities for employability in 2006. Students met during the audit praised the vocational relevance of their programmes and the broad encouragement to undertake work experience and/or volunteering. In areas where opportunities are more limited there was evidence of steps being taken to improve access to employers and work-based learning. The team considered the University's engagement with employers to be exemplary.

62 The audit team found evidence that the University makes wide and appropriate use of a range of external reference points as well as the Academic Infrastructure. The team found that the continued development of links with employers and the embedding of employability across much of the curricula to which this has led, to be a feature of good practice.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

63 The University believes that annual monitoring at programme and school level assures that there is an ongoing review of standards and quality, which highlights developments and enhancements in the student learning experience and assures the University of the continuing health of its awards. A programme standards and quality report is produced for each programme. Each report includes: significant programme changes; programme statistics; response to issues and good practice identified by external examiners; response to key outcomes of student evaluation; issues relating to collaborative provision and/or flexible and distributed learning; actions relating to professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and other external agencies; research and staff development; response to school issues; examples of good practice; the rolling action plan, and any issues to be referred to school and other matters to report. This then informs the production of a school standards and quality report that includes contextual information, a synopsis of programme standards and quality reports, late external examiners' reports, data and student satisfaction survey results, research and staff development activities, and any points for University consideration. The school standards and quality reports are received by ASQC to produce an overview report. These draw together: school rolling action plans; identified good practice; quality assurance and enhancement-related issues for University consideration, and the school's institutional learning and teaching enhancement strategy focus. The audit team found all these reports to be both critical and informative such that they make an important contribution to the ongoing monitoring of standards, quality and enhancement. For example, in the 2007-08 report, new practice related to plagiarism procedures was recorded in response to an action from the previous report, with each school having in place an academic misconduct group.

64 Each programme standards and quality report results in a rolling action plan that is expected to relate to the school's institutional learning and teaching enhancement strategy action plan (see paragraph 127) wherever possible. A school rolling action plan is produced in a two-year cycle that articulates actions emerging in the school from the range of review and monitoring activities, including programme standards and quality reports. This provides a

comprehensive mechanism for the School ASQC to monitor actions taken, the dissemination of good practice, and enhancement developments. This plan is reviewed every six months. At an operational level these plans are managed by the school's learning and teaching coordinator, who develops the detail through the school's Programme Standards and Quality Report Learning and Teaching Committee.

65 Prior to the introduction of Periodic School Review, periodic review was focused on subjects. Programmes were normally reviewed once every six years. The process was undertaken by external subject experts and trained internal reviewers. Sampling was used for large and complex provision where at least 50 per cent of provision was considered. As noted above in paragraph 10, the report of the Institutional audit 2004 advised that the University ensure, in the light of its sampling for periodic review, that it can be satisfied that the full range of programmes aligns with appropriate external reference points.

66 The subject review was based on a critical appraisal and specified programme documentation. As well as analysing documentation, the review examined resources, student work and statistical data, and involved meetings with students and staff. A report was produced and provided to the programme team and to ASQC for approval after the event. The programme team was required to provide a written response that informed a follow-up meeting about 12 months after the review. The audit team was provided with all the documentation for two subject reviews. Neither subject area included any programmes accredited by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. The final report of one subject review highlighted the use of external benchmarks as good practice. Within the review process, evidence was also provided about: opportunities to develop employability skills and links with employers; research informed teaching; staff research, and the student experience. The documents seen by the team evinced a detailed process that led to a comprehensive critical analysis of practice. Reports were received by ASQC and follow-up meetings conducted as required, being reported to the appropriate School ASQC and programme committee.

67 As noted above in paragraph 12, periodic school review has been introduced for the academic year 2008-09 to replace subject-based periodic review. The new process is designed to be developmental, while eliminating duplication and unnecessary bureaucracy. An audit trail of programmes is used to test the School's quality assurance and enhancement processes and procedures. Periodic school review has been developed from a process first piloted as the last subject review with Art and Design in 2007. The outcomes of this review provided a detailed and comprehensive examination of a number of the school's programmes under the headings: quality; subject health and standards incorporating curricula, student assessment, student achievement. Programmes were revisited against QAA subject benchmarks in the subject review process, which confirmed that aims and outcomes were consistent with the national benchmarks.

68 Periodic school review is organised by the CASQ such that each school will be reviewed every five years. The process will be conducted by a team that includes external members and students. Students receive development to support their participation and spoke positively about this activity. A progress report on the agreed action plan must be provided by the school to ASQC two years after the review event. The review covers all taught programmes delivered, but a separate procedure is in place for research degrees (see paragraph 139).

69 As the new school-based periodic review process had not been applied at the time of the audit, the team was unable to assess its operation. Although sampling is no longer used in periodic review, the audit team was not clear how the oversight of all programmes would be maintained through the review process, particularly where reliance is placed on using periodic review as a programme-level check on, for example, engagement with external reference points.

70 The audit team found evidence that the University's systems for approval, monitoring and review are robust and effective. The annual monitoring process is effective in ensuring that issues are identified and addressed at appropriate levels, while maintaining a suitable intensity of

institutional overview through the oversight of action plans by AQSC. Similarly, the team found evidence of effective and thorough validation and periodic review processes with an appropriate degree of externality. However, the team advises that the University remain mindful of the recommendation of the previous Institutional audit with respect to programme oversight, as it assesses the comprehensiveness and fitness for purpose of its new periodic School review process.

Management information - feedback from students

71 The University views its students as partners in the learning experience and considers them to be 'paying customers'. Students state that they have the ability to shape their education. Students told the audit team that informal feedback is an important mechanism for eliciting timely responses and that this has a key role in improving their experience. Students also consistently commented positively on the support they receive from staff, through their availability, accessibility and responsiveness to feedback.

