

Roehampton University

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Annex to the report

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Introduction

An audit team from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) carried out an institutional audit of Roehampton University (the University) from 22 to 26 October 2007. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's management of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students

Outcomes of the institutional audit

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

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University is adopting a sustained and reflective approach to improving students' learning opportunities, underpinned by well-constructed strategies linked to its overall vision; this is coupled with effective action planning and progress monitoring

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The University has succeeded in establishing a community of research students, despite the relatively small numbers involved, and institutional arrangements are providing an appropriate research environment and student experien

Published information

The University has implemented robust systems to ensure that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information it publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following features of good practice:

- the progressive development of management information relevant to all levels of activity, from programme annual reviews to the implementation of institutional strategies (paragraph 49)
- the holistic approach to addressing student retention (paragraph 92)
- the contribution made by the Graduate School in establishing a community of research students and, in particular, assisting the integration of part-time students (paragraph 116).

Recommendations for action

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

It would be advisable for the University to:

- monitor local assessment guidelines with a view to ensuring a consistent interpretation of academic regulations, equity of treatment for students and equivalence of approach to the management of assessment university wide (paragraph 32)
- ensure that mechanisms are in place to deal promptly with cases where students' module choices represent insufficient credit to satisfy the award or progression requirements of their programmes (paragraph 35).

It would be desirable for the University to:

- encourage schools to draw upon appropriate external academic contributions during programme development as an opportunity for enhancement as well as a means of strengthening the quality assurance of programme proposals (paragraph 52)
- monitor the effectiveness of the newly reorganised personal tutor system in ensuring that all students receive their stipulated entitlement to academic guidance within an overall support system which, because of its distributed nature, offers students a variety of sources of assistance (paragraph 83)
- keep under close review the impact of the recent decision to absorb collaborative programmes into mainstream monitoring processes, given the level of risk associated with collaborative arrangements that the University itself has recognised (paragraph 112).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 Roehampton University (the University) traces its origins as a unitary higher education institution back to the amalgamation of four independent teacher-training colleges in 1975. It has held degree awarding powers for both taught and research degrees since 2000 and obtained university title in 2004. Between 2000 and 2004 it was in a federal relationship with the University of Surrey, awarding University of Surrey degrees, but has withdrawn from this arrangement since achieving university title. The University now offers a broad portfolio of undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes through four schools: Arts; Business and Social Sciences; Education; and Human and Life Sciences. The Graduate School, created in 2006, gives recognition to the community of research students and supplements the facilities and support provided by schools.

2 In 2006-07, the University had 8,172 students, comprising 7,211 full-time and 961 part-time students; 1,885 male and 6,287 female; and 4,583 students who on entry were aged 20 and under, and 3,589 aged 21 and over. There were 6,362 undergraduate, 1,705 taught postgraduate (including postgraduate certificate in education students) and 105 research students, distributed between the University's four schools in the follow proportions: Arts 31 per cent; Business and Social Sciences 15 per cent; Education 30 per cent; and Human and Life Sciences 24 per cent.

3 In addition, there were 549 students on programmes offered through a variety of different types of collaborative arrangements, comprising validated programmes (including Foundation Degrees and school-centred Initial Teacher Training); joint programmes (offered through the Erasmus Mundus scheme); off-site delivery of university programmes by its own staff and by franchise arrangements; and articulation and progression agreements.

4 The University's vision statement, 'Challenging, inspiring and supporting students to grow as individuals and to be responsible citizens in a complex world', is premised on a view of education as an important driver of social change and personal growth and encompasses the core values that steer the University's strategic thinking. The institutional expectation is that programme development, including collaborative provision, will be linked to cross-cutting themes in areas of perceived strength, which build upon the traditions of its precursor colleges; childhood, well-being, human rights and creativity. The University's strategic thinking is also set within the context of the broader higher education agenda, with due weight being given to widening participation, developing students' skills for employment and entrepreneurship, and providing for an increasing number of international students.

The information base for the audit

5 The audit team had access to the reports on the following QAA reviews: the institutional audit, December 2003; the Review of research degree programmes, July 2006, not published; and the Foundation Degree review of Early Years Childcare and Education at a partner college, November 2006. The team was also provided with Ofsted Initial Teacher Training reports covering the period 2004-06 and with reports produced by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, on request from the University.

6 The University provided the audit team with a Briefing Paper outlining its approach to managing quality and standards, supporting information as cited in the Briefing Paper, and sets of documents relating to the 'sampling' audit trails selected by the team.

7 The University's Students' Union produced a written submission covering the accuracy of the information provided for students, the experience of students as learners and students' involvement in quality assurance processes. The written submission was informed by student focus groups and a standard questionnaire completed by the schools on their arrangements for student representation.

8 The audit team was given full access to the University's internal documents on the intranet. It met groups of staff and students, according to a programme agreed with the University.

Developments since the previous audit

9 QAA's last audit of the University in December 2003 resulted in a judgement of broad confidence in the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards. (For reference purposes, the report is published on QAA's website)

10 The Briefing Paper for the present audit summarised the areas addressed in the University's formal response to the previous audit report, outlining action taken in respect of the recommendations. Thus assessment procedures now specify explicitly responsibilities for external approval of examination papers and attendance requirements at examination boards, while reporting arrangements allow monitoring at institutional level. Programme approval procedures have been clarified in relation to the composition of approval panels and documentary requirements for programmes delivered through flexible and distributed methods. Collaborative provision has recently been absorbed within mainstream quality assurance processes, with supplementary procedures for verifying the adequacy of off-site resources. The University has also taken appropriate action in the areas of engagement with employers, student performance statistics and training for postgraduate students involved in teaching.

11 The audit team found that the University had generally taken effective and timely action in response to the recommendations made in the previous audit report, although it considered that institutional monitoring of local assessment practice continued to require attention (see paragraphs 32-33 below). The team also found there to be good practice in the University's approach to the development of management information based on student statistics (see paragraphs 37, 48-49 below).

12 In the interval between audits, the last student cohorts registered for University of Surrey taught awards have progressed through the system. (The ending of the federation with Surrey was anticipated at the time of the last audit.) Following the appointment of the current Vice-Chancellor in September 2004 and the formation of a new senior management team, a series of reviews of organisation and process has led to several significant changes. Revised academic, committee and management structures have been introduced (see paragraphs 15-17 below); quality assurance processes now give increased emphasis to providing the basis for reflection on student achievement (see paragraphs 37, 47-49 below); and staff development has become more focused on improving pedagogic skills (see paragraphs 89-90, 98 below). Future reviews are planned for academic staff workloads and the organisation of assessment.

13 Also since 2004, there has been a concerted effort led by the Vice-Chancellor to improve student retention. At that time, available data showed the University to be falling short of its benchmark for retention of undergraduate students. This prompted the University to formulate its Retention Plan, which targeted aspects of the student experience in the first year, when the risks of withdrawal are known to be greatest. Retention has clearly been an imperative within the University's overall strategic approach, leading in due course to the reorganisation of the teaching year, aspects of the modular scheme, and the personal tutor system (see paragraphs 34, 81, 95 below).

