

University of Reading

March 2008

Annex to the report

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Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Reading (the University) from 21 to 25 April 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 of Reading offers.

Outcomes of the institutional audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the University of Reading 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.

In addition to the two judgements above, the audit team also produced commentaries on the University's arrangements for quality enhancement, collaborative provision, postgraduate research students and published information. These can be found in the report.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University's Strategy for Learning and Teaching 2007-11 provides the framework for the University's approach to quality enhancement. This aims to move the University from an emphasis on quality assurance towards a more deliberate focus on enhancement. The Strategy is organised around four key themes: academic excellence; a supportive learning and teaching community; a stimulating student experience; and active staff engagement. The University identifies the Strategy as having 'a focus not only on enhancement but also on the student experience'.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

Institutional responsibility for the quality of postgraduate research degree programmes rests finally with the University Board for Research as part of its broader remit for promoting and monitoring research in the University. It shares with the University Board for Teaching and Learning responsibility for the quality of provision for research students. At operational level, the Committee on Postgraduate Research Studies, which is a subcommittee on both boards, is responsible for all postgraduate research issues. The four faculties, along with the student body, are represented on the Committee on Postgraduate Research Studies. This Committee has one subcommittee on Research Postgraduate Additional Skills Training, which has a specific focus on skills training issues.

Institutional policies on research students are contained in the University Code of Practice on Research Students, which was revised in 2004 in the light of the publication of the revised *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA. The University Code of Practice was strengthened in 2004. It was revised again in 2006-07 as a result of the report on the Review of research degree programmes 2005-06.

Published information

Having examined a wide range of published information, and noted the comments of students as expressed at meetings, and in the student written submission, the audit team considers 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 as being good practice:

- the way in which the University's Strategy for Learning and Teaching and its associated Implementation Plan provide a clear direction for enhancement and development activities and a comprehensive framework for delivery (paragraph 66)
- the University's achievement in continually reviewing, refreshing and enhancing its provision of student support and student services (paragraph 113)
- the ways in which the Quality Support Office, the Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning and the Centre for Staff Training and Development are working together to support the development and delivery of the University's Strategy for Learning and Teaching and related activities (paragraph 125)
- the development of user friendly and informative publications such as Teaching Matters and Policy Plus, which raise awareness of developments in teaching and learning and in quality assurance and enhancement (paragraph 136).

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- be more thorough in ensuring that annual monitoring reports are received, cover the intended areas, and are given full scrutiny at the appropriate level, ensuring in particular that the University Board for Teaching and Learning has sufficient time to consider in detail the reports from faculties (paragraph 44).

It would be desirable for the University to:

- make explicit the formal responsibilities of different postholders for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of published information (paragraph 202).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The University and its mission

1 The University has its origins in the University Extension College established in Reading in 1892 by Christ Church, Oxford. In 1902, it was renamed University College, Reading with its degrees being awarded by the University of London. The University was incorporated by Royal Charter in 1926, with full degree awarding powers.

2 The University is based on three sites in and around Reading. The main location is the 300-acre Whiteknights Campus, acquired in 1947, where the majority of the University's academic schools are currently located, along with the main building of the University library and the Students' Union. Its original site at London Road, to which the University College moved in 1904, remains part of the University and is where the School of Continuing Education is situated. The University's third campus was acquired in 1989, when its School of Education merged with Bulmershe College of Higher Education to form the then Faculty of Education and Community Studies, based at Bulmershe Court, 1.5 miles from the main campus. Today, it houses the Institute of Education, the School of Health and Social Care and the Department of Film, Theatre and Television, a part of the School of Arts and Communication Design.

3 At the time of the audit, the University's total student numbers amounted to 11,875 full-time equivalents, 10,776 full-time and 1,099 part-time. Of these, 78 per cent were undergraduate students, 16 per cent were taught postgraduate students and 6 per cent were

postgraduate research students. Home/European Union students totalled 10,265 full-time equivalents and overseas students totalled 1,610 full-time equivalents. Students on collaborative provision programmes accounted for 1,060 full-time equivalents .

4 All full-time students are automatically members of Reading University Students' Union, unless they choose to opt out. All part-time students, other than those permitted to work away from the University, are also members. Members of the Students' Union sabbatical team serve on a range of University boards and committees. The University and the Students' Union Sabbaticals work together on a range of relevant projects and issues. The Students' Union building has recently undergone a major refurbishment, mainly paid for by the University.

5 The University's Corporate Plan 2004-09 consists of two sections. The first section is a statement that sets out the University's vision and mission as follows:

- we are one of the United Kingdom's leading universities, a major contributor to the knowledge economy, and internationally recognised for our excellence in teaching and research
- our mission is to extend this world-class reputation by promoting the growth, transfer and application of knowledge across our activities
- our vision is to translate our excellence into a major contribution to culture, economic well-being, and the quality of life
- we will achieve our vision by developing a culture that stimulates and supports all our staff and students.

6 The second section is a higher-level strategy, which sets out at a broad level how this statement will be realised during the planning period. These are underpinned by an operating plan, which sets out in some detail how the above strategy will be achieved during the planning period.

7 At the time of the audit, the University was currently revising its Corporate Plan to cover the period 2008-13, with the intention to submit a final draft to the Council during the course of the 2007-08 academic year. At the same time, the University is also in the process of revising its three higher-level sector strategies relating to enterprise, to research and to learning and teaching.

8 It is the University's intention that the revised Strategy for Learning and Teaching will inform the new Corporate Plan, with a statement of vision and aims accompanied by a related Implementation Plan. In addition, it is the expectation that the Strategy, and in particular its Implementation Plan, will also be informed by the new Corporate Plan. The new Strategy will also inform school teaching and learning plans which, for a number of years, schools have been expected to draw up and revise annually.

Information base for the audit

9 The University provided the audit team with an institutional briefing paper and access to a wide range of internal and published documents, many of which were available on the intranet. The University also provided the team with audit trails of two recent programme-level reviews including all submitted documentation, the minutes of meetings and consideration by relevant committees and the resultant actions. The team was granted access to the intranet during the briefing and audit visits. In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the previous institutional audit of 2004
- reports of reviews by QAA at the subject level since the previous institutional audit
- reports produced by other relevant bodies (for example, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies)
- the institution's internal documents

- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students
- report of the QAA Review of postgraduate research degree programmes, 2006.

10 The audit team was particularly grateful to representatives of the Students' Union who produced a student written submission. This submission sets out the students' views on the accuracy of information provided to them, the experience of students as learners and their role in quality management.

Developments since the previous audit

11 The previous institutional audit took place in 2004. It recommended the University to strengthen its overview of variable practice in schools and departments, and of professional body reports; to be more systematic in its use of student feedback and to improve its mechanisms for identifying and disseminating good practice; and to adopt a more strategic approach to e-learning. The institutional Briefing Paper summarised the ways in which these recommendations had been addressed and, during the course of the present audit, the audit team was able to confirm that, although some reporting problems remain (see paragraph 44), the University's response to those recommendations has been appropriate and, in most cases, effective.

12 The Briefing Paper also explained how the University has taken forward aspects of its practice that were commended in the previous audit. These included its postgraduate certificate for academic staff, the work of directors of teaching and learning in faculties and schools, and links with industry. The present audit team noted that these are all being maintained and in some cases developed further.

13 There have been numerous other developments during the intervening years. Perhaps the most important is what the Briefing Paper summarised as 'a developing and deepening focus on the enhancement of learning and teaching'. Developments illustrating this theme include a new and comprehensive Strategy for Learning and Teaching, the creation of a University subcommittee for the enhancement of learning and teaching, a review of the Centre for Development of Teaching and Learning and the establishment of two Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. These initiatives are considered in more detail in Section 4 of this report.

14 A major development is the proposed merger with Henley Management College. The College will no longer exist post-merger and its programmes will be assimilated into the University's provision to become full programmes of the University delivered at, or from, the University's Greenlands Campus, and will be known as the Henley Management School. Other noteworthy developments since the previous audit include a range of measures to enhance support for students, expansion of collaborative provision and further development of e-learning. Again, these are considered further in later sections of this report.

Institutional framework for the management of academic standards and learning opportunities

15 The University's framework for managing the standards and quality of its programmes has three main components: a structure of committees and staff roles; mechanisms for communication and exchange of information; and a suite of policies and procedures.

16 The University's hierarchy of quality management committees has four clearly defined levels. At its apex is the University Board for Teaching and Learning, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning. This University Board meets twice each term and reports once each term to the Senate, which has overall responsibility for academic affairs. This Board's terms of reference are broad and somewhat unspecific, being defined by ordinance, but the audit team was told that in practice it has three main functions: to develop and oversee strategy; to exercise oversight of quality and standards; and to develop and review policies and procedures. The University Board for Teaching and Learning establishes working parties from time to time,

according to need, and has five standing subcommittees which consider particular aspects of teaching and learning: for example, Enhancement of Learning and Teaching, Examinations and Assessment, and Teaching and Learning Facilities. The audit team was told that these subcommittees enable more detailed consideration to be given to strategic issues at institutional level and engage a wider range of staff than is possible within the meetings of the University Board for Teaching and Learning itself.

17 Under the oversight of the University Board for Teaching and Learning, the operational responsibility for monitoring, managing and developing programmes rests primarily with faculties. There are three faculty boards for teaching and learning, since the faculties of Science and Life Sciences operate a single joint board. The faculty boards for teaching and learning meet once each term and are chaired by the faculty directors of teaching and learning. Like the University Board for Teaching and Learning, the faculty boards have a number of subcommittees that focus on particular aspects of quality and standards management.

18 At the programme level, each programme is managed by a Programme Director working with a board of studies. Boards of studies are required to meet annually at least, although many meet more frequently than that, and are responsible for coordinating and managing programmes and reporting to faculties. Boards of studies are expected to resolve issues identified through student feedback when it lies within their power to do so.

19 At the base of this hierarchy, module providers are responsible for designing, delivering and assessing each module.

20 The communications structure is designed not only to ensure oversight and management of standards and quality but also to facilitate effective communication and flows of information within the University. To this end, there is not only reporting from one level to another but also some overlap of membership between the various committees. The audit team was told that much communication takes place within the University, both through the committee structure and through other, less formal meetings of staff, and that this plays an important role in ensuring that all staff are appropriately informed.

21 The effective operation of the framework is facilitated also by the work of school directors of teaching and learning. Their responsibilities are wide-ranging, with a particular emphasis on development and enhancement. The audit team was told that they meet regularly with the faculty directors of teaching and learning and that the University was keen to encourage and support such 'communities of practice'.

22 A third component in the University's quality management framework is a suite of policies and procedures. The key document is the Guide to policies and procedures for teaching and learning, which is accessible as a web page and contains links to all the policy and guidance documents. The Guide is clearly organised by topic and the audit team found it clear and comprehensive.

23 Many of the University's policies allow some latitude for local variation when implemented in faculties and schools. The 2004 institutional audit had recommended that the University should 'develop more transparent processes for monitoring and reviewing diversity of practice' in these circumstances. In response to this recommendation, the University had strengthened its procedures for programme monitoring and reporting; it also required each school to produce an annual Statement of Teaching and Learning Policies and Procedures detailing local arrangements for evaluation of teaching, assessment and feedback, programme management, personal tutoring and student support. The audit team saw the current statements from all schools and noted the University's intention to publish them on its website.

24 For the allocation of resources, each school is required to produce a three-year operational plan, with associated plans for teaching and learning and for research. Within these plans, provision is made for anticipated developments (for example, the introduction of new

programmes) and the plans are revised and updated annually. Budgets are drawn up after discussion and approval of school plans, and resources are allocated accordingly. The audit team was told that this process is becoming more integrated, with the plans for teaching and learning and for research being more closely linked. It learnt also that the University and faculties reserve some funds each year in order to meet unexpected requirements for additional expenditure.