72 Formal processes for collecting feedback are in place and were observed to be informing the development of the student experience and the management of standards. In addition to the National Student Survey, the University administers its own student satisfaction survey, which is more comprehensive than its national counterpart. Student response to the surveys has increased such that over 70 per cent of students responded to the National Student Survey in 2008. Analysis of the University's survey is provided at University and School level, with significant detail to inform the development and enhancement of practice. Progress on actions identified is monitored.

73 The feedback from both the national and University's survey was reported to ASQC in January 2008. From this it was evident that the University's response to earlier feedback has had a positive impact. For example, in 2005, students had identified the need for more comprehensive induction. By 2007, feedback in this respect had improved. This improvement was confirmed in the audit team's meetings with students, who praised induction and the University's Welcome Week. The report also showed that the overall satisfaction of students at the University had improved between 2005 and 2007, when 77 per cent of respondents recorded their overall satisfaction. The student written submission also reflects an improvement, referring to an 11 per cent improvement in satisfaction since 2005 with the health centres, and 12 per cent for mature student advisers. The January 2008 report noted that improvements were still required in the areas of timetabling and the communication of lecture changes, and in the provision of detailed feedback on coursework.

74 Student feedback is an integral part of annual and periodic review. At a programme level, teams are required to collect and evaluate student feedback and include this in the programme standards and quality report (see paragraph 63). Although there is no longer a requirement to collect module feedback through a standard format, students and staff met during the visit all reported the use of formal questionnaires, which are often enhanced through informal feedback and the use of structured group feedback. Student feedback is reported through programme standards and quality reports to School standards and quality reports, and is considered within School ASQCs, thereby informing the development of the rolling action plans.

75 The audit team found that the use of student feedback made a positive and valuable contribution to the development and enhancement of learning opportunities.

Role of students in quality assurance

76 The University is currently taking a number of steps to increase the involvement of students in its committees. It is committed to increasing levels of representation in line with current good practice across the sector and is supporting this with training. The Students' Union executive welcomed their involvement in university-level committees, which include the Governing Body, Academic Board and ASQC, where they were made to feel welcome and valued as contributors. Students have also been invited to participate in the new periodic school review process, and to attend School ASQCs.

77 The Students' Union had been involved with development of a number of projects including the new virtual learning environment, and in a new joint 'Initiative on Plagiarism' with CASQ. The audit team formed the view that including the Students' Union or student representatives in any discussions on proposed enhancements to the student learning experience appeared to be normal practice at the University and that, as the University states, this will continue to be so for the foreseeable future.

78 Students participate in all the programme committees as required by the Academic Standards and Quality Handbook, and it was clear to the audit team from the programme standards and quality reports that it sampled that students' views are considered and responded to. The students met by the team reported being trained in preparation for their participation as panel members for the new periodic school review process. The Students' Union, with the support of the University, had also provided a one-day training programme to 170 student representatives at programme level. There was some evidence to suggest, however, that while good in parts, training was inconsistent and underdeveloped in some areas.

79 The audit team found that the established student representation on senior committees appeared to be working satisfactorily, while the newer representation on School ASQCs, for example, would appear to need some time and additional training to become established and reach its full potential. The team found evidence that, at programme level, the students' views were taken seriously and formed an integral component of quality management and enhancement mechanisms, but that, in some cases, this could be improved through better training of course representatives. Such improvement might also raise the students' relatively low overall satisfaction ratings with the course representatives' system.

80 The audit team concluded that the University is a responsive institution that has an extensive framework for student participation in its quality assurance processes, which makes a positive contribution to the management of the quality of learning opportunities.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

81 The University has a clear policy of linking research to teaching. The CASQ provides guidance as to how this can be accomplished and several events and resources have been developed in its support. This initiative contributes to one of the broader aims of the institutional learning and teaching enhancement strategy, namely that of 'creating a modern and inspiring curriculum'. Research informed teaching, including the ways in which research informs the curricula and the student learning experience, is also reviewed during approval, and during periodic school review.

82 In October 2006, the University set up a working party that linked two central University committees, ASQC and the University Research Committee, in order to devise and execute research informed teaching policy and strategy. This working party has since met monthly and has played a significant role in developing, coordinating and promoting developments in the area. In 2007, the working party conducted a survey of the then current University practice and found significant disparity across the institution in terms of how explicit and well established teaching-research links were. The survey revealed some evidence of good practice. For example, in the School of Art and Design, there was a good range of research, scholarly and external activity which impacted favourably on the curricula. There was also interaction between staff research interests and programmes that was meaningful and of benefit to the student. The survey additionally found that pedagogic research was used to inform the delivery of modules and programmes. The Politics periodic subject review also identified extensive research informed and research-based teaching activities. The survey did, however, identify some lack of understanding and shortfalls in policy, protocol and guidance on whether, and how, teaching and research could, and should, be linked at an individual, divisional, school and institutional level.

83 Since 2007, the University has developed a number of initiatives in this area, including the introduction of short-term research leave for staff to engage in projects that develop teaching-research relationships; more visible research and research-teaching links at university events; and the introduction of vacation student scholarships: Scholarship Projects for Undergraduate Researchers. At the time of the audit, this initiative was expanding. In February 2008, 15 awards had been made to students during the coming year, for research attachments. These and other initiatives are implemented through the Institutional Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy and School Action Plans and are monitored effectively through School ASQCs and the school senior management teams.

84 The University has also recently launched an adjunct to its postgraduate certificate in education, namely a Postgraduate Diploma in Research Informed Teaching, which is aimed at increasing staff research skills and awareness. Although it has experienced some start-up problems, in terms of staff support and release in particular, the audit team found this to be an interesting development that could have significant impact on this area of practice.