14 The importance of monitoring the impact of the various changes is reflected in several of the recommendations made by the audit team (see paragraphs 35, 83, 112 below). In addition, the team encourages the University, as it completes its series of reviews, to ensure that resultant procedural changes are carefully documented (see paragraph 18 below).

The institution's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities

15 The Senate is the senior academic committee with responsibility for conferring awards, based on recommendations from the awards and progression boards for taught programmes and from the Research Degrees Board, which oversees research student progression. The Senate delegates responsibility to its various committees, with the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee, together with its Academic Quality Subcommittee, having responsibility for the management of academic standards through application of the University's Academic Regulations, the external examiner system and programme approval and review procedures. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor has responsibility for the academic portfolio and is supported by the four school deans, the Dean of Taught Programmes, who directs the work of the Academic Office, and the Dean of Research, who oversees the development of research policy and manages the Research Office. The Academic Office includes the Head of Quality and Standards Development whose responsibilities relate to the development and implementation of quality assurance processes and to collaborative arrangements.

16 Four Senate committees specifically contribute to the development of learning opportunities: the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee, the Curriculum Strategy Committee, the Research Strategy Committee and the Student Experience Committee. The latter provides a forum to consider all aspects of student experience, whilst the other three committees each take on a more specialist role. Central and local activities are informed and supported by the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit, whose remit is to provide leadership and development for staff on pedagogical issues, and by four service directorates: Library and Learning Services, IT Services, Student Services and Estates.

17 Schools, through their committee and management structures, have key responsibilities in realising institutional objectives relating to both academic standards and quality. The school committee structure essentially mirrors the Senate committee structure and consists of a School Board (reporting to the Senate), a Learning and Teaching Subcommittee, a Research Students' Coordinating Group and programme boards. Deans have operational responsibility for their respective portfolios of programmes, including research degree programmes and programmes offered through collaborative arrangements. They are supported by assistant deans, heads of subject (a reconfigured role from 2007-08), programme convenors, moderators for collaborative provision delivered by partner organisations, and research student coordinators. Each school has a Quality and Standards Adviser who provides a link between the school and the centre, although an assistant dean may carry out this role. Within the Academic Office there is a corresponding role of the Contact Officer (one for each school) who works with schools and attends relevant school committees. In the case of the Graduate School, there is a Graduate School Board, also reporting to the Senate, which deals with both operational and academic issues.

18 The University's quality and standards procedures for taught programmes are normally published as a collection of web-based documents (although they were compiled into a single handbook for ease of reference during the audit). Taken together, these documents proved to be a useful and comprehensive record of the policies and procedures underpinning the University's approach to the management of quality and standards; however, the audit team had difficulty tracing the provenance of some of the documentation and found examples of documents that had yet to be fully updated or that contained minor internal inconsistencies. For instance, there was inconsistency between explanations and diagrammatic representations of programme approval over the number of external advisers required on university-level panels and discrepancy between role descriptions and procedures concerning the composition of school-level panels. In addition, there were occasional references to committees that no longer existed. The University is encouraged to review its documentation so as to ensure that it is both consistent and current and to consider ways in which its provenance can be made more explicit. These comments do not apply to the Quality and Standards Handbook for Research Degree Programmes, which is published as a single document, and which appeared to the team to be both comprehensive and internally consistent.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

19 In its Briefing Paper, the University identifies programme design and approval as the processes by which award standards are defined; assessment and examination as the processes by which these standards are applied; and monitoring and review as the processes that secure the continued relevance and application of award standards. It incorporates externality in these processes through the roles of external advisers and external examiners and observers, who verify standards and confirm their continued application. The University also believes that its own staff must recognise their professional responsibility for securing academic standards and this is reflected in the requirement for programme teams initially to set the standards of new awards relative to external reference points, and devise assessment criteria for the attainment of those awards through the preparation of programme specifications.

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

20 Programme specifications follow a standard template and the relevant School Quality and Standards Adviser and Academic Office Contact Officer provide advice to programme teams on content, layout and supporting documentation. The University considers that this approach ensures appropriate alignment of standards with the expectations of the QAA Academic Infrastructure, and takes account of the requirements of accrediting professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. There are two stages to the programme approval process, school-level scrutiny followed by university-level approval, which involves independent external advisers in confirming the comparability of standards with those elsewhere in the higher education sector. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor has responsibility for the final approval of programmes on behalf of the Senate, once any conditions stipulated by the University's approval panel have been met.

21 The periodic review of programmes, every six years, is a variant of the initial approval process, although it is based on a self-evaluation document rather than a programme specification. This has enabled the University, as it implements a revised system of reviewing cognate programmes in clusters, to deal with the review and re-approval of existing programmes and approval of new programmes within the same event. The basic instrument for routine monitoring of the application of standards is the programme annual review, where the focus is on student assessment, achievement and progression, with external examiner reports being a key input. The approval, monitoring and review of award standards are conducted within broader processes, which also evaluate the learning opportunities associated with the programmes to provide a basis for quality enhancement (see paragraphs 45-54, 99).

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

22 The University requires its awards to be correctly aligned with FHEQ in terms of level and with its own Academic Regulations in terms of both level and credit volume. It has developed a system to allow conversion between qualification level descriptors and the credit level descriptors applied to individual modules, and has also published guidelines that explain and clarify the purpose of each type of descriptor. The Academic Office is responsible for monitoring the development of external standards frameworks and for disseminating details of any revisions appropriately within the University.

23 Since QAA last published revised guidelines for preparing programme specifications, the University has updated its own guidance, affirming that programme specifications form the basis for all its programme documentation. However, although they are the starting point for the approval of new programmes, there is no requirement for them to be updated to reflect subsequent revisions to programme details. As a result, there is no automatic restatement of the relationship between learning outcomes and reference points during the period of the programme's operation, even though key reference points, such as subject benchmark statements, may themselves change over time. While encouraging the University to attend to this point of detail, the audit team was nevertheless satisfied that in other respects amendments to programmes were being systematically recorded, with current programme details, including updated aims and learning outcomes, being documentary requirements for programme review.

24 Through its involvement in the delivery of collaborative programmes with European partner organisations (see Erasmus Mundus, paragraph 102 below), the University keeps abreast of developments within the European Higher Education Area. In meetings with staff, the audit team found that there was a high level of awareness of the implications of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (Standards and Guidelines)*, for standards and quality. Documentation referring to the 'Dublin' descriptors seen as part of the sampling trails verified that this awareness was also manifested in the University's processes.