25 The framework outlined above serves to manage not only the University's own programmes but also its collaborative provision. Programmes delivered in partnership with other institutions have programme directors and boards of studies as outlined above, which report through the same structures to faculties and the University. The arrangements for managing collaborative provision are considered in more detail later in this annex.

26 At University level, responsibility for research degrees rests with the Committee on Postgraduate Research Studies. This is a subcommittee of the University Board for Teaching and Learning, but it reports also to the University's Board for Research. At faculty level, the faculty directors of research play a key role in ensuring that the University's Code of Practice on Research Students is implemented and adhered to. They work with the directors of the graduate schools in social sciences and in arts and humanities, and with the Coordinator for Postgraduate Education and Training in the Sciences; the work of these postholders is focused around the support of research students and the provision of skills training. Again, these arrangements are considered in more detail later in this annex.

27 The audit team formed the view that the University's framework is well designed and, in principle, fit for purpose. From committee papers and associated documents, the team concluded that the business of committees is being conducted in an orderly fashion, and that the presentation and scope of the University's policies and procedures is clear. In its Briefing Paper the University explained that many aspects of the present framework had been introduced just before the previous audit and that the subsequent years had been a period of 'relative stability...allowing the embedding of policies and activities'. The team concurred that the University's framework is now relatively mature and well established, although review and further development is ongoing.

28 Commenting on the operation of this framework, the University stated that 'these committee and reporting structures work well', mentioning in particular 'the way in which each of the four...levels communicates with the level above and below it'. The audit team saw numerous examples of reports passing between committees and (as noted above) was told that informal contacts between staff provide an additional means of communication.

29 However, the audit team formed the view that the University Board for Teaching and Learning is operating under some difficulty. The team was told that meetings of the University Board are often lengthy and that pressure of business does not always permit sufficient attention to be given to all matters; the team noted some instances in which scrutiny by the Board had not been as thorough as the University would have wished, and these are detailed in the next section of this annex. The team was also told during the audit visit that the deans of faculty were members of the University Board, in order to facilitate the discussion and development of strategy. Given this role, the team noted the frequency of absence of these key senior staff and considered it unfortunate that they were often absent from its meetings. These observations contribute to the recommendation that follows in the next section of this annex.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

30 The University's procedures for approval, monitoring and review of its taught programmes serve a dual purpose: both to assure and maintain the standards of its awards and to maintain and enhance the quality of learning opportunities.

31 The procedure for approval of new programmes aims to ensure that provision is appropriate in standard and quality, is in line with the University's Strategy for Learning and Teaching, and meets the requirements of relevant external bodies. The procedure recognises that 'programmes which are an amalgamation of existing provision need less attention than those which are wholly new to the University' and therefore distinguishes between simple approval and detailed scrutiny.

32 Simple approval may be granted by schools (but must be reported to faculties) for minor changes to programmes, such as amendments to modules that are consistent with existing learning outcomes. Simple approval may also be given by faculties for major amendments, such as new programmes formed entirely from existing modules or changes to an existing programme that involve significant alterations to the programme specification.

33 Detailed scrutiny is required for programmes in academic areas new to the University and for programmes that involve a significant number of new modules. The scrutiny process is carried out by a panel appointed by the relevant faculty. The panel includes membership from schools other than the school proposing the new programme and from other faculties, and has at least one member external to the University. The Chair of the panel acts as a 'critical friend' to the programme proposers, guiding them through the process. The scrutiny process considers, *inter alia*, whether due account has been taken of subject benchmark statements and *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*, and of professional bodies' requirements where relevant.

34 In all cases, programme initiatives are taken forward under the supervision of the school directors of teaching and learning, who advise on the level of approval/scrutiny required and ensure that the proposers are given appropriate guidance and assistance during the process.

35 The procedure for annual monitoring of programmes has two stages: the submission of an annual programme report by each board of studies to the relevant faculty board for teaching and learning, and the submission of an annual quality assurance report by each of these faculty boards to the University. These reports are submitted during the spring term to cover the previous academic session.

36 The templates for the reports are approved annually by the University Board for Teaching and Learning. The programme reports cover applications and admissions, student progression and achievement, feedback from students and external examiners, and learning resources. Boards of studies are also required to comment on arrangements for managing collaborative provision where relevant. The templates emphasise that the reporting process should be an opportunity for reflection and forward planning by boards of studies, and, therefore include a request for action points in line with school plans for teaching and learning.

37 The programme reports are considered by faculties, which then report upwards to the University Board for Teaching and Learning. In part, the purpose of these faculty reports is simply to record compliance with the University's requirements: faculty boards for teaching and learning are asked to confirm that the boards of studies reports cover all necessary matters and that schools have in place the procedures and policies required by the University. But faculties are also asked to identify and report on innovative practice in teaching and learning and on ways in which external inputs contribute to provision; in addition, they report on University-wide matters of interest that are specified from time to time by the University Board for Teaching and Learning.

38 The University's procedure for periodic review ensures that all programmes are reviewed at least once every six years. Like programme approval and annual reporting, the review process covers not only the assurance of programme standards but also the quality of learning opportunities and plans for future enhancement.

39 Periodic reviews are carried out by panels appointed by faculties. Each panel includes representation from schools and faculties not associated with the programme(s) under review and have at least two members external to the University. The University selects members with experience of QAA review processes where possible and requires that the external members have not been external examiners within a period of three years prior to the review. Panels are provided with a self-evaluation document prepared by the programme providers and with comprehensive documentation, including samples of student work. The review entails a two-day visit to the school(s) concerned and meetings with students and a wide range of staff.

40 The review panel produces an advisory report, including a recommendation as to whether the programme(s) should continue. The programme provider(s), in turn, prepare a response and action plan, addressing the comments of the review point by point. These documents are then submitted to the faculty board for teaching and learning, and thence to the University Board for Teaching and Learning, which may either recommend that the provision should continue for a further period of six years or be withdrawn.

41 The University does not have a comparable formal procedure for the withdrawal of programmes. A briefing note prepared for the audit explained that often the withdrawal of a programme is largely a matter of re-branding or re-badging existing modules, involving little more than a change in programme title; only rarely is provision in a discipline area completely withdrawn. When that happens, the University appoints an Implementation Group to manage the process. In other cases, the closure of a programme is approved by the faculty board for teaching and learning and the University Board for Teaching and Learning, and the faculty Director of Teaching and Learning then works with the programme providers to ensure that the process is handled smoothly. The University may wish to consider whether it would be helpful for more formalised procedures to be implemented in such cases, to ensure that all the staff concerned are aware of the steps to be taken and to safeguard explicitly the interests of any students affected by the closure.

42 During 2006-07, the University carried out a thematic review of its procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review. This concluded that the procedure for annual monitoring was, in general, working well, but it recommended that some significant changes should be made to the procedures for programme approval and periodic review. In future, programme approval will focus exclusively on the academic aspects of provision (rather than considering some aspects of resourcing as well) and will be facilitated by revised documentation. Periodic review will draw on the University's Pathfinder Direct project and will place more emphasis on enhancement and future planning; there will also be a greater degree of student involvement. In other respects these procedures will continue as at present. In particular, there will continue to be a significant element of independent external input and consideration of alignment with external reference points such as subject benchmark statements and the FHEQ.

43 The audit team saw several examples of the documentation involved in the current processes, including follow-up actions where relevant. The team formed the view that the procedure for programme approval is thorough and effective, and that detailed scrutiny of new provision includes an appropriate element of external input. The team also noted the thorough and detailed way in which periodic review is conducted and the support given through the Pathfinder project for increased attention to enhancement issues. It concluded that the amended process now being introduced has the potential to facilitate thoughtful reflection and enhancement of programmes. This is addressed further in Section 4 of this report.

44 With regard to the process of annual monitoring and reporting, the audit team was less convinced by the University's assertion that the process is 'working effectively'. The team observed that in both years for which documentation was provided (2006-07 and 2007-08) a number of annual programme reports from schools had not been received by faculties by the time faculties reported to the University Board for Teaching and Learning, and that there was no apparent follow-up to these omissions. The team also noted some gaps in the annual quality assurance reports from faculties to the University Board for Teaching and Learning: in particular, a professional body accreditation visit was not reported, and this University Board's request for faculty comments on variability of practice within schools and departments was not responded to. The team noted that both these omissions related to recommendations from the previous institutional audit, which the University stated that it had addressed. The team was told that such imperfections in written reports are usually compensated for by oral communication between staff but it formed the view that they indicated an underlying problem with the reporting process; as noted in Section 1, this perception was shared by some senior staff. The team therefore advises the University to be more thorough in ensuring that annual monitoring reports are received, cover the intended areas, and are given full scrutiny at the appropriate level, ensuring in particular that the University Board for Teaching and Learning has sufficient time to consider in detail the reports from faculties.

External examiners

45 The University has a Code of Practice on External Examining of Taught Programmes, which has recently been revised to ensure appropriate alignment with the *Code of practice*, published by QAA. The University's Code specifies the qualifications, role and duties of external examiners and the information that is to be provided to them. External examiners are nominated by heads of school and are approved by faculty boards for teaching and learning and are appointed annually for a maximum period of four years.

46 As expected by the *Code of practice*, the University has a process for inducting and supporting new and/or inexperienced external examiners. Besides visiting the school and meeting key staff, they are encouraged to attend a half-day training course which clarifies the expectations of the University with regard to their role.

47 External examiners are required to submit a full report using a comprehensive template. This is circulated to a number of key personnel (for example, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Learning and Teaching, the Faculty Director of Teaching and Learning, the Head of School) as well as being discussed by the board of studies. A summary of the report is prepared by the School Director of Teaching and Learning for discussion by the staff-student liaison committee; it is also copied to the Students' Union Vice-President (Education). The summary highlights key points in the examiners' reports, explains their context and significance, and ensures that appropriate anonymity for individuals is preserved.

48 The University's Code of Practice requires that a response to the external examiner's report is prepared by the School Director of Teaching and Learning working with the Programme Director. The response describes how the report has been considered and specifically addresses any concerns raised by the examiner. Each board of studies reports on the outcomes of external examining as part of its annual programme report, and each faculty's annual quality assurance report to the University Board for Teaching and Learning includes an overview of the external examining process within the faculty.

49 In its Briefing Paper, the University affirmed its confidence in its use of external examiners, asserting that 'it is clear from these reports that the system is working effectively and is held in high regard internally and externally'. The audit team saw several examples of external examiners' reports and samples of the way in which these had been summarised for students; it also saw examples of school annual programme reports to faculties and the faculties' annual quality assurance reports to the University Board for Teaching and Learning. From these sources of

evidence, the team concluded that the University's confidence in its arrangements is well founded, and that the process of external examining is thorough and robust.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

50 The University's programmes are structured and located within an institutional credit framework that maps to the FHEQ. The alignment of programmes with the institutional framework is checked during programme approval and periodic review, as explained earlier; also, external examiners are required to comment on the effectiveness of the University's assessment process in meeting external requirements and benchmarks.

51 As noted above, the University requires that subject benchmark statements are considered during the development and approval of new programmes, and again during periodic review. The University's guidelines on the preparation of programme specifications include helpful advice on the appropriate use of subject benchmarks. The University's programme specifications, all of which are available online, are constructed to a standard template, which helps to ensure that they are consistent and comprehensive. They are key documents in the processes of programme approval and review.

52 The University conducts an ongoing review of its policies and practice in the light of the *Code of practice*, considering each section of the *Code* as it is published. The Briefing Paper documented several instances in which this process of consideration has led to changes in the University's procedures. Likewise, the University has considered methodically the implications of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Area*. It has mapped its practice against these expectations and has been able to assure itself that it complies with them satisfactorily.