85 The University is making good progress in using research to enhance the quality of its learning and teaching. Developments in this area are led by the Working Party on Research Informed Teaching, which, in the audit team's view had played an important role in developments to date. The research student experience is well supported and contributes to this process (paragraphs 141, 142 and 149). The scholarship projects for undergraduate researchers projects for which the team saw evidence appeared to have had significant benefits for both the participants and the curricula. Although limited in number, these should have an important impact on developments in their respective curricula areas. The Postgraduate Diploma in Research Informed Teaching is an interesting development that might benefit from greater support internally and conversion to an MA. The development and monitoring of school action plans generally within the University appeared to be effective and many of the plans the team viewed included reference to research informed teaching. The ASQC also receives an oral update of progress with research informed teaching.

86 The audit team found strong links between research and teaching across the University that contribute significantly to the quality of learning opportunities. Although it is not yet fully embedded, the team regarded the University's commitment to research informed teaching and the approach it is taking to ensure that the curricula are informed by research as a feature of good practice.

Other modes of study

87 In a document made available to the audit team, the University reported that it had 20 programmes involving substantial flexible and distributed learning spread across four schools. These programmes did not fall within the audit trails selected by the team. As noted above (paragraph 13) the audit of collaborative provision recommended that the University's guidance on the approval of flexible and distributed learning programmes be applied to all flexible and distributed learning programmes, both internal and in collaborative provision, at the first opportunity. It expressed concern that employing sampling methodology in the then subject review process would mean that programmes using flexible and distributed learning would not be reviewed in detail, nor their learning materials exposed to external scrutiny, for some considerable time. The report also noted sparse consideration of flexible and distributed learning issues in school standards and quality reports.

88 The University's guidance lists the specific issues that need to be addressed in the design of flexible and distributed learning programmes regarding: standards; learning, teaching and assessment; student support and guidance; learning resources and subject health. During monitoring and review there is meant to be a specific focus on the three major areas that are most sensitive in flexible and distributed learning provision, for example, delivery, assessment and support. The guidance also shows how the Academic Standards and Quality Handbook has been

mapped to the *Code of practice*. The audit team's review of ASQC, the Standards and Quality Management Subcommittee and School ASQC papers revealed little consideration of flexible and distributed learning issues. The team did not have the opportunity to test the application of the University's guidance to the approval or review of a specific programme.

89 The University launched its new virtual learning environment in September 2008. This followed an extensive period of consultation, tendering and planned implementation. The virtual learning environment appears to work well and has been welcomed by staff and students as a significant improvement on its predecessor. The launch was supported by training for both staff and students in the operation and use of the system and appears to have gone smoothly. The University expects there to be a significant presence for every module on the virtual learning environment, and defines minimum standards of content.

90 The virtual learning environment provides a platform for considerable improvement in the quality of learning opportunities offered to students at the University. In order that these opportunities are exploited to the full, the audit team encourages the University to provide significantly more training in regard to the pedagogic aspects of working with a modern virtual learning environment and the opportunities it offers. The University recognises that it needs to ensure that there is an appropriate and consistent level of presence on the virtual learning environment for modules at all levels and across all schools. From its meetings with staff and students, the audit team concurred with this view.

91 The students the audit team met were complimentary about their experience on particular flexible and distributed learning programmes including the service received from the library. The University's student satisfaction survey, however, shows significantly lower levels of satisfaction for flexible and distributed learning students compared with their full-time equivalents.

92 The audit team found that the procedures for managing the quality of learning opportunities afforded by other modes of study are appropriate. However, the University is encouraged to ensure that its monitoring and review processes apply appropriate oversight to assuage concerns raised in the previous Institutional audit of 2004 and the 2006 audit of collaborative provision.

Resources for learning

93 The Libraries and Learning Resources department has been restructured under new management since the last Institutional audit and the provision has been enhanced through greater alignment with the Strategic Plan, the Institutional learning and teaching enhancement strategy and the research strategy. The library information resources policy was discussed widely, with schools being consulted through School ASQCs and the research community through the University Research Committee. The strategy was also presented to and approved by ASQC. Libraries and Learning Resources are developing their use of benchmarks, implementing 'Key Performance Indicators' and using National Student Survey and University student satisfaction survey results to review their performance. They also conducted a LibQual survey in 2007 to get direct student feedback and to enable benchmarking against UK and international libraries. Libraries and Learning Resources staff hold meetings to brief Students' Union representatives so that they, in turn, can report back to students on developments.

94 The Libraries and Learning Resources department is designated by the University as one of a number of professional service departments and as such is subject to an annual process of professional service review. These reviews involve a budget submission in April and an operational review in September each year. The review panel consists of the Vice-Chancellor, the Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor and two heads of college. The reviews focus on the key objectives of Libraries and Learning Resources and its links to the University's Strategic Plan; the way in which Libraries and Learning Resources monitors its progress towards achieving these objectives; and risks and opportunities. The review and its findings generally remain confidential to the executive arm of

the University but are, in some cases, reported in an abbreviated form to appropriate University committees, including the Academic Board. Libraries and Learning Resources prepares an annual report which is distributed widely across the University.

95 Libraries and Learning Resources provision is also considered through the University's normal approval, monitoring and review processes. Additionally, Libraries and Learning Resources presents an overview of its operational plan to the Academic Board and holds regular meetings with deans and heads of college at which progress is reported and feedback sought. The audit team saw frequent and consistent evidence of learning resource issues being considered in all such processes and events. Libraries and Learning Resources staff are also members of all School ASQCs and frequently participate actively in their discussions. A recent school review, for example, found that there was an excellent library provision, with students valuing and appreciating the support provided by the library staff.

96 Libraries and Learning Resources has taken account of some of the needs of part-time and distance-learning students by, for example, providing a free loan service to students on placement. It nevertheless receives lower satisfaction ratings in the University student satisfaction survey for flexible and distributed learning and part-time students than for full-time students. It also provides specific support for areas of research excellence by, for example, maintaining collections which, because of their rarity, source, condition, vulnerability, form, provenance or subject coverage, needed to be distinguished from the general stock of the library. Libraries and Learning Resources has also taken specific action and have specific plans to support the development of e-learning and the use of the virtual learning environment.