25 Similarly, the audit team saw evidence of benchmarking against professional standards, particularly in areas not covered by a specific subject benchmark statement. The team also learned from staff that they actively seek the views of external stakeholders when designing programmes, but noted that this was not a formal part of the approval process at school level and might not encompass wider academic input. Whilst recognising the value of such consultation and acknowledging the scrupulous use of external advisers on university approval panels, the team was of the view that the quality assurance of programme proposals would be strengthened by drawing on external academic contributions at the development stage (see also paragraph 52 below).

External examiners

26 Under the University's two-tier system of examination boards, external examiners are full members of programme examination boards, while awards and progression boards include in their membership an external observer whose primary function is to monitor and report on the consistency of treatment of students across the cohort. Both roles are formal appointments approved by the Senate and confirmed centrally; each carries the requirement to submit an annual report. External examiners are appointed to collaborative programmes on the same basis as to in-house programmes and the reporting requirements are also the same; where a programme is offered in-house and off-site the external examiner covers both locations. The separate external examining arrangements for research degrees are dealt with below (see paragraph 123).

27 The responsibilities of the external examiner are described in a good practice guide, which also contains procedures for the selection, appointment and briefing of external examiners, the content of their reports and the process for responding to their comments. As well as being required to ratify the standards of student performance and comment on assessment processes,

external examiners are also invited to record any wider observations they may have on modules or programmes arising from their review of assessment processes (see paragraph 44 below).

28 The audit team noted the rigour applied to the selection of external examiners; there were instances where the Academic Quality Subcommittee, which has responsibility for recommending appointments to the Senate, queried nominations from programme teams or sought more detailed information. Similar rigour was applied to external examiner reports; on occasions the Academic Office (which administers the reporting process) had referred reports considered to be insufficiently detailed back to external examiners. Also, the design of the report form was amended for 2006-07 to encourage a more narrative style of reporting.

29 External examiner reports are an input to programme annual review and it was apparent from the documentation reviewed by the audit team that issues raised by external examiners fed into action planning at both programme and school levels, with resultant action being communicated to external examiners through a formal response. Students are given access to external examiner reports through their representatives on programme boards, in line with recent sector-wide guidance. At institutional level, the Senate is kept informed of issues raised by external examiners through a summary report and analysis produced by the Dean of Taught Programmes. It also receives annual reports from external observers on the conduct of awards and progression boards. The report from the external observer at the undergraduate board had clearly been instrumental in focusing attention on the scale of the problem of students failing to satisfy the award and progression requirements of their programmes (see paragraph 34 below).

Assessment policies and regulations

30 Assessment processes are characterised by criterion-based assessment, anonymous marking of both examinations and coursework (where practicable), moderation of marks by a second internal marker (including second-marking of a sample of work) and moderation of the assessment process by external examiners. Assessment methods and assessment criteria are summarised within programme specifications, providing a common framework for the individual markers in programme teams. The University publishes assessment procedures, specifying relevant roles and responsibilities and operational arrangements, to be read in conjunction with the Academic Regulations. A single set of regulations governs all taught programmes (although some programmes may also be subject to modifying regulations) and the University considers that this promotes equality of treatment and approach in the management of assessment across the institution. Research degree regulations are award specific, although examination requirements are standard (see paragraphs 113, 123 below).

31 Students who met the audit team were generally positive about the information they received on assessment through module booklets. They mentioned that there were sometimes problems with the loading and timing of assessment, but saw these more as time-management issues for students than something requiring the overhaul of assessment deadlines. The students considered that through the feedback they received they were able to understand the reasons for the grades they attained and how they might improve on their performance; the written submission specifically mentioned the benefits of generic feedback in facilitating group discussion. The University is also looking at how best to communicate feedback to students in the context of the National Student Survey, which has recorded a below-average rating for feedback on assessment in some subject areas. The arrangements for giving research students feedback on their progress are dealt with below (see paragraph 120).

32 From its review of programme documentation, the audit team saw instances where local interpretation of the Academic Regulations was leading to variable practice. For example, there was inconsistency between different subject areas in the way the concept of 'reasonable attempt' (which gives students eligibility to retake assessment in a module) was being translated into threshold marks; and in another case, a 'non-honours pass' had seemingly been introduced at the lower limit of third-class honours. In the team's view, this level of variability went beyond the

bounds that might be accepted as reasonable between subject areas, particularly within a modular scheme. The team considers it advisable for the University to monitor local assessment guidelines, with a view to ensuring a consistent interpretation of academic regulations, equity of treatment for students and equivalence of approach to the management of assessment university-wide.

33 The audit team was also of the view that programme handbooks, in an attempt to be user-friendly, ran the risk of introducing inconsistent or misleading information about assessment-related matters that were adequately covered in documentation produced centrally. Examples included plagiarism, which is comprehensively addressed in the 'How to ...' Study Skills guide, also aimed at a student audience; and 'mitigating circumstances', where the University has produced indicative examples, based on recent experience and precedent, of circumstances that have, or conversely have not, warranted deferral of assessment.

34 On the issue of student progression, the University has faced a problem of students not accumulating sufficient credit to progress to the next level of their programmes or to achieve their award. This has mainly been the result of students' failure to register for a set of modules having the requisite credit. Initially the extent of the problem came to light only at the award and progression board at the end of the academic year, too late for the students affected to retrieve the position within that year. By way of response, the University has implemented improvements to the module registration process, culminating in an online system that only accepts choices that accrue the necessary number of credits. It is also in the process of simplifying credit structures and limiting the number of subject combinations on offer to students.

35 The audit team recognised that the number of problem cases had significantly decreased, but could also see that it was going to take some time for revisions to the modular scheme to become embedded within all year-groups. In the interim there would still be modules with different credit values, particularly as schools continued to exercise considerable autonomy over decisions about module credit and whether to teach modules in blocks or over the entire year, despite a recent restructuring of the teaching year. The team therefore considers it advisable for the University to ensure that mechanisms are in place to deal promptly with cases where students' module choices represent insufficient credit to satisfy the award or progression requirements of their programmes.

Management information - statistics

36 The University produces centrally, annual data relating to student recruitment, examination, progression, completion and qualification. These data are designed to be used locally by programme teams in the preparation of programme annual review reports, while summary reports based on particular datasets are generated for consideration by the various Senate committees.

37 In reflecting on academic standards within programme annual review, programme teams are being encouraged to identify trends and make use of benchmarking by commenting on the statistics for their programme relative to the average for the school. To assist them in adopting this approach, and more generally to support the implementation of a new report format, a set of statistical indicators is being introduced on a trial basis for the current review round (see also paragraph 48 below). At the time of the audit, the review cycle was at an early stage, but from the draft reports available, the audit team saw examples of programme teams making use of the indicators and giving explanations of any variances from benchmarks. Reporting at institutional level includes comparison of degree classifications by school, analysis of module pass rates according to different student characteristics (gender, ethnicity and entry qualification) and, in the case of research students, monitoring of recruitment, completion and qualification data. The team gained a strong impression that the University was beginning to derive significant benefit from improved management information (see paragraph 49 below).