53 The 2004 institutional audit recommended the University to strengthen its overview of interactions with professional bodies and their accreditation reports. In response, the University has established a central register of externally accredited programmes with the aim of ensuring that it is aware of all accreditation activities. The Briefing Paper explained that the outcomes of these interactions are reported through faculties to the University Board for Teaching and Learning. The audit team identified one instance in which this had not happened, which has been referred to earlier, but it noted that in other cases the process was working as the University claimed.

54 The Briefing Paper demonstrated that the University had given the report of the 2004 institutional audit thorough consideration and had responded thoughtfully to its recommendations. The University also responded in similar fashion to the QAA Review of postgraduate research degree programmes, 2005-06, and the Major review of healthcare programmes in 2005.

55 From the evidence summarised above, the audit team concluded that the University's use of the Academic Infrastructure is thoughtful and well managed, its use of external reference points is appropriate, and the element of externality in its procedures is consistently robust.

Assessment policies and regulations

56 The University has a Code of Practice on Assessment of Taught Programmes and a Code of Practice on External Examining. These documents set out comprehensively the University's expectations with regard to the practice of assessment, including the principles of assessment, the conduct of assessment, academic misconduct, marking and moderation, the procedures and arrangements for examination meetings, and academic appeals. These Codes of Practice are supported by a framework for classification and progression for first degrees and an equivalent framework for taught postgraduate degrees. These define the standard of attainment expected for progression and award at each level, and the procedure for aggregating and/or weighting marks in different types of programme; they also include detailed marking criteria.

57 This suite of policies and procedures is designed 'to ensure appropriate harmonisation of assessment practice across the University'. The practical implications for students are set out in the guide to undergraduate assessment and the corresponding guide to assessment for taught

postgraduate students, which explain the principles and practice of assessment in user-friendly terms and include helpful advice and links to further information. Both of these guides are accessible on the University's website and reinforce the information about assessment that is contained in student handbooks and other programme documentation.

58 At the time this audit took place, the University was engaged in an ongoing review of the framework for undergraduate assessment. This framework had been introduced in the 2002-03 academic year and the review had commenced after the first cohort of students graduated in accordance with its requirements. The review was being conducted by the Subcommittee on Examinations and Assessment and was considering a range of data sources, including classification statistics and the views of staff and external examiners. Although the review had not been completed at the time of the audit, interim reports had been made to the University Board for Teaching and Learning, and some adjustments to the framework had already been put in place.

59 The University's Code of Practice includes a clear definition of plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct, and the audit team observed that this definition was repeated, with explanation and guidance, in programme handbooks. The team was told that the University is encouraging the electronic submission of coursework and the use of plagiarism detection software as an additional means of addressing this issue.

60 The audit team formed the view that the University's policies and regulations for assessment are clear and comprehensive. It observed that the assessment requirements for each programme are set out in programme specifications, which map learning outcomes against teaching methods and assessment tasks. It noted, however, that despite the easy availability of this information, and similar information contained in the University's assessment guides and programme handbooks, nearly a fifth of the students who responded to a survey conducted by the Students' Union are 'unaware' of the assessment criteria and marking schemes used for coursework and examinations. The team was told that the Subcommittee on Examinations and Assessment is seeking to identify and disseminate good practice in respect of communicating assessment criteria to students and it encourages the University to continue with this work.

Management information - statistics

61 The University's Steering Group on Student Management Information has been working to develop data sets and analyses to assist with the management of programmes. The Briefing Paper commented that the University has 'made considerable strides' in this area over the last few years.

62 As an example, the University now provides each board of studies with an annual cohort statistics report, which details student progression, withdrawals, suspensions, programme transfers and overall pass rates. These data can be obtained for previous years, as well as for the current cohort of students, so that long-term comparisons can be made. The audit team saw several examples of these reports and noted that they provide the required information in a clear and useful format.

63 The Steering Group on student management information also undertakes an analysis of data from the National Student Survey. From 2007-08 onwards, boards of studies are asked to consider the National Student Survey data for their discipline when preparing their annual programme reports. The University regards the National Student Survey data as generally encouraging, but accepts that there are grounds for some concern with regard to feedback on students' work. This issue is considered further in Section 3 of this report.

64 From the evidence described above, the audit team concluded that the University is providing boards of studies with management information that is appropriate and helpful for the assurance of standards. The use of statistical information for the management of programme quality is considered below in Section 3.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Framework for the management of learning opportunities

65 The University's Corporate Plan states that the University's framework for success in teaching and learning includes the objectives of developing courses to meet new academic and industry needs; establishing more centres for excellence; expanding the continuing education and widening participation programmes; seeking greater collaboration with educational partners; and providing higher-quality student support. These diverse goals are advanced through the Strategy for Learning and Teaching 2007-2011, which includes four key themes of: academic excellence; a supportive learning and teaching community; a stimulating student experience; and active staff engagement. This Strategy is supported by a detailed implementation plan in which the strategic aims are broken down into 19 objectives; these will be delivered through 57 distinct actions, which are assigned a leader and designated operational agent.

66 The audit team concurred that the way in which the University's Strategy for Learning and Teaching 2007-2011 and its associated Implementation Plan provide a clear direction for enhancement and development activities, and a comprehensive framework for delivery, represented a feature of good practice.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

67 With regard to the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, and revisions, the University states that publication of the initial versions of the *Code* had provided opportunities for self-reflection and that the appearance of new editions triggers reviews of policy and practice. Additional documentation was provided relating to the consideration of the revised *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*. This confirmed that the revised *Code* had been carefully considered by the Subcommittee on Examinations and Assessment; the Subcommittee had recommended to the University Board for Teaching and Learning four changes, of which the most significant related to an enhanced role for externals in the identification of good practice, and all four had been accepted by this University Board at its meeting on 24 February 2005.

68 Several of the institution's programmes are subject to accreditation by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, with particular concentrations in the Schools of Systems Engineering; Construction Management and Engineering; Business; and Mathematics, Meteorology and Physics. The Briefing Paper refers to the close work undertaken between some schools and their professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and this was evidenced by additional information relating to the accreditation by the British Psychological Society of the psychology programmes in January 2007.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

69 Examination of the periodic reviews of economics and archaeology demonstrated that the University operates a thorough procedure, in which full attention is devoted to the quality of learning opportunities on the basis of external examiners' reports, student feedback, examination of departmental publications, investigation of facilities, and relevant management information. In the economics review, in addition to the expected references to benchmarking statements, qualifications framework, and external examiners, it was reported that the Business School had also created an advisory board drawn from senior executives from Thames Valley employers, whose remit includes the provision of advice to the School about its degree programmes from the perspective of potential employers.

70 All boards of studies submit to their faculty board for teaching and learning an annual Statement on Teaching and Learning Policies and Procedures, which covers the four broad areas of evaluation of teaching, assessment, programme management, and personal tutoring, student support and discipline. Although the framework for these statements is standard, there is considerable variation in the coverage and usefulness of the information provided. Thus within

the School of Business, the 2007-08 Statement from the Department of Real Estate and Planning provided considerable information about the operation of its peer review system for evaluating teaching quality, whereas the Economics Department, in a statement of brevity that demonstrated some uncertainty about standard University practices, such as the personal and academic records system for student support, offered three short sentences. It appears that within the School of Business, two very different approaches to peer review are in operation, but it is unclear how the School has reassured itself as to the appropriateness of these arrangements for their local contexts.

71 On the basis of these, each faculty board for teaching and learning constructs its annual quality assurance report to the University Board for Teaching and Learning, which is considered by the Board in the spring term. The audit team examined the reports for 2005-06 and 2006-07. In each case the University Board minute states that 'Enquiries had been made, and responses received, under six separate headings'. In each case it was observed that, whereas two faculty reports (Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences) essentially adhered to the requested six-part scheme, the combined report from the other two faculties (Life Sciences and Sciences) ignored this framework and did not clearly cover all the specified issues. In addition, in 2006-07, the University Board for Teaching and Learning asked faculties to submit views on two broader issues; again, the same two faculties responded, whereas the combined report from the other two did not, but the Board did not comment on this failure to supply the information, which would have permitted it to hold a strategic discussion of issues it had identified as important.

72 With regard to the institutional reflection on the effectiveness of its processes, the University decided to propose a development related to the operation of its periodic review process as its Higher Education Academy/Joint Information Systems Committee e-learning Pathfinder project. The intention has been to move the reviews from a primarily backward-looking and quality assurance-focused exercise to a more progressive process in which schools are encouraged to engage more thoroughly with enhancement issues, while not disregarding the essential quality assurance elements. The procedure being piloted entails considerable input from the Centre for Development of Teaching and Learning in terms of assisting schools to prepare documentation and facilitating reflection by academic staff about how offerings which are already very good can be further developed. The preliminary indications from the first trial of the new system in politics suggest that a change of emphasis has been produced and the challenge for the institution now is to consider how this initiative can be sustained beyond the imminent expiry of the Pathfinder funding. The adaptation of quality assurance processes to inform effectively and to assist enhancement reflects action 11 in the Strategy for Learning and Teaching.

73 The audit team was provided with documentation relating to the closure of the Department of Physics, a decision taken by the University Council in November 2006 and to be implemented at the end of July 2010. The physics transition management group has met regularly to ensure that proper attention is given to student interests, and it has helped to communicate information to students in response to their concerns, ensuring that student interests have been fully taken into account at all times.

Management Information - feedback from students

74 The Briefing Paper states that student evaluation is seen as an integral part of the University's management of quality and standards. As the result of a working group established in response to the 2004 institutional audit report whose recommendations were approved by the University Board for Teaching and Learning in June 2006, a clear statement of the institution's expectations with regard to evaluations was produced, Guidelines on Student Evaluation. This document establishes a set of five key areas on which feedback is to be sought, but also recognises that local requirements or priorities will necessitate some variability around this core; it underlines the importance of feedback to students, for which the virtual learning environment offers one effective mechanism, and the need to keep students informed of actions resulting from their feedback. Although the guidelines relate to the formal collection of evaluations, they also accept

that considerable value is also to be derived from informal methods; they also emphasise that the specific module-focused information derived from evaluations needs to be related to the wider programme-orientated opinions that are likely to emerge through staff-student liaison committees.

75 A digest of module and programme evaluations and matters raised at staff-student liaison committees is included in the annual programme reports, with a note on any actions taken as a result of comments. Periodic reviews take account of this information and include meetings with students to gauge their satisfaction both with departmental provision and with the methods used by the department to assess student opinion and to communicate resulting actions. Alongside this development of departmental evaluations, the University also established a working group to consider the user surveys distributed by various service providers. The recommendations of this group were, again, approved by the University Board for Teaching and Learning and resulted in a statement of key recommendations about the provision of feedback and information about resulting actions, and the publication of results both on individual service providers' websites and on a consolidated Users Survey website. A guidance note was produced, in parallel to the guidelines for departments, which covers design and mechanisms, analysis and publication, and timing.

76 The steering group on student management information has strategic oversight of information generated from the student record system (RISIS = the Reading Integrated Student Information System). A cohort statistics report was developed at the instigation of the steering group on student management information; this has been available since November 2004 to provide a range of data for undergraduate cohorts relating to retention and progression analysis, classification information, and employment statistics to inform the construction of annual programme reports. With the repeated production of these cohort statistics, schools have had access to invaluable data covering a period of years so that trends can be analysed.