97 The audit team heard some evidence from students that, while Libraries and Learning Resources services and staff were generally well regarded, there were significant differences between the quality of provision on different campuses, and that there were some problems with noise in the library and in accessing computers at certain times. These comments were supported by the findings of the University's student survey, which also indicated that the University was making progress in addressing a number of these issues. The team noted from the records of a meeting that academic staff were, however, critical of the information resources available, although the document did not elaborate the areas of perceived deficiency.

98 The University is undertaking significant development of its estate. Staff and students met by the audit team stated that much of the estate provides excellent state-of-the-art facilities with other parts under development. The University regards providing high-quality facilities and support services as being a key part of its 'brand'. The University student satisfaction survey indicates generally good levels of satisfaction with accommodation. The two periodic reviews that the team examined commented favourably on the facilities available to students and the students' view of these facilities. Research and postgraduate students were also generally complimentary concerning the facilities provided for them. Some students did, however, comment adversely on the specific facilities available to them, while recognising that the University was working to improve facilities generally.

99 The audit team found that the University provides a good level of learning resources, to full-time, on-campus students in particular. Libraries and Learning Resources has put in place appropriate review and feedback and reporting mechanisms at appropriate levels to both staff and students, and seeks and reacts appropriately to feedback, which results in a general improvement in student satisfaction levels. There are, however, some specific areas of provision that the University is aware need to be targeted for improvement.

Admissions policy

100 The Academic Standards and Quality Handbook sets out the procedures for all admissions. These procedures have been aligned with the provisions of the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education*. The implementation of this guidance at college, school and programme level is monitored by ASQC, through school standards and quality reports and other

documentation, to ensure that practice continues to support the strategic objectives of the University, and that they remain current and valid in the light of changing circumstances. The audit team did not see examples of consideration of admissions policy in the sample of school standards and quality reports it scrutinised.

101 The specific procedures currently to be adopted by colleges for the admission of students to individual programmes are considered at programme approval, and, once approved, kept under review during annual monitoring, and may be considered as part of the periodic school review.

102 During 2007, the University undertook a full and detailed business process review of its applications processing. The review used an internal project team and a team of external consultants to map out the existing processes and practices in order to benchmark them and to identify issues and areas for improvement. The review found that many dedicated staff contributed to the success of the recruitment of students, but that these staff often lacked clear and consistent guidance and direction. It also found some processes, such as high volumes of interviewing, that, while thought essential by staff, were high in terms of resource commitment, and resulted in taking an extended time to make an offer. The key areas identified for improvement were lack of ownership, inconsistent practices, under-utilisation of information technology and duplication of effort. The outcome of the review was a complete overhaul of the applications process at the University. This is a complex project involving significant development of the University's student record system and movement of tasks from academic to administrative staff. The implementation of this project is a key strategic priority for the University, with 'first phase' implementation planned for October 2009.

103 The audit team concluded from the documents it viewed and the staff it met that admissions processes varied significantly across both programmes and Schools, but that in general they reflected engagement with the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education*.

Student support

104 The University has a student charter that defines the levels of support a student should expect. The University has traditionally used a mixed model that combines institutional and local delivery of learning support. Most academic programmes contain embedded learning support, either in academic modules or stand-alone skills or professional development modules, usually taught in the first year. There is also a range of different personal and academic tutorial systems developed at school level to suit the particular needs of each school's students. The audit team found no evidence of central guidance on the level of academic or personal support that should be provided by programme teams, although Objective 3 of the institutional learning and teaching enhancement strategy is to 'Develop a co-ordinated approach to the provision of study support'. Targets resulting from the 2007 University student satisfaction survey include, in particular, improvements in personal tutoring. The audit team did, however, find that the student handbooks it sampled generally contained information concerning personal tutor and other student support.

105 Students told the audit team that they generally regarded their personal tutor or programme leader as the first point of contact for advice. They reported that this was generally a satisfactory arrangement. The team came across some support for this view in the two periodic reviews they followed. The University's student satisfaction survey, however, indicates that 'Guidance and support from lecturers' is much more highly regarded than 'support from personal tutors' with the University's own analysis suggesting that there was a greater need for clarity and consistency in the provision of personal tutors. The latter, in particular, is a key University target for improvement over the period 2007 to 2009.

106 The University Student Support Services, like Libraries and Learning Resources, is designated as a professional service and comes within the scope of the University's professional services review procedure (see paragraph 94). The arrangements for student support are also

monitored and enhanced through the University's normal approval, monitoring and review processes. Student Support Services also reports annually on data and trends to School ASQCs and ASQC.

107 Student Support Services provides a range of services that extend programme and school academic guidance systems both generally and targeted to specific groups. These services include: guidance to University staff on supporting students and responding to sensitive student issues; developing and implementing a range of policies relating to student issues, and enabling the University to manage risk and ensure compliance in a number of areas relating to the student experience (such as disability discrimination, immigration issues, complaints handling). Student Support Services has attempted to 'benchmark' itself against other universities but found this to be difficult owing to the different levels of service provided by the different institutions. Careers advice is provided by a unit outwith Student Support Services.

108 A central team, located in the CASQ, conducts research into effective learning and teaching and provides resources to staff to help improve the teaching of learning skills. In 2007-08, support has included workshops about:

- transition into higher education
- helping students work in groups and deliver presentations
- some guest facilitation in conjunction with relevant programme staff to test out delivery of particular learning-skills resources
- acting as brokers providing learning resources to teaching staff sourced from within the University or partners at other institutions
- training second-year students to act as mentors for first years
- working with learning and teaching coordinators to develop the first-year curricula.