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

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

39 In the Briefing Paper, the University relates the management of learning opportunities to the first two priorities of its Strategic Plan 2006-11, namely:

- consolidating a sustainable reputation for excellent teaching, research and knowledge transfer, focused in distinctive areas of core strength
- providing a first-rate experience of university for both students and staff.

40 The first priority is being addressed through the implementation of the Academic Strategy and the alignment of school plans with the overall strategic direction of the University, while the second is being addressed through the Student Experience Strategy, complemented by the Campus Strategy, which sets out the University's plans to develop its estate. The Academic Strategy underpins the institutional commitment to rationalise existing provision within a coherent and sustainable portfolio of programmes, while the Portfolio Review provided specific recommendations. The University is now seeking to carry forward its plans using the normal processes of review, either through the review of programme clusters or through school review.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

41 Monitoring the *Code of practice* and the *European Standards and Guidelines* and seeing that these are embedded in institutional policies is the responsibility of the Academic Quality Subcommittee, in liaison with the Academic Office. In performing this function, in respect of the *Code*, the Subcommittee either considers revisions to sections itself or ensures that other appropriate committees do so. For example, matters relating to research students are referred to the Research Degrees Board via the Dean of Research. From a study of relevant committee minutes, the audit team concluded that the Academic Quality Subcommittee was undertaking its responsibilities diligently.

42 Similarly, accreditation, review and other reports from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, Ofsted and other external agencies are received and considered by the Academic Quality Subcommittee. In general, institutional responses to such reports are delegated to the appropriate school and are followed up through programme annual review (see paragraph 47 below).

43 Where external reference points highlight aspects that are not programme specific, such as learning resources or learner support for students with disabilities or particular learning needs, the Student Experience Committee exercises its role to oversee student services provision. The evidence considered by the audit team, including positive comments from students, suggested that this committee, in conjunction with Student Services, was providing an effective mechanism for ensuring that the level of resources and support provided by the University took account of externally set guidelines. Moreover, in the examples seen by the team, collaborative arrangements took account of external reference points, where they applied.

44 The audit team was able to confirm that, in practice, external examiners routinely take advantage of the opportunity afforded to them to comment in their reports on wider aspects of the provision including, for example, the content of modules and the links between that content and staff research and scholarship (see paragraph 67 below).

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

45 Proposals for new programmes or extensions to existing programmes are normally signalled in annual school plans, which take the form of rolling three-year strategies. If given approval 'in principle' by the Curriculum Strategy Committee, which seeks to ensure alignment with the Academic Strategy, proposals are given more detailed examination (based on a standard pro forma) by its Curriculum Scrutiny Subcommittee, which sanctions appropriate proposals to progress to full consideration by the programme approval process (see paragraph 20 above). Proposals for collaborative programmes are directed through a similar route, although they may not originate from school plans.

46 In recognition that the quality of learning opportunities provided for students can be critically dependent on the resourcing of individual programmes, the University's approval and review processes incorporate checks whereby the availability of resources must be signed off by relevant budget holders in schools or service departments. More significant resource implications have to be approved centrally by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor subject to scrutiny by a Budget Committee reporting through the executive structure. The audit team was able to attest that these checks were followed stringently within the documentation provided for the sampling trails, including that related to collaborative provision. On the basis of discussions with staff, the team concluded that the University's systems for ensuring that the resource implications associated with introducing new or revised programmes were well understood and provided a framework that was fit for purpose.

47 Programme annual review makes use of module reviews, feedback from module tutors, external examiner reports and centrally produced statistics. It involves a 'pyramid' process under which resulting reports and action plans produced at programme level pass upwards through the committee system, being summarised at each successive stage. Programme annual review reports inform the process of periodic review and the institution has itself considered the extent to which they add value to that process, and to the monitoring of programmes generally. This has led to the revision of the report format to focus more on quantitative evidence as the basis for quality enhancement. The audit team was able to see one example of a first draft report in the new format from each of the four schools and, although there was some variation in the way they had interpreted the institutional guidelines for the new process, the team was able to draw broad conclusions based both on the documentation provided and on discussions with staff. It appeared to the team that the new-style reports had the potential to achieve the objective that had been set in their redesign of allowing their compilers to be more purposefully reflective.

48 There were early indications that improved management information was benefiting the process of programme annual review. The University had recognised that data generated centrally had not been easily accessible to schools and an internal report had concluded that there was considerable variation across programme annual reviews in the use of data, with some programme convenors unable to access or interpret the data in a meaningful way. Accordingly, a universal set of indicators has been developed with a prototype being tested during the current round of programme annual review. The University is adopting a developmental and incremental approach to the issue, but it was clear to the audit team that, although much work remains to be done, ownership of the course is being pursued and evidence of this was apparent even within the draft reports (see also paragraph 37 above).

49 In addition, the University has endorsed a proposal to extend the scope of its review of management information beyond the use of statistics for programme annual review. The goal is to develop a series of standardised reports on broader performance indicators not necessarily deemed significant at programme level. The audit team identifies as a feature of good practice the progressive development of management information relevant to all levels of activity, from programme annual reviews to the implementation of institutional strategies. The team is also confident in the University's intention to monitor the effectiveness of these developments and to share best practice across the schools in the compilation of programme annual review reports.

50 The audit team was able to read full documentation for a sample of periodic reviews conducted under the revised process based on a clustering of linked programmes, one of which also incorporated a new programme proposal. Included with this documentation (which was provided to support the sampling trails) was a record of the discussions at programme, school and institution levels illustrating how the reviews had been managed internally and how they had contributed to the process of institutional self-evaluation. The team formed the view that the review documentation was comprehensive and that discussion within the institution at the various levels had been thorough and purposeful. The University has itself undertaken a review of the first year of operation of its revised procedures for periodic review and as a consequence is continuing to refine its methodology and clarify operational details.

51 The audit team noted that in practice the school scrutiny panel plays an important but largely administrative role in ensuring that documentation prepared for a review or approval is accurate and conforms to institutional expectations. However, there was only limited evidence of panels challenging programme convenors on more fundamental matters, such as the extent to which the programmes contribute to the achievement of institutional aims and incorporate changes that reflect current institutional strategies. In certain cases seen by the team, it had been left to the University's review panel to address such issues, one example related to the desirability of adding the 'Questioning Citizenship' module to first-year syllabuses in accordance with one of the strategic priorities for enhancement (see paragraph 97 below) and another related to the institutional guidelines on work placement. The University is encouraged to be more explicit in its guidance on the preparation of self-evaluation documents about the need to take account of institution-wide developments and strategic priorities from the outset.

52 The audit team also noted that the membership of school scrutiny panels was confined to the host school (albeit from outside the programme areas under review) and that there was no formal mechanism for drawing on external academic input. While it found the combined process of periodic review and programme approval to be robust, detailed and efficient, the team nevertheless considers it desirable for the University, as an opportunity for enhancement, as well as a means of strengthening the quality assurance of programme proposals, to encourage schools to draw upon appropriate external academic contributions, particularly during programme development (see also paragraph 25 above).