77 The University has participated in every round of the National Student Survey and is proud of its record, with an overall satisfaction rating of 88 per cent, which places it in the top 20 institutions in England. An analysis of the University's performance in the 2007 survey was considered by the steering group on student management information at its meeting on 14 September 2007. Boards of studies have been asked to take explicit account of National Student Survey results when preparing their annual programme reports. The University recognises that, like almost all other higher education institutions, the area of feedback and assessment is significantly weaker; as a result, the Subcommittee on Examinations and Assessment has revised its guidelines on providing feedback to students on their performance, the Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning is examining ways to help staff to provide feedback more effectively in ways that students recognise, and one of the three first groups of University teaching fellows has embarked on a project relating to feedback, initially within the School of Agriculture, Policy and Development but with the intention of making a wider impact. The University has also chosen to use the International Student Barometer over the past three years, and in the latest round was placed first out of the 91 participating institutions in the 'overall learning experience' category; while celebrating this success, the Universities also recognises the challenge posed by the desire to preserve this high status.

Role of students in quality assurance

78 The University states that there is a particularly strong partnership with the Students' Union on teaching and learning matters and with regard to the student experience. This strong partnership is part of aim 2 in the Strategy for Learning and Teaching, and its continued development is enshrined in action 27. The Vice-Chancellor referred to the informal and friendly relationship that existed between himself and the student community, and this was echoed in the meeting with students. The Briefing Paper states and students confirmed that students contributed to the development of the new Strategy for Learning and Teaching, although it is noticeable that the student written submission does not make significant mention of this activity. Students have been involved in the various thematic reviews that the University has conducted in recent years.

79 The University has a long-standing network of staff-student liaison committees at school and faculty level, and students also participate in a University student-staff forum, although in the meeting with the audit team, the Vice-Chancellor expressed some ambivalence about the current contribution of this last body. Current arrangements for student involvement are informed by the comprehensive report of the working group for student representation, established in 2005-06, which reported to the University Board for Teaching and Learning in June 2006. This identified areas of good practice in different parts of the University and drew on this information to produce a suite of notes of guidance on different aspects of student representation.

80 One area of concern identified in the 2006 report related to student representation at faculty level. As a result, student faculty representatives were re-branded as education representatives and a full complement of eight has been appointed for the current year. With regard to the student members of staff-student liaison committees, the Students' Union provides clear guidance on suggested procedures for elections, job descriptions, distribution of duties, and appropriate training.

81 A particular feature of student involvement at the University is the Student Academic Representation Scheme, which was launched at the start of the 2007-08 academic year to replace the previous Course Representative Scheme. This new scheme had been devised as a result of one of the undergraduate research projects financed by the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme scheme. The Student Academic Representation scheme, whose members act as an interface between staff-student liaison committees, student representatives on faculty and University committees and the Students' Union, is intended to help students to take greater ownership of their learning experience, and to improve communications both from schools into the Students' Union and from the Union out to schools. The Union has devised a training programme to help the Student Academic Representation scheme deliver these objectives, and informal networks of these Representation schemes are also being encouraged to share ideas and experiences. The new scheme is operating within the context of a five-year strategy to monitor and promote its success.

82 The student written submission recognised that students had various means of making their views known to departments and the University, but also expressed some regrets that requests or concerns, even recurring ones, did not always elicit a clear response or relevant action. The team was told that almost a quarter of students had not heard of the staff-student liaison committee. The students whom the team met were, overall, positive about engagement, but also felt that there were problems relating to the communication of responses to relevant student groups, both when it proved impossible to respond positively to concerns, but also when action had been taken to address an issue.

83 The Students' Union, student written submission project group, led by the Students' Union Vice-President (Education), designed the 'R U Bovvered?' survey. Its structure and terminology were targeted to be appropriate to the wide student population in order that a significant range of responses was captured. The content of the survey was drawn to cover a spread of general issues, for example, access to, and quality of, learning resources, as well as focusing on some areas that were known to be of particular interest, for example, assessment and feedback. The RU Bovvered survey asked students which people they regarded as best placed to provide representation on any issues relating to their academic lives.

84 The results demonstrated a clear belief in the efficacy of self-representation, followed by support provided by three categories of staff (academic, departmental or school support staff, and central staff such as student advisers and the Counselling Service) and thereafter various student officers, with the local student academic representation scheme being preferred to the Union Sabbaticals. The student written submission commented with disappointment on the relatively low positions of the central support staff and the student academic representation schemes, but concluded that the former would probably be best known to a relatively restricted constituency while the limited reliance on the student academic representation schemes reflected

lack of confidence in some areas in the efficacy of the staff-student liaison committee system. The results also highlight the importance of high-quality support and advice for the cohort of students who would prefer to take forward their own issues, as well as the need to be alert to the interests of those students who might not have the confidence to act for themselves.

85 With regard to collaborative programmes, the University encourages student involvement of a form which is appropriate to the particular institutional, and perhaps national, context without expecting there to be an exact replication of the University's arrangements.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

86 The opening statement in the University's Corporate Plan 2004-09 refers to the University's international reputation for excellence in teaching, research and enterprise. Relatively little attention is devoted to this issue in the Briefing Paper, and there is inevitably a concern among staff with significant learning and teaching responsibilities that research will take precedence in important decisions. The University's new Strategy for Learning and Teaching highlights the importance of developing these links and that there is scope for according this greater visibility. It is noticeable that the Human Resources guidelines for the construction of the portfolio to support a teaching-based promotion application do not identify research-teaching links as an area of activity. That said, it is also clear that much is already being done. Thus the periodic review documentation seen by the panel provided evidence for the integration of research and teaching in particular areas, with the archaeology review referring to how the Department's research excellence is reflected in cutting-edge contributions to its teaching and learning offerings; the proposal for the new BSc in Consumer Behaviour and Marketing and the professional, statutory and regulatory bodies' review of psychology also noted the interaction between research strengths and programmes.

87 The linkages between research and learning lie at the heart of the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Applied Undergraduate Research Skills, which promotes the engagement of students with primary research resources such as the various collections and museums with which the University is connected. The Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning aims to develop students as active participants in the processes of research and knowledge creation, with one specific example being the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme scheme, which in 2007-08 is placing 50 students in research opportunities across all four faculties. The students whom the team met, although on the whole not aware of this recent Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme initiative, were uniformly complimentary about the stimulation they felt through belonging to active communities of learners and investigators.

Other modes of study

88 In recent years, the University has, like many institutions, invested heavily in technology to support student learning, in particular the virtual learning environment and the support staff who are essential to its effective exploitation. The team heard how technology-enhanced learning had progressed from being a mechanism to support a limited number of distance-learning programmes into being an expected element in the information relating to all programmes delivered on the Whiteknights Campus.

89 The University is now attempting to manage the challenge of moving from a position where the majority of technology-enhanced learning is essentially passive, a repository of content that students can access in addition to, or at other times from, that available elsewhere, to a more active and interactive process, where students and staff use technology to develop more effective pedagogic collaborations.

90 Following participation in the Higher Education Academy/Joint Information Systems Committee e-learning Benchmarking Exercise allowed the University to apply for 'Pathfinder' funding and was successful in doing so. The Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning Annual Report for 2006-07 reflects on some of the staffing constraints on its activities,

which include a lack of capacity to offer formal training to all staff who are enrolling as virtual learning environment 'Instructors'. It also lists among its activities for the current year the creation of a suite of resources for use in periodic reviews following the Pathfinder periodic review project. The University will undoubtedly be monitoring how effectively this initiative is being sustained.

91 The proposed merger with Henley Management College will make a very substantial difference to the University's involvement in distance-learning activity, and this was presented by the Vice-Chancellor as one of the attractions of the development. It will be essential for the University to consider how its quality assurance mechanisms and quality enhancement strategies are applied in this new context, in order to ensure that the quality of the learning opportunities of the new provision is maintained and enhanced.

Resources for learning

92 The maintenance of 'an inspiring learning environment' is part of the first aim within the University Strategy for Learning and Teaching, to be achieved through actions 16-17, while aim 2, relating to a supportive learning community, recognises the importance of physical and virtual environments which need to be developed in the light of constant monitoring and evaluation of a rapidly changing arena.

93 The audit team heard that over the past three to four years the University has been developing a more integrated approach to financial planning and resource allocation through the three-year operational planning round. One particular objective has been to help schools to consider their teaching and learning needs and research plans holistically, thereby enabling them to present a coherent case for extra resources. Resourcing decisions, for example relating to new staffing for learning and teaching initiatives or for existing programmes, are made by the Senior Management Board on which the three pro-vice-chancellors and one Deputy Vice-Chancellor sit, and its discussions are informed also by the regular discussions which the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Resources) conducts with deans about developments and needs in their faculties.

94 Considerable attention has been devoted to reviewing the role of the University library to establish how best it can support the learning and teaching and research objectives of the institution. To this end a working party was established during 2005-06, which considered issues of space, resourcing, and strategic direction in the light both of the University's priorities and external information. The working party's recommendations were adopted by the Senior Management Board in December 2006. Significant investment of £1million has been devoted to the refurbishment of two floors of the library in order to provide better integrated initial information for students, to respond to concerns about the availability of text books by enlarging the 'Course Collection' area, and to provide a range of less formal individual and group study areas in line with developments across the sector in the creation of social learning spaces.

95 One aspect of the library's response to shifting learning patterns has been the development of the Student Access to Independent Learning facility in conjunction with Information Technology Services and the Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning. This facility, which is in fact open to staff as well as students, aims to promote the wide and more effective use of technology-enhanced learning through the provision of a presentation practice room, regular availability of study advisers, and drop-in-and-learn sessions. In terms of support for students it is aligned with some of the activities of the Skills Opportunities at Reading programme, for example mathematics support, and complements the new provision in the Carrington Building.

96 A further strategic consequence of the library working party has been the decision to consolidate library operations on the Whiteknights Campus by closing the Bulmershe Library. This aligns library provision with the University's overall plans for the development of its estate through concentrating operations on the Whiteknights and London Road sites, a plan which the Vice-Chancellor saw as delivering considerable benefits to the student learning experience. The short-term challenges of such a library move have been recognised, and steps have been taken in order to attempt to manage these.

97 The University's Centre of Excellence for Teaching and Learning for Career Management Skills has its own physical space located in the new Carrington Building, while the Centre of Excellence for Teaching and Learning in Applied Undergraduate Research Skills allocated the capital spend provided by HEFCE to the refurbishment and creation of undergraduate research spaces across the campus, as well as improving access to the University's Collections and Museums. The LearnHigher Centre of Excellence for Teaching and Learning, in which the University participates, has a special LearnHigher room in the Carrington Building and has commissioned research from its 16 participating institutions about the development of resources to aid student learning. The University has taken responsibility for the areas of time management and report writing, but in due course, a much wider range of information will be generated by this collective endeavour.

98 The University's results from the National Student Survey with regard to Learning Resources aligns with the very positive comments about library and information technology resources reported in the student written submission on the basis of the RU Bovered survey and with comments made by the different student groups which the audit team met. Internally, student views on library provision are invited through Comments and Website Comments sections on the library website. The annual Student Personal Computing Survey has been broadened in 2007-08 to collect views on the use of the virtual learning environment and the impact of learning technologies more generally.

Admissions policy

99 The University has a clear admissions policy which sets out the principles underpinning its approach to admissions. Admission and progression information is monitored through annual programme reports and longer-term trends are considered in the context of the six-yearly periodic reviews. Specific decisions on annual targets are taken by the Committee on Strategy for Student Recruitment and Academic Provision, which draws on information from the Planning Support Office and consults individual schools and the Faculty Director of Teaching and Learning.

100 Individual programmes have their own specific criteria for selection and entry, but these are expected to be applied within the broad context of the University's overall policy. The University is aware that this local diversity can have consequences for cross-departmental initiatives: thus in the context of discussions relating to the new BSc in Consumer Behaviour and Marketing, appropriate attention was devoted to the issue of whether the proposed entry tariff would disadvantage students taking modules in psychology, whose departmental entry tariff was significantly higher.