109 The intranet pages available to staff and students detailing support available to students are comprehensive and readily accessible. They include specific headings for 'mature students' and 'international students' which lead to specific advice services geared to meet the needs of these students. The University has also recently launched an e-tutoring initiative primarily aimed at flexible and distributed learning students.

110 The University's first Disability Equality Scheme and action plan were published in December 2006 and were developed with the support of a steering group that reported directly to the Board of Governors. The key aim of the Scheme and associated action plan is to set out the University's commitment to promoting disability equality, and to identify how this commitment will be translated into measurable goals. The University believes itself to be at the forefront of sector developments in this area.

111 The University has developed a Welcome Week and an International Students Week which have evolved over recent years to become key components of its induction and retention strategies. Welcome Week was first delivered in September 2005 as a direct result of the 2005 University student satisfaction survey, which indicated that students were less satisfied with the induction process than many other aspects of their student experience. Some groups, particularly mature students, international students and students not living in halls, felt that induction did not cater to their needs.

112 Welcome Week provides an integrated programme of activity during the first week of the student experience at the University. Activities are intended to cover every facet of student life: social, academic, pastoral, cultural and sporting. Welcome Week takes place on all three campuses, and the University works in close conjunction with the Students' Union to deliver the activities. Activities are supported by 250 student volunteers, 'Fresher Reps' who give up their time to help new students move into their halls and begin to orientate themselves to the University. In 2007, for

example, there were over 350 different events for students to take part in. It was clear to the audit team from its meetings that students and staff alike value Welcome Week. It would appear to have had a significant impact on retention rates. The team particularly noted the focus on student health and wellbeing and the move away from some of the more traditional features of freshers' weeks.

113 The Student Support Services achieve high levels of satisfaction in the University's student satisfaction survey and aspects of provision have attracted recognition from external or sector-wide bodies, such as Universities UK, as models of good practice. The evidence reviewed by the audit team generally supported this view. However, discussions with students and some documentary evidence indicated that there was significant scope for increasing awareness and usage of the various careers services offered by the University.

114 The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for student support are appropriate and effective, and that they contribute positively to the quality of learning opportunities. The team found the use of the University's Welcome Week as an institutional approach to enhancing the induction and retention of a diverse student body, a feature of good practice.

Staff support (including staff development)

115 The University makes clear links between its strategic priorities and staff development. It has developed a learning and development strategy to support the Strategic Plan and its associated strategies which outlines the importance of the University's staff in contributing to the future success of the University. This strategy provides a framework for professional learning and development, and articulates responsibilities and operational priorities for professional development at the University that respond to national imperatives for continuing professional development such as the UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education. Deans, heads and academic team leaders are accountable for staff development expenditure and support within their operational units. All strategy documents and other supporting documents are available to staff on the University's web pages.

116 The institutional learning and teaching enhancement strategy has a theme of 'encouraging excellence in professional development' which includes developing minimum standards of practice for academic and support staff engaged in supporting student learning; promoting innovation and dissemination of e-learning development and practice through secondment arrangements; commitment to professional development by ensuring opportunities for staff to develop their scholarship and research so as to improve support for learning and teaching; developing a system of teaching scholarships and fellowships; supporting networking with the Higher Education Academy and its subject networks; and engaging with professional bodies and associations.

117 All full and part-time permanent employees, as well as those appointed to a fixed-term contract of a minimum of three years, are required to complete the PGCHE, which is run in the School of Education and accredited by the Higher Education Academy. Academic team leaders have discretion if a member of staff is on a shorter fixed-term contract or appointed to a sessional contract. This is also considered advisable rather than compulsory for research students who take on teaching duties. There is also, however, a valued, short training programme that is offered to all new staff including visiting lecturers and research students.

118 The audit team noted the work of the Educational Development Unit and the more recently established Centre for Professional Learning and Development. These offer, respectively, assistance with the implementation of the virtual learning environment, and generic and bespoke staff development, which the University considers may become significant in the institutional promotion of enhancement. The team considered the annual learning and teaching conference, which ran for the tenth time in 2008, to be an important vehicle for sharing of ideas involving staff development and other issues across the University.

119 The audit team learned from its meetings that all staff undergo appraisal or performance development review on an annual basis and that these are essentially the same process. The academic team leaders summarise the results of these processes in order that, among other things, generic staff development activities can be identified. These requirements, together with other needs identified from analysis of changes in the external environment, policies and strategies are then fed into the schools' action plans and monitored in the usual way by the University. The team saw an extensive list of staff development activities and was assured in meetings with staff that the effectiveness of this activity was monitored by the CASQ and ASQC.

120 Section 9 of the Academic Standards and Quality Handbook contains guidelines for the peer observation of teaching. This states that staff should normally be observed at least once every two years, with possible exceptions for new academic staff not enrolled on the PGCHE, part-time staff, academic staff who are changing roles, or where there is a pre-existing identified need for support in teaching practice; these staff may be observed more frequently.

121 All staff development activity is reported to and monitored by ASQC. Schools report local activities through School ASQCs and school standards and quality reports and University-based developments are reported through regular reports from the Head of the Professional Learning and Development Unit and the Deputy Head Enhancement (Centre for Academic Standards and Quality) both of whom are members of ASQC.

122 Staff met by the audit team confirmed that human resources procedures were applied as intended, and that the Staff Review and Development Scheme was held to be effective in supporting them in their roles and in enhancing the academic provision of the University. The learning and teaching enhancement strategy highlight report 2007-08 considered by ASQC featured several significant developments in staff development activity. Other documentary evidence that the team saw indicated that there was some variation in the coverage and practice of peer review of teaching, appraisal and performance review and staff development generally. Peer observation was, for example, 're-established' in the School of Education in 2007-08 and featured in the development plans of five schools for 2008-09.