53 The University has recently introduced the role of Head of Subject to provide academic leadership within a specified subject area and to take on responsibility for overseeing programme approval, programme annual review and periodic review. While it was too early for the audit team to reach a firm conclusion on the impact the new role would have on quality assurance and enhancement, it was able to verify that the role had been signalled in the Academic Strategy and had also been the subject of consultation and debate within the committee structure. The University was sensitive to the possibility of a duplication of responsibility between heads of subject and programme convenors and had reviewed the latter role in order to avoid any overlap. The University was also implementing a new process for conducting reviews of a whole school or service department; the School of Arts was due to be reviewed shortly after the audit and details of the process and the review schedule were being finalised at the time of the audit visit.

54 Overall, the audit team considered that the University had established procedures allowing it to be reflective and self-critical in the operation of its quality assurance mechanisms; in particular it had taken steps to address deficiencies in the use of management information. It continues to refine its processes for programme approval, annual review and periodic review and is extending its review activity to cover other aspects of the University's work. The diligence of its oversight of procedures suggests that confidence can be placed in the institution's management of their continuing development.

Management information - feedback from students

55 Student opinion is obtained each year through the National Student Survey (NSS) and a locally developed Roehampton Student Survey. The student 'voice' also reaches the University through committees and programme boards, focus groups, the module evaluation process and, in the case of research students, through the Graduate School Board. Responsibility for gathering student feedback on collaborative provision is delegated to the partner organisation and institutional oversight is gained through programme annual review.

56 A particular feature of the University's committee structure is the prominence given to the Student Experience Committee, established in 2005. Its remit is to develop, coordinate and monitor student services provision and its membership comprises senior university staff, together

with representatives from academic staff, service providers and students. The audit team was told that the Committee provides the Vice-Chancellor with an opportunity to be informed about current issues directly and that his role as Chair conveys a signal that the views of students are important. The agenda for meetings includes a report from the Students' Union as a standing item. The team concluded that the Student Experience Committee, through the frequency of its meetings (four times a year) and the alignment of its agenda with core institutional priorities, plays an important role in ensuring that students' views are both heard and taken into account.

57 The Student Experience Committee is also the natural forum for considering responses to the NSS and the Roehampton Student Survey. Reports on the surveys are presented to the Committee by the Director of Planning and issues arising from the surveys are identified and referred as appropriate within the institution. In its Briefing Paper the University indicated that the results of both surveys are used to inform its strategic planning and review processes. The Students' Union also makes use of the information, for example in the development of student societies.

58 The University gathers student views about specific issues, either regularly or on an ad hoc basis as required. Examples include user feedback on library and learning resources and the information obtained through the in-house First Impressions Survey distributed to first-year students towards the end of their first term. This survey was introduced in 2006-07 and a report on its findings was presented to the Student Experience Committee in spring 2007. The audit team was also given examples of more informal groups that provide opportunities for students to articulate their views. These included impromptu meetings between the Vice-Chancellor and students, and student membership of working/project groups set up to address such subjects as restructuring of the teaching year and changes to the personal tutor system.

59 The students who met the audit team expressed general satisfaction that their views were heard and that they received feedback at programme level or otherwise regarding any subsequent action taken by the institution. This two-way exchange of information is facilitated by a system of programme representatives who, the team was informed, raise issues with programme staff through regular meetings. A system of hall of residence representatives also operates within the four colleges. Notwithstanding the problems associated with appointing representatives across the institution, which were identified in the students' written submission, the team was told that, in general, the system works well. Training for both programme and hall representatives is provided by the Students' Union, whose officers have access to their own training via the National Union of Students.

60 Student representatives on the Graduate School Board told the audit team that the Board provided an effective forum where student views and concerns could be aired and issues addressed. The team considered that the Board performed an important function as a focus for research student representation (see paragraph 122 below). In addition, individual research students are able to express their views through the six-monthly review of their progress and the compilation by the student of a reflective report that may highlight matters of particular concern (see paragraph 120 below).

61 In summary, the audit team considered that the mechanisms available to students, at all levels, were broadly based and showed sensitivity to the importance of both listening and responding to student views.

Role of students in quality assurance

62 The Students' Union President is a member of both the University's main quality assurance committees; the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee and the Academic Quality Subcommittee. The President is also a member of the Senate, together with a second student member nominated or elected by the student body.

63 Minutes of the committees indicated a high level of student attendance over the past two years and the audit team considered that this showed a commendable level of commitment, particularly by the Students' Union. However, the team noted that this level of commitment relied heavily on a very few individuals and the University is encouraged to reflect on whether there might be benefit from increasing the student membership of such committees. As a case in point, one of the very few meetings of the Senate at which there was no student representation was an extraordinary meeting called specifically to discuss proposals for the restructuring of the teaching year, although students had been involved in other discussions and in other forums on this issue. Members of the general student body contribute to quality assurance processes through their representatives on programme boards and thereby provide input to the programme annual review process.

64 University review panels meet with student groups as part of the periodic review process. Minutes of review meetings for each of the sampling trails showed that student views had been taken into account in formulating the panels' recommendations. Responsibility for student involvement in quality assurance processes within collaborative arrangements is delegated to the partner organisation.

65 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University had established adequate systems to ensure that the student 'voice' was heard within its quality assurance processes but that it would benefit from reviewing the overall level of representation.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

66 The University aims to embed research into the undergraduate experience of all students by focusing programme development in areas of core strength. The University states in the Briefing Paper that students are taught by academic staff engaging in scholarship and research that inform programme content. Students also have the opportunity to develop their own research skills: at undergraduate level, assessment strategies ensure students are able to undertake research on given topics, while at [taught] postgraduate level, research projects form a substantive element of the assessment of each programme.

67 Teaching staff met by the audit team, emphasised the linkages between school-level learning and teaching subcommittees and the central Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee. While such linkages were more informal than formal, the team recognised that they helped to create an atmosphere that promoted internal debate, based on centrally determined overall strategies and a devolved system of adoption and practice. Students met by the team were enthusiastic in their comments on the currency of the curriculum, as evidenced by up-to-date referencing and by their perception that staff are visibly active in research and as practitioners, and bring their experience to the classroom. In practice, this aspect of programme content is tested by the inclusion of external representatives on approval and review panels (see paragraphs 20, 25 above) and, on an annual basis, by the external examiner system (see paragraphs 27, 44 above).

68 Internally, the University has taken positive steps to recognise and reward staff who demonstrate the link between research and teaching by including (since 2006) 'research informed teaching' as an assessment criterion for the Roehampton Teaching Fellowship Award. Curricular development projects have added further momentum, including those sponsored by the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (financed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England). The University is piloting two routes for promotion to principal lecturer, based either on expertise in learning and teaching or on enterprise. It is also developing scholarship about learning and teaching through staff appointments, notably a Chair in Pedagogy, one of 20 new professorial appointments made in the past two years. The audit team concluded that the University's claim that scholarship and research informs programme content was well founded.