101 The University also has a clear widening participation strategy, supported by a widening participation office which aims to ensure equality of access for all. The University has taken the lead in the local Aimhigher: Berkshire network, and is active through its local further education college network as well as through outreach activities to increase awareness of, and interest in, higher education.

102 Admissions tutors or designated admissions staff in schools are provided with initial training at a session, An 'Essential Guide for new Admissions Tutors', which is led by the University's Admissions Officer and run by the Centre for Staff Training and Development. Regular briefings with regard to particular developments, for example on the 14-19 curriculum, are provided for established tutors, again by the Centre for Staff Training and Development in conjunction with the University's Admissions Officer. There are also 'Open Meetings' to brief the wider cohort of staff on general issues, for example tuition fees and bursaries. The Centre for Staff Training and Development pays particular attention to the need to brief staff from outside the UK higher education system with information about UK qualifications and the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service admissions process. Students whom the team met all spoke positively of their experience of the admissions processes for the University.

Student support

103 Provision of a supportive learning and teaching community and of a stimulating student experience are the second and third aims of the Strategy for Learning and Teaching, and many of the specific actions, both for these aims and the other two, relate to a broad range of student support issues. The student written submission reports that students find their experience as learners satisfying, fulfilling and supported.

104 The University provides clear information and guidance about its expectations relating to student support both to staff (for example, in relation to personal tutoring or the guidance on feedback) and to students (for example, through the student diary). The significance of the induction period for new students is clearly recognised, and the University has reflected on the balance between academic and wider elements in the process. For the University, the process begins well before arrival, with a Freshers' Week website available to encourage new students to reflect on aspects of the transition to higher study well in advance. Specific sections of the website are now designed for various categories of student, mature, international and postgraduates. Attention has been devoted to student retention, with the result that those most at risk have been identified and special support measures put in place for their benefit. The student written submission refers to a general danger of information overload and to tackle this problem, on the initiative of the Students' Union, a ReFresher Week was introduced in autumn 2007 as a way of re-engaging students with the range of clubs and societies. With the cooperation of the University this event is an opportunity to consolidate awareness of important information. The audit team heard from the students it met positive views about the care and thoroughness of the University from the time of open days and applications through to arrival and integration during the first term.

105 The student written submission states, on the basis of the RU Bovered survey, that students are 'considerably confused about what is expected of them to be successful'. Part of the concern relates to issues of academic misconduct and plagiarism, but the main issue identified in the student written submission is feedback and guidance; the latter coincides with the most obvious area of underperformance by the University in the National Student Survey. The Institution has responded by revising its guidelines on providing feedback to students, the Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning is encouraging staff to reflect on their practices and to secure greater student engagement with the assessment and feedback processes, and one of the first cohort of University teaching fellows is conducting a project on assessment and feedback.

106 In autumn 2007, the Carrington Building was opened, bringing together under one roof and adjacent to the Students' Union a comprehensive range of personal and welfare services which had previously been distributed around the campus. The Vice-Chancellor spoke of its very positive reception, in the light of which the Institution would be examining how to take this initiative further. The other significant development to the University's estate last year was the opening of a £2 million extension to the Students' Union building, 'The Hub', in which various student advice and support services are located. In the Carrington Building is located a dedicated adviser for international students and a Disability Office. The very positive perception of the University by international students in the Briefing Paper has already been noted, while, with regard to disabled students, the audit team heard an enthusiastic account from a student helper of the volunteering opportunities that the University organised to encourage students to assist their peers.

107 The University's Students' Union is an integral element in the range of student support services, and the University has taken steps to help to ensure that it can perform its work as effectively as possible. In addition to the new extension noted above, the University provided the money to establish the position of an academic adviser during 2006-07, whose remit included support in coordinating the new student academic representation scheme.

108 Personal tutors are also a key element in the student support system. The University conducted a thematic review of the system in 2004-05, which resulted in the creation of an action plan for 2005-06 that was designed to promote a greater sense of student engagement with the system and ownership of their personal and academic records, and to provide better support for academics in their roles as personal tutors through the appointment in all departments of senior tutors. Personal and academic records have clearly been a challenge, with students expressing very varied attitudes. In 2006-07, after a pilot, the University introduced a suite of supporting individual learner profile tools to provide first-year students with materials with which they would engage throughout the year as a basis for discussions with personal tutors. Individual learner profiles, relevant for second and third-year students, have been introduced in 2007-08. In 2007-08 a pilot project called iLearn@Reading was introduced in select schools to replace the paper-based personal and academic records with a virtual learning environment-based file, with the intention of clarifying the links between personal development planning and skills development, employability and career management skills activities. An interim evaluation by the Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning of iLearn in January 2008 compared the system favourably with personal and academic records, but also identified that extra support was required to secure a fuller and more active engagement by students. Continued attention to the personal tutor system is an Action (18) within the Strategy for Learning and Teaching.

109 The student written submission refers to the concerns of a minority of students that the system does not support them well; on the other hand, in the RU Bovered survey question as to whom students would chose to represent their interests academic staff came second, and in many cases these staff are likely to be personal tutors. The audit team saw ample evidence to substantiate the view that the University is devoting serious attention to the issue of personal tutoring and is examining innovative ways to improve the system.

110 Skills development has been taken seriously by the University for some time, and transferable skills were the subject of a thematic review that reported to the University Board for Teaching and Learning in 2006. Among the outcomes were the suite of individual learner profile tools noted above and the development of the Skills Opportunities at Reading website, which operates as a valuable portal to a wide range of support for skills development (interpersonal communication, learning, problem solving, use of information technology, self-management, numeracy, postgraduate skills). A new transferable skills set is to be introduced into degree programmes in 2008-09, and several of the actions in the Strategy for Learning and Teaching (35-44) relate to skills development. A central aspect of this skills activity is career preparation, and for the past five years the University has included a compulsory five-credit Career Management Skills module in all second-year undergraduate programmes. This initiative helped to secure for the University the award of the Centre of Excellence for Teaching and Learning in Career Management Skills, whose objectives include improving students' responses to career management skills activities, extending these to postgraduates and graduates, raising the awareness of staff about effective career management skills work, and offering the University's expertise to the wider higher education community in the UK.

111 There is clearly work to be done with regard to the Career Management Skills module, on which the student written submission expresses negative views and on which the team heard negative comments from the students. The most significant issues appear to be the compulsory nature of the module and the need to tailor it more closely to different disciplines. The Centre for Career Management Skills is committed to working on the latter, and improvement in this area may lead to reduced concern about compulsion. The Centre for Career Management Skills has awarded one of its fellowships to the Learning Support Manager in the Centre for Development of Teaching and Learning to examine the links between personal development planning activity and career management and planning. The University is taking a lead in developing pragmatic approaches to an issue of concern to all UK higher education institutions.

112 The evidence noted above, for example, the development of the Carrington Building and the collaboration with the Students' Union in the introduction of ReFreshers Week, and the monitoring of these developments, provide strong indications that the University is exercising effective institutional oversight of student support and reflecting intelligently on how a service which is appreciated by the students can be constantly improved.

113 The audit team concurred that the University's achievement in continually reviewing, refreshing and enhancing its provision of student support and student services represented a feature of good practice.

Staff support (including staff development)

114 The University recognises staff as the key resource for the effective delivery of its Strategy for Learning and Teaching, and several of the actions relate to staff development issues, for example Action 13 on strengthening communities of good practice, Action 29 on encouraging greater student involvement staff development, and all Actions (47-57) relating to Aim 4. The Human Resources Strategy provides a clear statement of policies and procedures, with attention to the different needs of the full range of categories of staff. The Centre for Staff Training and Development offers a suite of courses which address the needs of all categories of staff; information about these is readily available on its website. The Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice is the training programme for new academic staff in their first academic post; the Centre for Staff Training and Development has taken steps to ensure that departments appreciate the benefits of their staff devoting time to this activity by encouraging participants to disseminate ideas for good practice from the course; the team met one staff member who had recently completed the Certificate and had then shared ideas with departmental colleagues.

115 Management of staff development occurs at school level, with heads of school being given responsibility for the oversight of their staff's needs and for ensuring the operation of the Staff Development Review process. All schools are required to operate a system of peer observation, but there is no prescription about exact operation and schools are left to develop what best suits their numbers and discipline. There is also a learning and teaching support programme for postgraduates, research staff and others involved in supporting student learning; this is appropriately tailored to the needs of these staff.

116 The annual report of the Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning for 2006-07 refers to continuing frustrations about staff reward and recognition for teaching and learning, to perceived difficulties for promotion to senior lecturer via the teaching route, and to the status of school directors of teaching and learning as an obstacle to engagement with the University's learning and teaching enhancement agenda. In discussion with staff, the team heard that, while these reservations were still pertinent, there were grounds to hope that attitudes were shifting. This was due partly to publicity given to the Strategy for Learning and Teaching, partly through the confidence that was being fostered by the suite of incentives and rewards for learning and teaching achievement and excellence, and partly through the experience of staff who were securing promotion in large part for their learning and teaching activities.

117 With regard to promotion, the audit team found that the information about criteria and processes published on the Human Resources website was somewhat unclear about the availability of the teaching route. In particular, the University needs to resolve the differences of emphasis in the information published about promotion routes to reader and to continue working to clarify the ways in which teaching excellence can contribute to a case for a professorship.

118 The University runs three award schemes for Outstanding Contributions to Teaching and Learning Support: school awards in which heads of school are provided with £1,500 to reward up to three staff from separate categories; team awards, of which two were made in 2006-07, and student awards. In the last category, there were 525 nominations in 2006-07, of whom five received an award of £500. All 60 of the nominees on the short list received a letter of

commendation, and the audit team was reassured the process was regarded positively. A scheme of University teaching fellows was introduced in 2006-07, with the first three winners embarking on their three-year fellowships in 2007-08. The fellows are drawn from a range of schools (Languages and European Studies; Systems Engineering; and Agriculture, Policy and Development) and are pursuing a range of projects, which connect directly to the University's Strategy for Learning and Teaching, for example, on feedback and assessment, and on new and emerging educational technologies. The hope is that these internal fellowships will provide the basis for a successful application to the National Teaching Fellow Scheme, in which the University was previously successful in 2002.

119 An important aspect of the support for, and development of, staff at the University is the constructive cooperation between the Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning and the Centre for Staff Training and Development, especially in combination with encouragement for activities at local level. The Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning had been created to promote engagement in technology-enhanced learning, and that remains a key element within its activities, but the impingement of e-matters on all aspects of staff development and training necessitates close working with the Centre for Staff Training and Development. The activities of the two units have proved to be a key dynamic for staff development and enhancement work.

120 The University recognises that staff engaged in collaborative provision as well as staff at partner institutions may need special development to perform their roles.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

121 The Strategy for Learning and Teaching 2007-2011 (see paragraph 65) provides the framework for the University's approach to quality enhancement. It aims to move the University from a quality assurance approach towards a more deliberate focus on enhancement. The University identifies the Strategy as having 'a focus not only on enhancement but also on the student experience'. The Strategy has an associated Implementation Plan which was approved by the University Board for Teaching and Learning in October 2007. It establishes a timescale for relevant actions along with assignment of responsibility to particular individuals or bodies. There is clear evidence from this range of policies and plans that the University is developing an institution-wide approach to enhancing quality of provision. Details of this are provided below.

122 The University has a four-level structure of responsibility for managing both academic standards and academic quality. The Subcommittee for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching has a particular responsibility for quality enhancement. The Subcommittee for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching met for the first time in Spring 2007 with a remit to take an institutional overview of learning and teaching enhancement and to act as a steering committee to the Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning. While it is a relatively new body, the Subcommittee for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching has set about its business of promoting enhancement in a systematic manner. The Strategy for Learning and Teaching Implementation Plan is being effectively managed and monitored by the Subcommittee for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching. In line with the University commitment to including students in quality management and enhancement, the Subcommittee for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching includes the Vice-President (Education) of the Students' Union among its membership.