123 The audit team found that the University's systems for the management of learning opportunities were comprehensive, fit for purpose and operating as intended. The University engages well with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points. There is an extensive framework for student participation in quality assurance. The University maintains links between research, scholarly activity and the curricula through a clear strategy to embed research informed teaching. Well-established resource allocation procedures are effective, as are the University's arrangements for student support. There are effective arrangements for staff development and support, although the University might wish to consider ways of securing more consistent application of peer observation and appraisal across the institution. These features support a judgement of confidence in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of learning opportunities. As the University will be subject to a separate audit of its collaborative provision this judgement does not apply to that provision.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

124 Nottingham Trent University has a distinctive and deliberate approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities. Local enhancement strategies are centrally defined and directed, supported by the Centre for Academic Standards and Quality (CASQ), but leave scope for schools to identify and pursue additional priorities within the wider institutional framework. This approach is reflected not only in the structure of the committees that have responsibility for academic provision, but also in their names and terms of reference. As noted above in paragraph 18, all academic activity in each of the nine schools is overseen by the School Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC). The ASQC routinely receives reports from the schools on their learning and teaching enhancement activities, summaries of schools' achievements

within the framework of the University's institutional learning and teaching enhancement strategy, and reports on the activities led by the schools' learning and teaching coordinators. The minutes of these committees were reviewed by the audit team and they demonstrate clearly that a substantial proportion of their business is focused on the quality of support for students' learning and the progress of strategies and projects designed to enhance that quality.

125 The key driver of the institutional approach to quality enhancement is the Strategic Plan, which provides the context for the institutional learning and teaching enhancement strategy 2006-10. The institutional learning and teaching enhancement strategy established a framework of staff roles and activities that promote and advance the institutional enhancement policies. It also defined a set of priority areas for enhancement activity. At the time of the audit, there were four priority areas: creating an innovative and inclusive learning environment; encouraging excellence in professional development; enhancing learner support systems; and creating modern and inspiring curricula.

126 Among particular examples of ways in which the University and schools have advanced these enhancement priorities are: a three-stage programme of development courses available to staff and postgraduate students; a secondment scheme for academic and professional staff allowing them to develop educational initiatives; the appointment of a project support officer to work with the Students' Union in further developing work placements and volunteering; the Research Informed Teaching Initiative; the development of enhanced undergraduate induction in the form of the Welcome Week first delivered in 2005 (see paragraphs 111-112), and, since 2005, the commissioning and subsequent introduction of a virtual learning environment (see paragraph 89). The audit team was able to confirm in its meetings with students and staff both general awareness of the enhancement initiatives and their particular impacts on individuals.

127 The enhancement strategy is supported by a set of organisational structures, posts and procedures designed to ensure initiatives are appropriately resourced and integrated into the academic life of the university. Each school has an institutional learning and teaching enhancement strategy action plan led by an academic appointed to the role of learning and teaching coordinator. Progress on the action plan is reviewed twice a year by the School ASQC and at 'School Days' (away days of the whole school). Learning and teaching coordinators also make annual reports to ASQC on the progress of their school's action plan and objectives for the year ahead. The learning and teaching coordinators are principal lecturers based in, and recruited from, each school. They maintain academic activity as teachers and researchers. The learning and teaching coordinators chair their individual school learning and teaching committees, and are members, and in some cases chairs of School ASQCs. They are also closely linked to the work of the CASQ through their participation in the university learning and teaching coordinator network, which is managed and guided by the Deputy Head for Quality Enhancement. The learning and teaching coordinators met by the audit team have clearly played an important role of linking the institutional level enhancement strategy and particular initiatives in schools.

128 Enhancement activities are also facilitated by the CASQ secondment scheme, which allows academic and professional staff time to develop learning and teaching initiatives. Examples of activities pursued during secondments were: actions to promote research-led teaching within a school; development of the virtual learning environment and enhancements to the teaching of science and technology. Secondment opportunities are evaluated annually and a report made to ASQC.

129 An example of planned cross-institution enhancement to which the University has devoted significant attention and resources is the Research-Informed Teaching Initiative. As noted earlier (paragraphs 81-86), this has been overseen by a permanent working party on which all schools are represented. Another example of institutionally-led enhancement is its comprehensive review of its admissions processes discussed in paragraph 102.

130 The achievements of the enhancement strategy were also visible at school level in the minutes of the learning and teaching committees. For example, progress was reported during 2007-08 in the School of Social Sciences in the operation of the school's student forum, guidance to students on e-assessment and activity within the Research-Informed Teaching Initiative. The School of Education learning and teaching coordinator had monitored progress in the recording of 'virtual lectures', outcomes of the enhanced student course representative training and the development of the school intranet.

131 Through its examination of minutes and other documentation, and through its meetings with staff and students, the audit team was able to confirm that the institutional learning and teaching enhancement strategy and the University and school structures that support it, were becoming increasingly effective in driving and monitoring an institution-wide programme of enhancements to the learning experience of students.

132 It was evident to the audit team that the University is engaging fully with the enhancement agenda, which is the focus of a number of its processes. The team found that the structured, strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities across the University to be a feature of good practice.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

133 In 2006, the University was subject to a separate QAA Collaborative provision audit, through which confidence was expressed in the assurance of standards and the management of learning opportunities. The University's collaborative provision will again be subject to a separate audit. Consequently, the University's management of its collaborative provision is not considered as part of this audit.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

134 In 2008-09, 527 students were registered for research degree programmes awarded by the University. Of these students, 54 per cent were registered full-time and 46 per cent part-time. They were divided amongst the Schools in the following way: Business, Law and Social Sciences 291; Art and Design and Built Environment 43; Science 111, Arts, Humanities and Education 82. In 2007-08, 87 students completed their degrees, 48 being awarded a PhD, four an MPhil, and 35 an MSc by research. These numbers represent significant growth over the last five years.