Other modes of study

69 The University clearly distinguishes in its procedures between distributed learning, principally using a virtual learning environment (VLE) as a means of student support, and distance learning, offering whole programmes at a distance, which may include using a VLE. Distance-learning programmes are managed within the general quality assurance framework, supplemented by additional procedures for ensuring the quality of teaching materials. These entail piloting sample materials as a prerequisite for programme approval; providing examples of materials, together with a schedule for their updating, in the documentation for approval and review; and ensuring that approval and review panels include the appropriate expertise.

70 Only two of the University's programmes are available through distance learning (MA Children's Literature, in the School of Arts, and MSc Diabetes, in the School of Human and Life Sciences) and these are also offered through conventional classroom delivery. Staff who met the audit team gave examples of bespoke student support that had been developed in the context of distance-learning programmes. The team also learned that one school, the School of Business and Social Sciences, had developed a distance-learning course in voluntary work in partnership with two external organisations, using the University's VLE, StudyZone, as the delivery platform. This course, which is accredited by the University, accepted its first cohort of students in 2007-08. However, it is envisaged that such initiatives with partner organisations will be limited and the University indicated in the Briefing Paper that it is not currently planning to expand distance-learning provision. Therefore the main driver for developing the use of the VLE will be to support the delivery of in-house programmes.

71 A central e-learning services team coordinates the development of StudyZone and promotes the adoption of a blended approach to e-learning by disseminating good practice and by supporting staff in the introduction of internet-based technology. Internal reporting shows that the use of StudyZone has grown steadily and there is now an expectation across schools that all programmes will provide materials for students online. This is underpinned by a specific target that StudyZone will be used to support the delivery and assessment of at least one module in every undergraduate programme by July 2009. The audit team concluded that the University was taking a measured incremental approach to its use of distributed learning, having set itself a modest target in terms of the increased use of StudyZone as a tool to support delivery and assessment. However, the team would encourage the University to ensure that its quality assurance systems are able to oversee effectively what may be a faster increase in use of web-based technology by its partner organisations.

Resources for learning

72 The Library and Learning Services Directorate has responsibility for central learning resources provision. It produces an annual report for the Student Experience Committee drawing on benchmarking data available from the NSS conducted by SCONUL [Standing Committee of National University Libraries]. Much of the funding available for books and associated materials is allocated to schools to provide continuing support for existing programmes. This part of the budget is formula-based and managed by school deans, with the facility to bid to the central Budget Committee for any significant resources required to facilitate programme development. The resourcing of both new and continuing programmes is systematically addressed by the University's processes for programme approval, monitoring and review (see paragraph 46 above). The University also takes an institution-wide view and top-slices the budget to fund major projects, such as development of the VLE (see paragraph 70 above) and the Graduate School, which includes a well-resourced workspace for research students (see paragraph 115 below).

73 The Briefing Paper acknowledged that students have expressed concerns about resources, particularly books in the library, in the NSS and the Roehampton Student Survey. The same point was made in the students' written submission and by some of the students whom the audit team met. The Academic Strategy seeks to address this issue through rationalisation of the curricula, thereby reducing the subject spread and enabling resources to be focused on fewer core areas. The Campus Strategy seeks to address the issue through construction of a library extension as

part of a longer-term objective of locating the library within an 'academic hub', also containing non-specialist computer suites and generic teaching space.

74 The University is subject to the conditions imposed on it by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies for continuing recognition of some of its programmes, notably in Psychology and Education. As an example, Ofsted reports seen by the audit team consistently verified the high level of good-quality resources available to support the training of teachers, both within the School of Education and from central library and IT services.

75 Under collaborative arrangements, there is a memorandum of agreement, which sets out the partner organisation's delegated responsibilities for learning resources provision subject to monitoring by the school-appointed moderator or programme convenor (see paragraph 103 below). The University, for its part, sets a level of entitlement to library services for students on collaborative programmes. The audit team noted that the level of resources at a partner organisation was a factor in the risk assessment made as part of the approval process, but the arrangements for subsequently monitoring this level were unclear to the team (see paragraphs 110, 111 below). This point notwithstanding, the team concluded that the University was adopting an effective strategic approach in dealing with the issues of learning resources provision.

Admissions policy

76 Responsibility for developing and overseeing admissions policy rests with a Pro Vice-Chancellor supported by an Admissions Steering Group, whose role includes agreeing admissions tariffs with schools. Details of admissions procedures and requirements are published in prospectuses dealing respectively with undergraduate programmes, postgraduate programmes and teacher education, together with a supplementary prospectus providing further information for international students.

77 Admissions to taught programmes are administered centrally by the Recruitment, Admissions and Student Records office on the basis of decisions taken by schools in accordance with institutional guidelines. An internal audit of the University's practices on admissions took place during 2006-07, overseen by the Academic Quality Subcommittee; this included an exercise to benchmark those practices against the revised version of the *Code of practice... Admissions to higher education, 2006*. From the report to the Subcommittee, the audit team noted that central admissions officers and school-based admissions tutors undertake training for their roles. There are separate admissions arrangements for research degree programmes, administered by the Research Office and overseen by the Research Degrees Board (see paragraphs 117-118 below).

78 The University is committed to maintaining diversity and widening access within the framework of equal opportunities legislation. Widening participation is promoted among potential 'home' undergraduates through cooperation with Aim higher, the South London Lifelong Learning Network, WestFocus and the Access Centre. Awareness of disability and special educational needs in recruitment policy is the responsibility of a Disabilities Officer. Progress is monitored through management information on undergraduate entry qualifications.

79 The Student Experience Committee undertakes a broader monitoring function and the audit team was able to verify that regular reports on admissions, including the achievement of targets, are presented to the Senate. The team was told by staff that admissions had improved, that more highly qualified applicants were being recruited and that the institution was attributing this trend to its marketing strategy. In addition, the University reported an increase in recruitment from outside the UK, which is being achieved through the activities of the International Centre, Erasmus Mundus initiatives, articulation agreements and progression arrangements.

80 The audit team considered that the University had taken positive steps to develop, implement and monitor a comprehensive admissions policy that is centrally determined and locally interpreted.

Student support

81 There is an objective within the Strategic Plan 2006-11 to improve the level of personal guidance and academic mentoring provided for students. This has been motivated by the institution's widening participation agenda and its drive to improve student retention. The University has set a target that, from September 2007, every student should receive personal academic guidance at least once a term, and all schools have been asked to produce plans to demonstrate how this is to be achieved. At the time of the audit, the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee was implementing a range of recommendations arising from a review of the personal tutor system. One consequence has been the publication of a personal tutor handbook, which in the view of the audit team contains a comprehensive set of guidelines for personal tutors; the University has signalled its intention to update this handbook annually.