123 The Subcommittee for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching is informed by three other committees; the Subcommittee on Information Technology in Teaching and Learning; the Steering Group on Academic Skills and the steering groups for Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

124 The Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning plays a major role in implementing quality enhancement and the actions from the Strategy for Learning and Teaching.

Established in 2002, this Centre of Development has 'a wide range of responsibilities for enhancing teaching and learning at the University' and it has 'the explicit role to work as an agent for institutional change relating to the enhancement of teaching and learning and to capture and disseminate internal good practice within the University and more widely'. The Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning is part of the Academic Services Directorate reporting to the Director of Academic Services and this Centre has promoted and monitored a number of important initiatives. These include the Pathfinder Project, the University's Centres of Excellence for Teaching and Learning, the e-Learning Benchmarking exercise, personal development planning and producing the in-house termly publication 'Teaching Matters'.

125 The Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning works in close association with both the Centre for Staff Training and Development and the Quality Support Office. This has been a highly productive partnership in advancing enhancement initiatives such as their joint away days. In particular, the two Centres have forged a strong relationship in promoting staff training and especially in providing the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice.

126 The audit team identifies as a feature of good practice the ways in which the Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning, the Centre for Staff Development and the Quality Support Office work together to support the development and delivery of the University's 'Strategy for Teaching and Learning' and related activities.

Management information - quality enhancement

127 The University has a range of mechanisms for taking account of regular quality management processes to promote quality enhancement.

External examiners

128 The University has extended the role of external examiners to include making recommendations for good practice. The University has also established procedures for ensuring adequate responses to issues identified by external examiners. Points raised by external examiners are taken up in turn by the Board of Studies, the faculties and ultimately the University Board for Teaching and Learning through annual quality assurance reports.

129 In its Strategy for Learning and Teaching the University has proposed accessing good practice elsewhere. To this end it has initiated involvement with the Higher Education Academy in a number of important ways. The University has participated in the Higher Education Academy/Joint Information Systems Committee e-Learning Benchmarking Exercise 2006-07 and the subsequent Pathfinder Project. Details of these are discussed below. Higher Education Academy colleagues have visited the University and Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning staff have attended Academy events. Schools are encouraged to engage with Academy subject centres.

Employers

130 Schools convene advisory groups which include employers and representatives from industry. These advisory groups can inform degree programmes and provide career advice. Individual programmes and courses relate to employers organisations, especially through practice placement schemes. Annual programme reports are required to comment on work-based placements

131 The University careers advisory service is linked with a variety of employers and they are involved in the summer and autumn recruitment fairs. The careers advisory service is advised by the Careers Advisory Board, which consists of staff, students, lay members and employers. The University is considering plans for an 'institutional audit' of employer involvement.

Annual review

132 Annual programme reports are based on a standard template, which contains an enhancement component. Boards of studies are specifically asked to highlight innovative practice in their reports. Annual programme reviews are used in annual quality assurance reports of faculty boards for teaching and learning, which are considered by the University Board for Teaching and Learning. The spring 2007 annual quality assurance reports, identified a range of examples of good practice which were discussed by the Subcommittee on the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning and the University Board for Teaching and Learning.

Periodic review

133 Subject providers produce an action plan in response to periodic review. This is submitted to the relevant faculty board for teaching and learning, which makes recommendations to the University Board for Teaching and Learning, which also receives annual review reports of all periodic reviews one year after review. Follow-up reports are provided by subject providers and submitted to the faculty board for teaching and learning.

Thematic review

134 Since the 2004 audit, the University has introduced annual thematic reviews to complement periodic review. These are designed to produce institutional overviews in particular areas and to identify good practice. These reviews have produced strong reports and a series of recommendations that have been taken up by the University. In 2004-05, a thematic review was undertaken of student progression and the personal tutorial system, which resulted in improvements to the personal and academic records system and personal development planning. The 2005-06 thematic review of transferable skills led to a revised institutional transferable skills set to be introduced in the 2008-09 academic year. The 2006-07 thematic review proposed the Pathfinder Project as part of periodic review and an enhanced involvement of students within the periodic review process and these have both been taken up by the University. In 2007-08, a thematic review of undergraduate modularisation was in progress.

Good practice

135 The Strategy for Learning and Teaching provides the framework and an action plan for developing an ethos which expects and encourages the enhancement of learning opportunities. The Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning plays a major role in identifying and promoting good practice and it employs a range of processes for dissemination. The Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning website includes information on good practice in a range of areas. It produces Teaching Matters, an in-house termly publication which provides information on good practice from across the University. This is an excellent and lively publication, which is widely read and well regarded by staff. The Quality Support Office produces a termly e-update, Policy Plus, to its basic Guide to policy and procedures for teaching and learning.

136 The audit team identifies as a feature of good practice the development of user-friendly and informative publications such as Teaching Matters and Policy Plus, which raise awareness of developments in teaching and learning and in quality assurance and enhancement.

137 The Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning administers the Teaching and Learning Development Fund, which provides financial support for quality and enhancement initiatives among staff and at institutional level. A wide range of projects have been funded that have encouraged enhanced practice and innovation in schools. These include projects such as MASIV [Modular Accreditation for Students Involved in Volunteering], WiFi and the Mathematics Support Centre. In 2007-08, three project areas are in progress for enhancement projects related to the Strategy for Teaching and Learning. These projects are reported in Teaching Matters and on the Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning website.

138 Good practice is disseminated through a range of University events which reflect a commitment to enhancement. The most important is the Annual Teaching and Learning Day which involve presentations from outside experts and opportunities for sharing good practice among University staff. Termly lunches and annual away days for school directors of teaching and learning further promote discussion and exchange on good practice. There are regular meetings of school senior tutors, school administrators and school learning technology coordinators. All these initiatives aim to promote and encourage 'communities of practice' among staff in order that experience might be shared and good practice developed.

Staff development and reward

139 The Centre for Staff Training and Development provides a range of training but 'there is a particular focus on enhancing teaching and learning and the broader student experience'. Of particular note in relation to enhancement is the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice, which is compulsory for all newly appointed full-time lecturers. Staff engaged on this programme are encouraged to disseminate their knowledge of good practice and many run staff development sessions within their schools. Participants in the Postgraduate Certificate are encouraged to develop their compulsory projects in line with the needs of University schools. Project abstracts are published on the Centre for the Development of Teaching and Learning website, and the best projects are presented at the University learning and teaching days.

140 The University runs three schemes of Awards for Outstanding Contributions to Teaching and Learning Support. The School Awards reward individuals for significant contributions to teaching and learning either through direct interaction with students or support for teaching staff. Similarly the team teaching Awards recognise the contribution of teams of teaching staff. The student Awards allow students to nominate members of staff. These schemes, which are well received and appreciated by staff and students, sit within a broader framework of staff promotion and reward.

141 The University also supports a University Teaching Fellowship Scheme which was introduced in 2007. This scheme aims to reward excellence in teaching and learning and to raise the status of teaching. It provides funding for research into teaching and learning and encourages the development and dissemination of good practice. Three fellowships of a very high standard were awarded in 2007, details of which were reported in Teaching Matters. The Teaching Fellowship Scheme is funded by the Teaching and Learning Development Fund.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

142 The University defines collaborative provision as 'Any programme directly leading to an award of the University which is delivered in part or in whole through an arrangement with a partner organisation'. The Briefing Paper states that 'Students on Collaborative Provision programmes accounted for 1,060 FTEs'. It also indicates that '...the further development of the University's collaborative provision is...one of the major developments since the 2004 institutional audit'.

143 At present, the University has three groups of collaborative programmes. These are:

- a suite of Foundation Degrees in three discipline areas (computing/information technology, education and horticulture). These are delivered in six partner further education colleges
- six undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes delivered with international partner institutions, including jointly awarded degree programmes
- a small number of partner-supported distance-learning programmes. The audit team heard that these would be substantially increased by the planned merger with Henley Management College.

144 Although it is relatively small, the collaborative provision is quite diverse. The audit team heard that international collaborations have been developed from existing research links and that staff in the different sectors learn from each other. Members of staff are positive about the proposed merger with Henley Management College and believe that it will have a positive impact on their use of e-learning.

145 Over the last four years, the University has been extending its collaborative provision. At the time of the previous institutional audit the University's collaborative provision involved just two local partners, the College of Estate Management and Reading College and School of Arts and Design, and a very small number of other regional and international arrangements. The University has now started to cultivate a number of new partnerships. Within the local region, an Associate College Network was established in 2004 with five partner further education colleges. One further college has since joined. Foundation Degree programmes are presently delivered in partnership with six colleges from within the Associate College Network and from the wider south-east region. The University has also developed collaborative undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes with international institutions. The most recent of these, confirmed at the time of the audit, is an MSc in Islamic Finance, to be delivered in collaboration with the International Centre for Education in Islamic Finance (INCEIF), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

146 In addition to the development of Foundation Degrees, the other significant regional initiative has been the award of funding for the Progress South Central Lifelong Learning Network, for which the University is the lead institution. The Network includes a number of core higher and further education institutions, as well as a wide range of other partners from both the education and the employment sectors. This link to relevant employers in the region is seen as essential to the success of the initiative, which seeks to develop provision that meets the needs of both learners and employers. Fundamental to these aims are the development of progression agreements negotiated and signed by relevant institutions in the Network. These guarantee progression between specific vocational programmes to suitably qualified students. A Foundation Degree in Horticulture, developed from a Progression Agreement with the Berkshire College of Agriculture, is the only initiative for the University that has led to collaborative provision, although it has yet to recruit students.

147 The Briefing Paper and the audit team's meeting with the Vice-Chancellor suggest that the University intends to continue this 'considered development' in the future through seeking partners of appropriate standing who are in line with institutional aims and strategies. The team heard that the University had rejected a number of offers of collaboration because of concerns about quality assurance. The aim is for a growth in collaborative provision that is 'cautious, practical and grounded'. The University is also working on an International Partnerships Strategy to provide a focus to future development.

148 The recent appointment of an International Quality Support Manager has led to an increased emphasis on quality assurance procedures and a higher profile for collaborative provision throughout the University. This post was established in the Quality Support Office in June 2007, 'with a remit to support schools in the development and ongoing management of new and existing partnerships'. The audit team saw evidence of the considerable support now provided by the Quality Support Office. It has produced a series of documents providing staff with guidance on the policy and procedures to be used when working with other institutions. These are included in the guide to policy and procedures for teaching and learning and comprise extensive notes on policy and procedures for the design, approval and quality management of collaborative provision including specific guidance for international collaborative provision, jointly awarded degrees, Foundation Degrees, and requirements for the periodic review and revalidation of collaborative programme.

149 All collaborative programmes whether delivered in the UK or overseas are approved, taught, assessed, managed and reviewed using procedures and arrangements which are the equivalent of those in place for programmes delivered in the University. Until 2005,

the University had a subcommittee on collaborative provision but this was disbanded because it was felt that its role to 'provide a strategic overview' of such provision was being fulfilled by other bodies including the University Board for Teaching and Learning.

150 At the present time, the University Board for Teaching and Learning oversees collaborative provision and receives reports from the faculty boards of teaching and learning. A programme director within the relevant academic school is responsible for the day-to-day management of each collaborative programme. A key part of their role is to liaise with the appropriate nominated contact at the partner institution(s) in relation to the management of the programme.