135 The institutional arrangements for the management of postgraduate research programmes differ from those for undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes. The University has created a Graduate School to coordinate postgraduate research and training. The Graduate School is organized into four constituent parts, one in each of the colleges. The four college associate deans for research and graduate studies manage the Graduate School at college level, and have a line of accountability to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor whose responsibilities include the role of Head of the Graduate School. The Graduate School provides facilities for research students including computing, desk space, quiet working areas and common room facilities. These facilities are often in close proximity to both the office of the Associate Dean, Research and to the college-level administrative teams with responsibility for research degree students. The postgraduate students who met members of the audit team reported that these college-based arrangements created a critical mass of research students and increased contact across the discipline-based schools.

136 Postgraduate research students confirmed to the audit team that the University is able to provide a good research environment and culture to support its research students. In the Research Assessment Exercise 2001, four areas of work achieved a Grade 5 and all those submitted were achieving work of at least national standard. In the RAE 2008, 30 per cent of

academic staff (282 people) had been submitted in 16 Units of Assessment. 74 per cent of activity achieved international status (a rating of 2* or more) and 8 per cent was classed at the highest level, world-leading (4*). Research income, including grants from the research councils and a substantial Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council doctoral training grant, has been growing significantly and in 2007-08 was over £5 million. The University also supports postgraduates through the 'Vice-Chancellor's PhD Bursary Scheme' that pays UK/European Union fees, and provides a maintenance stipend for up to three years.

137 Following the 2004 reorganisation of the academic structure of the University into four colleges and nine schools, the opportunity was taken to reconsider the regulatory framework supporting postgraduate research degrees. A review and consultation were undertaken that resulted in revised regulations that came into force from 1 January 2006. These regulations, to be found in the Academic Standards and Quality Handbook, prescribe the procedures for the management of the learning, teaching and assessment of research students. They were constructed to comply with the requirements of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, and have been regularly updated. The Regulations cover all aspects of provision for research students from application to examination.

138 Responsibility for ensuring the implementation of the Research Degree Regulations lies with the University Research Degrees Committee, which reports through the University Research Committee to the Academic Board. The University Research Degrees Committee is chaired by the Head of the Graduate School. Each college has a College Research Degrees Committee, chaired by the Associate Dean, Research, which implements the regulations at College level. The associate deans, research, are all ex officio members of the University research degrees Committee. The University Research Degrees Committee receives reports from the college research degrees committees at each of its termly meetings, and an annual report on provision and outcomes at its autumn term meeting. The audit team examined the minutes of the University Research Degrees Committee, which showed that these arrangements afforded oversight of the application of the regulations and that appropriate attention is given to the standards and quality of postgraduate research activity.

139 Until 2007, research degree programmes were periodically reviewed as part of periodic subject review. However, with the introduction from 2008 of the new arrangements for periodic school review (see paragraphs 67-68), the University decided to put in place a programme of periodic college research degree reviews of Graduate School provision at college level. At the time of the audit, the University Research Degrees Committee had considered a draft set of proposals for the periodic review of standards, quality and enhancement in the delivery of research degree programmes at college level. Each college will be reviewed every five years, beginning with the College of Art and Design and Built Environment in spring term 2010. The college research degree reviews will be chaired by the chair of the University Research Degrees Committee and involve an appropriately qualified external academic. In the view of the audit team the proposed periodic review arrangements are consistent with the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 1*.

140 The selection, admission and induction of research students is managed at college level within the framework of the research degree regulations. The suitability of an applicant is judged by the Associate Dean, Research and a member of the prospective supervisory team; the process includes an interview. An offer of a place is made only where appropriate resources are in place, which includes suitably qualified and approved supervisors, and after an initial training needs analysis has been carried out. As required by the regulations, an induction programme is provided for all new research students that includes University, college and school elements. Each college has a research student handbook, which is distributed to students at induction and available on the research and graduate studies intranet, that provides information for students on their entitlements and responsibilities. Students met by the audit team reported that the induction, training and provision of information were comprehensive and good.

141 Supervision requirements and procedures are set out in detail in the research degree regulations, which require a supervisory team of three supervisors, one of whom is designated director of studies. The supervisory team must have experience of supervising two students to successful completion and a member of a team without previous experience of supervision must attend a University-approved training course within 12 months of joining a team. Supervision of research students is included in academic work allocation models. Each college has a code of supervisory practice incorporated within the research student handbook or a staff handbook. The University regulations require college research degree committees to set out minimum frequencies for supervisory meetings for each discipline. They also require that supervisors and students agree on the frequency of meetings and that a written record of each meeting is kept. Students told the audit team that supervisions took place as agreed and that supervisors were readily available at other times and that the quality of their supervision is good.

142 All research degree students are formally monitored twice a year. The main annual monitoring meeting involves written and oral submissions from the student that are considered by a panel consisting of the supervisors and an independent member appointed by the college research degree committee. The 2006 QAA Review of research degree programmes recommended that the University consider enhancing its progress monitoring procedure by expanding the membership of the annual panel to provide greater independence from the supervisory team. The University Research Degrees Committee considered this recommendation, particularly the possibility of excluding members of the supervisory team from the panel, but decided that the annual monitoring procedures were robust, sufficiently independent and that the presence of supervisors was useful to the process. Key decision points in the progress of a student, such as upgrading from an MPhil to PhD programme, are incorporated into the annual monitoring cycle. The monitoring panel makes recommendations to the College Research Degrees Committee, which includes whether the student should continue, should be upgraded or downgraded or should discontinue the degree. Where a student's progress is a cause for concern, it will be further reviewed by the College Research Degrees Committee which will, if necessary, appoint an independent person to assist. The research students met by the audit team confirmed that they valued the presence of two or three supervisors at their regular meetings. They also indicated that the arrangements for two reviews a year, one an interim review and the other a more formal panel, provided them with clear and frequent guidance as to their progress.