82 Students receive detailed information on their programmes and on general support mechanisms, both through induction and a range of handbooks, which are supplemented by more detailed information on school web pages and, increasingly, by module information on StudyZone. As well as having personal tutors, students have access to academic guidance through the School Academic Adviser, whose role is to provide assistance on complex regulatory matters. Study skills support is currently provided at both discipline level and centrally, and the Briefing Paper indicated that the University's 'How to ...' Study Skills guide is regularly praised in student feedback. Dyslexia and disability support is available (in accordance with the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001*) through Student Services and school-based coordinators. One of the schools has piloted the introduction of the role of Academic Learning Support Assistant to coordinate the provision of study skills support at school level. The audit team was informed that the process of extending this arrangement across other schools had already begun, in line with the institution's strategic approach of devolving more academic support provision to schools.

83 The students who met the audit team expressed satisfaction that they were able to find academic support when needed. They told the team that in the first instance they tended to turn to individual module tutors whom they invariably described as approachable and helpful. However, there appeared to be considerable variation in the part played by the personal tutor system within the overall framework of academic support and guidance. In particular, the team found that few of the students it met made full, if any, use of the University's system of personal development planning, although it played a more prominent part in the self-reflection undertaken by research and postgraduate students than by undergraduate students. In addition, the team found that students identified strongly with their colleges and that the system of college-based student-welfare officers played an important role alongside the personal tutor system. Given the importance ascribed by the University to its personal tutor system, the team considers it desirable for the institution to monitor the effectiveness of the newly reorganised system in ensuring that all students receive their stipulated entitlement to academic guidance within an overall support system which, because of its distributed nature, offers students a variety of sources of assistance.

84 The Student Services Directorate manages an established network of welfare support services for all students. Integrating the previously separate specialist services of Counselling, Careers, the Medical Centre, Disability Support, the Money Doctors, the Nursery, and Off-campus Accommodation, Student Services offers students access to coordinated advice and guidance. Where specialist help is required, schools and colleges refer students to appropriate providers through Student Services. Institutional oversight of the system is the responsibility of the Student Experience Committee. The audit team found the students it met were clear about the range of services available to them and how to access those services.

85 Responsibility for student support in collaborative arrangements is delegated to the partner organisation, oversight by the University being through mainstream quality assurance processes. The specific arrangements for the personal and academic support of research students are described below (see paragraph 119), with the Graduate School offering a further dimension to the support available.

86 In the view of the audit team, the University has a comprehensive framework for academic and personal student support, augmented by initiatives such as the study skills support available in schools through the emerging role of Academic Learning Support Assistant and the welfare services available through the college system. Overall, the team considered that the framework was effective and that the institution displayed a capacity to reflect on its efficacy and to implement improvements as necessary.

Staff support (including staff development)

87 The human resources function is overseen by a Pro Vice-Chancellor who is responsible to the Employment Committee of the Council for most staffing matters. The full range of human resources policies and procedures is published on the StaffZone pages of the University's website. Staff development opportunities can be accessed by the same route and are also published in the form of an annual directory. This includes details of the centrally funded programme of staff development arranged by the human resources function and coordinated by the Staff Development Group (a working group reporting to the Employment Committee). Under collaborative arrangements, memoranda of agreement make provision for staff from partner organisations to participate in the University's staff development programme (see paragraph 109 below) and the audit team saw examples in programme annual review reports of these opportunities being taken up.

88 Schools submit to the Staff Development Group strategically aligned annual staff learning and development plans, together with evaluations of the previous year's activities; these are informed by school-based appraisal systems. Accordingly, the Group releases funds for external and internal development activities. Staff met by the audit team showed a good understanding of the University's staff development policy and its implementation.

89 The Head of the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit is a member of the Staff Development Group, thereby strengthening the link between the human resources function and the work of the Unit, whose role is to manage and support the implementation in schools of key strategic priorities associated with learning and teaching (see paragraph 96 below). Progress towards this objective is monitored by the Learning and Teaching Quality Committee as part of its responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the Academic Strategy.

90 The University's PgCert in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education forms the basis of professional accreditation in learning and teaching for new and inexperienced teaching staff, and is open to all staff involved in supporting learning, including staff in partner organisations. Accredited by the Higher Education Academy (HEA), the PgCert forms part of the Masters in Education suite of programmes. At the time of the audit, the University was aiming to gain recognition from the HEA for a continuing professional development framework aligned to UK professional standards. Focused staff development opportunities are provided for supervisors of research students (see paragraph 115 below), and the audit team learned that the successful pursuit of such opportunities is mandatory before staff are allowed to supervise. In addition, research students involved in teaching receive training that prepares them for their roles (see paragraph 121 below).

91 Overall, the team found that the institution's arrangements for staff support and development in relation to academic staff engaged in teaching and the supervision of research students were comprehensive and fit for purpose.

Conclusion

92 The audit team concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students. In addition to the specific features of good practice already identified, the team also highlights the holistic approach to addressing student retention, which continues to be an important factor in the University's overall strategy (see paragraphs 13, 40, 56, 81 above).

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

93 The University's approach to quality enhancement combines incremental improvements to provision through the dissemination of good practice with a number of thematic projects related to priorities in the Strategic Plan 2006-11 and its supporting strategies. The organisational structures that underpin and take forward the enhancement agenda are the Student Experience Committee, the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee and the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit.

94 The learning and teaching priorities that the University has identified relate to:

- enhancing the student experience
- enhancing the learning experience
- the employability of students
- the professionalisation of staff.

In support of the above priorities, the University has identified specific activities, which have been translated into action plans with assigned responsibilities and deadline dates. These are subject to regular monitoring and updating.

95 Thematic projects related to enhancing the student experience have included a restructuring of the teaching year and revision of the personal tutor system, both of which are being implemented from 2007-08. Instigated in part to tackle the problem of student retention, the 'remedial' aspect of these projects has been addressed above (see paragraphs 34-35, 81). However, they were also driven by a desire to smooth the progress of students through their programmes by reducing the number of interruptions caused by summative assessment points; this would create opportunities for formative feedback within support arrangements based upon clearly defined entitlements, as well as for a more diverse range of assessment activities. The cohesion given to the research student experience through the creation in 2006 of the Graduate School, another of the University's thematic projects, is fully acknowledged below (see paragraph 116).

96 Central to the University's priority of enhancing the learning experience is the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit and the support it provides for schools in developing pedagogical approaches that match the diversity in the student population. In this context, the audit team noted the series of position papers produced by the Head of the Unit for consideration and dissemination by the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee. These covered assessment practice, personal development planning and student participation in quality assurance processes and were underpinned by analysis of sector-wide developments, giving a better understanding of how these elements contribute to enhancement of the overall learning experience. The development of web-based resources for both teaching and personal development planning has been identified as a priority, although the audit team noted that the progress being made in these areas was variable (see paragraphs 71, 83 above).