151 All collaborative programmes are managed by a board of studies, with appropriate representation, which reports to the relevant faculty board of teaching and learning. In some instances, the same board of studies may be responsible for the collaborative programme and also for equivalent on-campus provision. In other cases, the board of studies may manage collaborative programmes only. The University allows schools flexibility to decide on arrangements that are appropriate to their circumstances.

Approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision

152 Section 11 of The University's guide to policies and procedures for teaching and learning sets out the policy and procedures for the design, approval and quality management of collaborative provision. These draw on the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* but are also '...interdependent with other University policies and procedures relating to teaching and learning'.

153 Schools considering the development of a proposal for collaborative provision are required to contact a number of office-holders before developing a formalised relationship with a potential partner. These include: the relevant School Director of Teaching and Learning (where not directly involved in development of the initiative); the relevant Faculty Director of Teaching and Learning; and the Quality Support Office (the senior quality support officer for UK collaborations, and the International Quality Support Manager for international collaborations).

154 These contacts provide guidance and advice on the feasibility of developing a proposal and the process for doing so. The approval process for collaborative provision consists of two parts:

- initial approval; this is intended to be a quick, responsive process designed to help the proposing school develop the idea to a stage where the overall merits of the proposed collaboration can be assessed and a strategic decision taken
- full approval; this is an in-depth process that examines all aspects of the proposed collaboration: academic suitability, business case and financial viability, and partner suitability.

155 Any proposal for collaborative provision involves the completion of three key documents. These encompass: a proposal for new collaborative provision; a risk assessment for new collaborative provision; and a partner profile for new collaborative provision.

156 Examples of the documentation seen by the audit team covered the appropriate areas dealing with the nature of collaboration, the areas of potential risk common to many forms of collaborative provision and the history, legal status, funding etc. of the proposed partner institution.

157 Proposals are submitted to the Committee on Strategy for Student Recruitment and Academic Provision for consideration. Proposals to the Initial Approval process go to this Committee. A final copy of the application documentation is submitted to the Quality Support Office. It is then sent for signature to the Vice-Chancellor or Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) as appropriate.

158 The full approval process involves the preparation and consideration of a number of key papers. These are: the appropriate proposal form relating to programme development; a business

plan, including full costings (and where appropriate, pricings); a report of a formal visit to the partner Institution produced by the Quality Support Office; and a due diligence portfolio produced by the Quality Support Office.

159 Programmes are developed and approved in accordance with the University's procedures relating to support for, and approval of, programme initiatives and revisions to programmes and if applicable in relation to relevant sections of the collaborative provision specific guidance documents.

160 Once a proposal for a collaborative programme is approved by the scrutiny panel and by the Committee on Strategy for Student Recruitment and Academic Provision, it is referred to the faculty board of teaching and learning, and then on to the University Board of Teaching and Learning, and ultimately the Senate. Following the approval of the Senate, the Quality Support Office finalises the agreement between the University and the partner institution. All agreements are signed by the Vice-Chancellor or the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning).

Monitoring and review of collaborative arrangements (oversight of delegated responsibility).

161 The principal mechanism by which the University is assured of the ongoing management and quality of collaborative programmes is the annual programme reports from the relevant board of studies to the faculties. All boards of studies are required to produce a report in the spring term on the programmes for which they are responsible.

162 The template for annual programme reports includes a section for completion by those boards of studies with responsibilities for collaborative provision. This requires boards to comment on their management of collaborative provision and to outline actions taken and issues raised in relation to managing, supporting, and enhancing any programmes delivered in collaboration with a partner institution during the course of the academic year. They are invited to comment on a range of issues including, the way that the board of studies operates, programme delivery, staff appointment and development, visits to and from partners, marketing and promotion of the programme and student complaints. In addition, a specific section on collaborative provision is included within the faculty annual quality assurance report template.

163 The contents of all material relating to collaborative provision are brought together and analysed annually in an overview report, compiled by the Quality Support Office. The most recent report seen by the audit team covered the 2005-06 academic year and was received in 2007. The team expressed some concern about the timeliness of this process but was informed that the report is regarded as a review and that local mechanisms for reporting are devolved to school level committees. In the future, the University may wish to consider if this is an adequate mechanism for providing timely assurance at the institutional level.

164 The policies and procedures for the periodic review of collaborative programmes mirror those for non-collaborative programmes and are detailed in requirements for periodic review and revalidation of programmes. The format of a review visit may sometimes need modification in order to be logistically feasible. In such cases, it is expected that the chair of the review and revalidation panel and one other member will visit the partner institution, in order to review the teaching and learning facilities and other relevant aspects of provision. The remainder of the review visit takes place at the University, and normally coincides with a scheduled visit from representatives of the partner institution, such as for boards of studies or examiners' meetings.

Assessment, external examining and student complaints and appeals arrangements.

165 The audit team heard that arrangements for assessment, external examining and student transcripts are the same as for on-campus programmes. This is also the case with student complaints and appeals arrangements. Student representation is also basically the same as for the University as a whole but is adapted to allow for logistical issues and local conditions

Learning resources (including staffing and staff development).

166 As part of the approval visit, the University assures itself that appropriate library and information technology resources are available. Agreements state that partner institutions have a responsibility to ensure an appropriate level of resource and an appropriate learning environment. However, the audit team heard, and the annual overview report on collaborative provision for 2005-06 also noted, that for some courses there was a degree of confusion with regard to access to learning resources and, in particular, electronic learning resources. The University is aware of this problem and has established a working group with the brief to investigate issues relating to the provision of access to learning resources for students on collaborative programmes and to identify and consider relevant resource implications. It is expected to report before the end of the year, but the team heard that there are complicated issues with regard to the Joint Information Systems Committee licence arrangements that require a considerable amount of work. The aim is to reduce the confusion on the part of students and improve access, but, the University will not necessarily be the provider.

167 The Briefing Paper indicates that the University provides support not only for its own staff who are involved with collaborative provision but also for staff in partner institutions. The Quality Support Office produces providers' handbooks for all of the University's Foundation Degrees and is also beginning to develop these for its international collaborative programmes. These handbooks provide an operational manual for staff from the University and from the partner institution, and thus help in the management of programmes. The Quality Support Office staff sit on the Board of Studies for Foundation Degrees in order to provide advice and they also help disseminate good practice in a variety of ways.

168 Staff from relevant schools deliver training for staff at partner institutions during their visits. Partner institution staff also visit the University. All partner institution staff have access to the Centre for Staff Training and Development training sessions and the University provides a fee discount to staff from any institution in the Associate College Network who wish to apply for particular continuing professional development or management-related programmes delivered by the University. In addition, the audit team saw and heard additional evidence of numerous staff training and development activities related to different aspects of collaborative provision.

Publicity and marketing materials (oversight of information produced by partner organisations).

169 The Quality Support Office works with staff in the relevant schools and partner institutions to ensure the integrity of publicity materials relating to the University's collaborative provision. An overview of such information is maintained by staff within the office.

170 Programme recruitment and marketing materials may be produced by the University or by the partner institution, or both, subject to the conditions in the agreement. The Quality Support Office is responsible for maintaining oversight of the advertisements for collaborative programmes. The information on relevant websites is checked at regular intervals and as the team heard, in appropriate circumstances, altered.

Other modes of study

171 According to the Briefing Paper, distance-learning provision is currently limited to a small number of programmes delivered by the one centre, a small number of programmes delivered by the School of Continuing Education, the MA in English Language Teaching, and some programmes delivered in collaboration with the College of Estate Management. The University's plans to develop its distance-learning provision strategically are fundamentally linked to the proposed merger with Henley Management College. The Vice-Chancellor indicated that the Henley merger is a means of increasing student numbers and increasing distance-learning provision. By the time of the audit, the due diligence process undertaken by both parties had been successfully completed and initial

approval for the merger obtained from both the Court of Governors of the College and the Council of the University. By law, these bodies must give approval a second time at meetings to be held in April and May 2008. The merger is formally being managed by a Henley Project board, which met for the first time on 14 April 2008. Several work streams have been established, including one relating to quality assurance and another to student operations and services.

172 The team was told that as part of the Quality Assurance work-stream, consideration has begun to be given to the effective and ongoing integration of relevant policies and procedures for the Henley Business School. In addition, the University will undertake a validation of programmes currently delivered by the College in June 2008. A paper setting out the format for the validation was approved by the University Board for Teaching and Learning at its meeting held on 17 April 2008. The Henley Management College will no longer exist post-merger and its programmes will be fully integrated into the University.

173 There are also 'Other types of arrangements with partner institutions' which the University feels fall short of true collaborative provision. These include double or linked degrees (two separately delivered, but linked awards); minor collaboration; off-campus delivery; progression arrangements (entry to advanced point in a University programme subject to an academic admission hurdle); recruitment arrangements (entry to the start of a programme); student exchange and study-abroad arrangements and placement learning. These are not normally subject to the full in-depth approval process, which applies to collaborative provision arrangements, but are still subject to appropriate approval processes.

174 Overall, the University has simplified, strengthened and developed its processes and procedures for the assurance of quality and standards in collaborative provision. The Briefing Paper claims that the 'University's knowledge and experience in the area...has grown over the course of the past four years, (and that) the arrangements in place and the mechanisms that it uses have evolved and been enhanced'. The audit team viewed evidence to support this claim. Through the work of the Quality Support Office, the Centre for Staff Training and Development and other initiatives, it is seeking to create a greater awareness of accepted sector good practice across the University. Given the plans for significant growth in this area, it is important that these trends are continued. The team believes that the University's arrangements for collaborative provision are sound and reliable, and generally reflect the precepts of the *Code of practice*.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

175 Institutional responsibility for the quality of postgraduate research degree programmes rests finally with the University Board for Research as part of its broader remit for promoting and monitoring research in the University. It shares with the University Board for Teaching and Learning responsibility for the quality of provision for research students. At operational level, the Committee on Postgraduate Research Studies, which is a subcommittee of both boards, is responsible for all postgraduate research issues. The four faculties, along with the student body, are represented on the Committee on Postgraduate Research Studies. This Committee has one subcommittee on research postgraduate additional skills training that has a specific focus on skills training issues.

176 In each of the 18 schools, a Director of Postgraduate Research Studies holds responsibility for postgraduate research student issues within the school. At faculty level, the directors of research (deans) have formal responsibility for all quality issues in relation to postgraduate students.

177 Two faculties have established graduate schools (Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences). There is a graduate training programme in sciences, but no graduate school. The directors of the two graduate schools work alongside the faculty directors of research and the Coordinator for Postgraduate Education and Training in Sciences. In 2007, the University established a working party to review the graduate schools and faculty-level training programmes.

178 Institutional policies on research students are contained in the University Code of Practice on Research Students, which was revised in 2004 in the light of the publication of the revised *Code of practice*. The University Code of Practice was strengthened in 2004. It was revised again in 2006-07 as a result of the report on the QAA Review of research degree programmes, 2005-06.

179 The University has sought to strengthen institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students in ways that will improve monitoring, consistency and the general management of the postgraduate student experience. The terms of the Committee on Postgraduate Research Studies have been revised and extended and promotes consistency in the faculties and schools. It has drafted a job description, identifying core duties, for school directors of postgraduate research studies across the University where no such document previously existed. This Committee annually monitors 'adherence' to the University's schools to the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

The research environment

180 The University is a research intensive institution with a significant research income. The University's Research Endowment Trust Fund allocates £1.2 million a year for a range of research initiatives, including institutional studentships. The University Corporate Plan 2004-09 proposes the further enhancement of the University research environment through an increase in postgraduate research student recruitment.