143 As recorded in paragraph 55, a weakness recognised by the University at the time of the audit was the inability of the student record system to support adequately the monitoring of research student numbers and their progression by the College research and graduate studies offices. The college offices and schools therefore maintained their own databases. University Research Degrees Committee has set up a project team, overseen by a working group, to develop an appropriate database and report-writing functions which was due to complete its work by the end of November 2008.

144 The development of research and other skills begins with the assessment of the student's training needs before admission to a research degree programme and a statement of study and training needs is a formal part of project approval. Further training needs are assessed through the annual monitoring cycle. The Graduate School provides a programme of generic and specific skills training that meets the requirements of the research councils that fund students at the University. At the time of the audit, the University had recently established a Centre for Professional Learning and Development with the intention of providing a greater range of transferable and other skills suitable for both research students and their supervisors. In its meeting with research students, the audit team was told that the range of training they had undergone varied according to the particular research they were engaged in. Where research students are engaged in teaching or demonstration activities, support and mentoring is provided. It is possible for research students to take modules in the PGCHE which is run by the School of Education. The team felt it would be appropriate for the Graduate School to monitor systematically the take-up of relevant training by research students who are providing teaching to undergraduates.

145 Feedback from students is obtained regularly in a variety of ways. The annual monitoring procedure involves a joint report on the process from the student and supervisor. Research students are represented on college research degree committees and the University Research Degrees Committee at which examiners' reports are scrutinised. Students spoken to by the panel indicated the most common form of feedback was directly to their supervisors but they were aware of other avenues should they need them.

146 The assessment of research students is governed formally by the requirements for submission and examination set out in the Research Degree Regulations. These determine the appointment of examiners, the conduct of the examination and the assessment criteria. Externality is assured by the requirement that at least one of the examination panel of three should be an appropriately qualified person from outside the University. An independent, experienced person chairs all viva voce examinations. At the time of the QAA Review of research degree programmes the University had in place relatively brief assessment criteria, except in the case of its professional doctorates. Subsequently, the University Research Degrees Committee set up a working group to consider practice in other higher education institutions and to consult with staff and students. Following the working group's recommendations, the University Research Degrees Committee approved a more detailed set of assessment criteria which have been incorporated into the research degree regulations.

147 An appeals procedure, including appeal against an examination decision, is set out in the regulations for research degrees. The University also has a comprehensive complaints procedure. Research students are made aware of these avenues during induction, on the University's Research and Graduate Studies Intranet, on links to them prominent on the virtual learning environment, and they are clearly set out in the colleges' research student handbooks.

148 In developing the Graduate School, and the college-based arrangements that support research postgraduates, the University has created a coherent cross-disciplinary framework that addresses the risks of isolation that can hamper research students. At the same time, the oversight of the University Research Degrees Committee and the college research degree committees provide robust management and assurance of standards and quality.

149 The evidence considered by the audit team led it to conclude that the arrangements for postgraduate research students, including those for support, supervision and assessment, were rigorous and effective, and fully met the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*. The team found the effectiveness of supervision, support and monitoring of postgraduate research students to be a feature of good practice.

Section 7: Published information

150 The audit team examined a range of published information, including University-wide policy and procedural documentation, school and college documentation, programme handbooks, regulations, the University's website and intranet, the undergraduate prospectus and committee minutes. The team established that the University provides an extensive and accessible range of published information for prospective and current students and staff, both electronically and in hard copy. This information broadly covers that listed in Annex F of the HEFCE publication, Review of the Quality Assurance Framework, Phase two outcomes, October 2006/45.

151 The University's electronic information provision and communication with students is through a University website and the virtual learning environment. Responsibilities for publicity materials lies with marketing teams within colleges and schools with each area having web pages within the University's overall site. Deans are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the information on these websites and marketing teams seek responses to updates from programme leaders and other staff. School sites contain information on taught and research degrees, administration details and links to other resources. Students who met the audit team emphasised the efficacy of the virtual learning environment, particularly in allowing them to access their

timetables, module information, other learning materials, links to professional services and electronic library and learning resources. The team recognised the efforts that have been made by the University to facilitate student access to information through the virtual learning environment, and although at the time of audit this learning environment had only recently gone live, the team felt that it had the potential to become an excellent resource for learning and communication of information.

152 Relevant information is also provided for undergraduate and postgraduate students on taught awards and postgraduate research students on their programmes, that includes their rights and obligations, academic regulations, facilities and support services within programme handbooks. The audit team reviewed a range of programme handbooks for undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses, and found them to be generally comprehensive and to contain relevant and accurate information about course structure, assessment and the range of support services available to students. The team met student representatives, who confirmed their general satisfaction with the usefulness of the information provided by the prospectus and the website during the application and admissions stages. The students also confirmed to the team that they found the information provided to them to be accurate and complete for their needs. This included information on the aims and outcomes of their course, regulatory matters, curricula content and learning, teaching and assessment methods; student support and programme and module descriptors.

153 The audit team examined a sample of programme handbooks, and established that information on appeals, complaints and academic infringements is clearly documented in the relevant handbooks for taught awards and postgraduate research students, and that these are easily accessible to students either in hard copy or for fuller details through links to the University's intranet. There was some variability of style and approach, with some Schools, such as those in Art and Design, presented in a particularly user-friendly fashion.

154 Programme handbooks are typically constructed by the programme leader and are required to conform to a minimum specification as set out in the Academic Standards and Quality Handbook. Handbook compliance is checked by the school quality and standards manager. The Academic Standards and Quality Handbook states that marked work should be returned to students as soon as possible and normally within four weeks from the date of submission. The audit team found that there needed to be consistent guidance on the production of programme handbooks in terms of the return of assessed work, and that adherence to the guidance needs to be monitored (see paragraphs 50-52).

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

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The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester
GL1 1UB

Tel 01425 557000

Fax 01452 557070

Email comms@qaa.ac.uk

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