Selection, admission, induction and supervision of research students

181 The Code of Practice on Research Students sets out the procedures for the selection, admission and induction of research students. Applications for research degree programmes are considered by staff within the relevant school, overseen by the Director of Postgraduate Research Studies. The Centre for Staff Training and Development organise annual training sessions on 'Recruiting and Selecting PhD Students'. Students confirmed that the pre-arrival information and arrangements had been very helpful. Institutional guidance notes on interviewing students for research degree programmes are provided by the University.

182 New students are provided with a handbook containing institutional and discipline specific information and a student diary. A formal school induction introduces new students to University facilities, skills training and student welfare provision. School induction includes the academic dimensions of studying for a research degree and supervisors introduce students to supervisory arrangements, relevant research groups and 'Learning Needs Analysis'. School induction is supported by the faculties and graduate schools through the faculty doctoral training programmes. Students confirmed receiving handbooks and they were well acquainted with the University's Code of Practice. Students had experienced some variation in induction arrangements and this had been taken up by the Postgraduate Representation Group with the Committee on Postgraduate Research Studies.

183 The University Code of Practice on Research Students establishes the responsibilities for both supervisor and student in relation to the research programme, identifying the terms of appointment and training of supervisors, workload for supervisors, the number of formal supervision sessions, along with a record of such meetings. Research student evaluations of supervision arrangements and procedures to be followed in the case of absence of a supervisor or the breakdown of a supervisory relationship are included.

184 Students reported some variability in supervision arrangements. Procedures for monitoring supervision were explored by the audit team. Schools and faculties are required to complete an annual review of the Code of Practice on Research Students and this includes information on supervision arrangements. This in turn is based upon student evaluations of supervision. Annual reviews along with a faculty overview are considered annually by the Committee on Postgraduate Research Studies. Adequate monitoring arrangements are, therefore, in place.

They reveal, however, that there is departmental variability in evaluating supervisory arrangements. This is being considered by the Committee on Postgraduate Research Studies.

185 The QAA Review of research degree programmes in 2005-06 invited the University to consider the use of supervisory teams. The University has endorsed the policy for research students to be supervised by one 'experienced' supervisor or where a member of staff was inexperienced 'a more experienced co-supervisor would be appointed if practicable'. In relation to supervisory teams, the University has concluded that while a student should be supported by staff in addition to their supervisor, providing a supervisory team of several people might not be practical, for example, where the number of academic staff in a discipline was small. It has, therefore, been agreed that other members of academic staff should be involved in supervision and that this involvement might take a number of forms. Schools are to be made aware that the University sees it as good practice that a 'supervisory committee or supervisory team be appointed'.

186 The QAA Review of research degree programmes also invited the University to consider the attendance of supervisors on training sessions. In response, the University has endorsed its 'Policy Statement of Staff Development'. This states that individual supervisors have a responsibility to take the initiative in developing their supervision skills, while heads of schools have managerial responsibilities in relation to staff training in student supervision.

Progress and review arrangements

187 The Committee on Postgraduate Research Studies provides the guidelines for the monitoring and review of postgraduate research students' progress and the responsibility for implementation lies with the research student committee in each school. School research student committees undertake an annual review of the progress of each postgraduate student, which involves receiving a separate written report from both student and supervisor.

188 As a result of the revised section of the *Code of practice*, the Committee on Postgraduate Research Studies agreed that this annual review process be supported by including consideration of 'Learning Needs Analysis', a process that helps students to tailor their research training. Learning-needs analysis has recently been introduced by the University and involves students and supervisors discussing and identifying student training needs at the beginning of research training. In addition, the University has introduced a personal development portfolio (research student log) for all research students.

Development of research and other skills

189 Research students receive both discipline-specific training in schools and more generic research training through the faculty doctoral training programmes, particularly in the first and second years of their research programmes. Overall responsibility for postgraduate skills training lies with the Committee on Postgraduate Research Studies, but particularly with its subcommittee on research postgraduate additional skills training. In 2005-06, the University introduced the 'Skills training strategy for research postgraduates and post-doctoral researchers at the University'.

190 Postgraduate research students are involved in the teaching of undergraduates and the University sees this as an integral part of a research student's personal and skills development. Students involved with teaching or demonstrating are required to attend training sessions, provided by the Centre for Staff Training and Development. The University has established a 'Policy statement on the use of postgraduate teaching assistants or demonstrators'. Postgraduate students confirmed the usefulness of the staff training sessions provided by the Centre for Staff Training and Development.

Feedback arrangements

191 All research degree students complete an annual evaluation of their supervisory arrangements and facilities. Standard pro forma are available for these evaluations, which are considered by the relevant school research committee.

192 The University has recently been working to establish an Employers' Forum through which the University will brief employers on skills training provision and encourage feedback and comment.

193 Research students are represented on committees and boards at institutional, faculty and school level but not in a consistent manner. The Committee on Postgraduate Research Studies is trying to address this issue of consistent representation of postgraduate students. In 2007, the Postgraduate Representation Group was established in the Students' Union and this has strengthened postgraduate representation. The Postgraduate Representation Group is represented on the Committee on Postgraduate Research Studies and also on the Working Party on Postgraduate Personal Development Planning. The audit team noted, however, that there was no representation of the postgraduate student view in the student written submission.

194 School-level arrangements vary from school to school and are usually organised around staff-student committees on which postgraduate students should be represented. It is evident that some school staff-student committees have no postgraduate representation. At faculty level, the Graduate Schools in Arts and Humanities and in Social Sciences both convene student-staff committees, and in all four faculties there is the facility for research student representation on faculty committees.

The assessment of research students

195 University procedures for the examination and assessment of postgraduate research are laid out in the Code of Practice on Research and the Rules for the submission of theses for higher degrees. These are provided to students.

196 Research students are examined through thesis submission and normally a viva voce examination. Examiners may also require students to take a written or practical examination. Candidates are examined by two examiners, at least one of whom is external and appointed with expertise in the field. Internal supervisors are not appointed as internal examiners, nor do they attend the viva voce. However, they are available for consultation and may provide a statement on relevant circumstances. Assessment arrangements for postgraduate students in the University are appropriate and are working well.

Representation, complaints and appeals arrangements for research students

197 The University has a 'Student complaint procedure' The QAA Review of research degree programmes identified the complaints procedure as clearly described in the handbook. It involves a five-stage process from local level arrangements at Stage 1 to a University Complaints Committee at Stage 5. There have been revisions to the complaints procedures following the recommendations of a working group.

198 There are formal University procedures for postgraduate students who wish to appeal against an examination result and these are considered by the Senate Standing Committee on Examination Results. An appeals process is also in place for decisions relating to MPhil and PhD registration at school level.

Section 7: Published information

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

200 In the Briefing Paper, the University argues that 'Current students are provided with a wide range of information on their degree programmes and other aspects of their student experience'. The audit team concurs with this view, but also observes that some student respondents quoted in the student written submission 'felt that more student-friendly methods of presenting much of this information should be investigated'.

201 The University lists its current websites and outlined future developments in a paper called Publication of Information by the University, relating to academic standards and quality (2007). This demonstrated that the University was providing information on the institutional context, the quality and standards of programmes and links with employers. Subsequently, 'the Quality Service Office established a webpage which acts as a 'gateway' site for any interested parties seeking such information'. This provides a link to the relevant websites and to copies of the summaries of periodic reviews. A link is provided to this 'gateway' page from the prospective student web page and also from the Careers Advisory Service web page for employers.

Methods used by the institution to ensure the accuracy of the information it provides

202 The meetings with senior staff indicated that a number of individuals and/or departments acknowledged responsibility for ensuring the accuracy of different publications. An additional document supplied to the audit team stated that 'Programme-related information is provided by the academic schools but is then checked by the Faculty Directors of Teaching and Learning, by the sub-deans and by the Student Recruitment and Schools Liaison Office, which also coordinates the publication of the prospectuses. Institutional information is provided by relevant central offices. The paper versions of the prospectuses inform the web versions'. Nevertheless, it was not always clear to the team nor to some of the staff that they met who had the final formal responsibility for 'signing off' and/or updating some items of published information. Although the team did not encounter any major concerns with regard to the accuracy of information provided, there is potential for confusion and the team considers that it would be desirable for the University to make explicit the formal responsibilities of different postholders for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of published information.

203 Handbooks are produced by each school in respect of the programmes for which it is responsible. The responsibility for joint and shared programmes lies with the relevant board of studies. Schools can produce a single handbook for such programmes or they may cover the programme in two handbooks relating to the appropriate subject areas. The audit team noted that the need to ensure that schools provide accurate and reliable information is stressed as part of training and briefings for key staff in the academic schools, in particular heads of school and school directors of teaching and learning.

204 The audit team examined a variety of documents including undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses, programme handbooks, Foundation Degree provider's handbooks, handbook templates. It has also examined University websites and those of some partner institutions together with the University's entry on the Unistats website. In addition, the team read a number of relevant University documents. These included the Information Strategy 2004-09, the information environment and publication of information by the University relating to academic standards and quality.

205 Students who met the audit team were asked about the quality and accuracy of the information they received before their arrival, at induction and during their time on a programme and they generally supported the student written submission conclusion that the information provided to students is extensive, accurate and reliable. The submission stated that students are very satisfied (95.6 per cent) with the reliability and truthfulness of the information they receive before joining the University. There is, however, some concern among students about information overload. This is identified as too much information, from disparate sources, and subject to local variation. The student written submission also suggests that, 'students desired more information upfront about the level and types of costs they are likely to encounter whilst studying....' The student written submission also noted '...that there is a general lack of awareness of sources of financial support, such as the Access to Learning Fund'.

206 The audit team found that students are provided with a broad range of information on their degree programmes and other aspects of the student experience. Publications include the student diary; programme handbooks for undergraduate and for taught postgraduate students that include relevant programme specifications and the research students' handbook. In addition, there are websites giving details of support services and a student home page on the University's website. It is noted that according to the student written submission '...some participants commented negatively about the reliance of (sic) programme or module handbooks, and the student diary, provided to students at an early stage of their University life'.

207 Assessment information is provided by a variety of means, including the Guide to undergraduate assessment and the Guide to assessment for taught postgraduate students'. The audit team found these clear and helpful but note the comment in the student written submission that: 'Students are considerably confused about what is expected of them to be successful, and what they are entitled to expect of their academic staff. In addition, the 'RU Bovered' survey states '...19.5 per cent of students feel either 'unaware' or 'very unaware' in advance to submission of the assessment criteria...' which will be used in the grading of their work. While more than 80 per cent feel either 'aware' or 'very aware', almost a fifth of students being unclear on how they are expected to perform or unsure of how to find out this information.

208 The student written submission argues 'that more student-friendly methods of presenting much of this information should be investigated, by either streamlining the information provided and/or providing it in a more accessible and understandable format'. The Briefing Paper indicates that the University is aware of some issues with regard to assessment and that it is investigating and planning to use more 'student friendly methods' of providing information.

209 To this end in December 2007, the subcommittee on programme management established a working group to discuss the best way of providing appropriate information to students. The group has yet to produce a final report, but the audit team was informed that it is currently investigating electronic means to streamline the provision of such information, which will help provide easy access to relevant details of particular issues during students' programmes at the times they most need it.

210 The audit team was informed that the University uses its quality management processes to seek the views of students on the information with which they are provided and to assure itself that any issues are appropriately addressed. For example, periodic review panels receive and consider relevant sources of information provided to students, such as programme handbooks. In addition, as part of the process of student evaluation of modules, students are asked to comment on information provision. Students may also raise issues related to the provision of information through the University's representative structures.

211 The Planning Support Office is responsible for the University's entry on the Unistats website. The team has examined the information provided and noted that the University has provided a brief commentary on some of the data.

212 Overall, having examined a wide range of published information, and noted the comments of students as expressed at meetings and in the student written submission, the audit team considers 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.

RG388a 08/08

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ISBN 978 1 84482 873 9

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786