97 In connection with students' employability, the University highlighted the creation of the 'Questioning Citizenship' module, now offered across a wide range of programmes to promote the understanding of human rights and citizenship. The module involved NGOs [non-governmental organisations] in its development and, through giving students 'moral' learning opportunities it constitutes an important strand in the University's vision. It is complemented by other initiatives giving students opportunities to develop leadership and transferable skills through volunteering.

98 While there is no specific thematic project for the professionalisation of staff, there are several ongoing initiatives, including the pilot of new criteria for promotion to principal lecturer (see paragraph 68 above), the application for recognition by the Higher Education Academy of

the continuing professional development framework (see paragraph 90 above), and the planned review of academic staff workloads (see paragraph 12 above). In addition, and aimed specifically at quality enhancement, are Teaching Fellowship Awards (see paragraph 68 above), recipients of which are expected to act as 'champions', providing leadership through their research and through development of novel practice.

99 Regular events for the dissemination of good practice include the annual Teaching and Learning Conference and workshops run by the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit as part of a broader programme of staff development. The dissemination of good practice also results from the passage through the committee system of summaries of particular features identified in external examiner and programme annual review reports. In addition, periodic review allows programme teams the opportunity to reflect on their practice and identify features of good practice for wider dissemination. Recent developments in management information have provided the means whereby incremental improvements to provision can be measured and monitored against plans.

100 The audit team considered that the examples the University gave to illustrate its approach to quality enhancement met the definition of quality enhancement in the institutional audit method. There was clear evidence of a sustained and reflective approach to enhancing students' learning opportunities, underpinned by well-constructed strategies linked to the institution's core values and vision. Based on discussions with staff, the team concluded there was widespread understanding of strategic priorities engendered through iterative processes of consultation, and discussion alongside effective action planning and progress monitoring.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

101 The University's UK collaborative arrangements comprise validation agreements relating to programmes developed by associated institutions. In terms of student numbers the largest partnership (176 students) involves postgraduate taught programmes in counselling and psychotherapy. The remaining partnerships are in education and include a range of Foundation Degrees at a local further education college (121 students) and school-centred initial teacher training programmes involving several different partnerships (121 students in total). Many of these programmes are subject to accreditation or review by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, such as Ofsted and the Health Professions Council, while there was a QAA review covering some of the Foundation Degree provision in 2006.

102 Outside the UK, the University's collaborative arrangements are focused on off-site delivery of its own programmes, in particular the MA Special Educational Needs (78 students) which is offered as a joint award through the Erasmus Mundus scheme, with variants taught at two other locations by University staff. In addition, there are two programme franchises involving some 20 students (the larger being with one of the University's Erasmus Mundus partners) and a third franchise has recently been approved. All these arrangements are within the European Union.

103 The same framework for the management of quality and standards (see paragraphs 15-18 above) is applied to both the University's in-house and collaborative programmes, which are each assigned to a host school. Within the executive structure, two roles are identified as having specific responsibilities for collaborative provision, the Head of Quality and Standards Development, who acts as the point of administrative liaison for partner organisations, and the moderator appointed by the host school in the case of validation or franchise arrangements to oversee quality assurance processes at the partner organisation and advise on quality issues. (The role is assumed by the programme convenor for programmes taught off-site by the University's own staff.)

104 With respect to standards, mainstream procedures apply fully to collaborative programmes: approval documentation is prepared in accordance with University guidelines; the University retains responsibility for the appointment of external examiners and receives their

reports; and the Academic Regulations incorporate specific sections for both Foundation Degrees and Erasmus Mundus. The latter make explicit the requirement to name both the University and the partner organisation on certificates and diploma supplements. Franchised and validated programmes have their own examination boards, but students' results are reported to the relevant University awards and progression board, which makes recommendations to the Senate in the usual way.

105 The University has introduced guidelines for student assessment in languages other than English, following a decision to approve two programmes to be taught and assessed in German at a partner organisation in Germany. The proposal prompted internal debate, resulting in the appointment of an external examiner and a moderator who are both bilingual German/English. The audit team noted that the guidelines appropriately identify the size of the pool of suitable bilingual external examiners as a consideration for approving such arrangements, while, in the particular case, the anticipated short duration of the collaborative arrangement was also a decision-making factor.

106 The moderator role spans the full range of standards processes and includes assisting the partner organisation with the preparation of programme approval documentation, ensuring consistency of assessment processes with those at the University and serving as a member of the examination board. The audit team saw examples of programme specifications following the University's standard template, while external review reports verified that programme learning outcomes were appropriately aligned with external reference points. In one report the way in which the moderator role was being carried out was identified as a feature of good practice. Nevertheless, the team was aware of the difficulties involved in successfully carrying out this type of role, which entails at the same time acting as a helpful work colleague and as an objective critic. The team reviewed a sample of moderators' reports, noting that these complemented the external examiner system by providing another perspective on assessment arrangements and student progression from a source outside the partner organisation.

107 While programme approval is based on mainstream procedures, the approval of the partnership itself must also be considered and normally this is done in parallel with approval of the first programme to be offered under the proposed collaboration. Recognising that collaborative provision carries a greater level of risk than in-house provision, the University has developed a risk assessment tool, which is applied following the initial contact with a prospective partner to inform the decision on whether to proceed; the risk assessment is further refined as the proposal is progressed. Consistency with the Academic Strategy is also a key decision-making criterion and in practice this means that a new venture should be linked to existing activity rather than be a source of new programme development. At the next stage, the proposal passes to the Curriculum Strategy Committee for approval in principle, and, if successful, progresses to the Curriculum Scrutiny Subcommittee for more detailed consideration and release into the approval process in the normal way. At this point the Head of Quality and Standards Development initiates formal due diligence and preparation of a draft memorandum of agreement, and the moderator is appointed.

108 The approval process for collaborative provision culminates in a university approval panel event to consider the approval of both the partnership and the first programme(s); it is always held on the premises of the partner organisation. Similarly, the six-yearly periodic review covers both the partnership and the programme. However, in certain circumstances (for example, if the partner organisation has little prior experience of teaching at the level of the collaborative programme) there is an interim review after the first out-turn of graduates.

109 The audit team noted the close alignment of the University's portfolio of collaborative programmes with its areas of perceived strength. The focused analysis of the Curriculum Scrutiny Subcommittee was apparent from its minutes, aptly illustrated by the longer term view it took of the potential ancillary benefits of one collaborative arrangement before allowing it to proceed to the full approval process. The team reviewed a number of memoranda of agreement; these included provisions relating to assessment and to the allocation of responsibility for resources, student support and staff development. However, the memoranda were not consistent in the

provision they made for the University's interaction with any professional, statutory and regulatory bodies that accredit or review collaborative programmes, or for compliance with any statutory approval processes required under local law. The team noted that there was no procedural requirement for approval panels to address such issues and it encourages the University to reflect on whether there should be greater standardisation in the format of memoranda of agreement.

110 The programme annual review is the vehicle for routine monitoring of collaborative programmes. As well as producing reports on individual programmes, associated institutions compile an overview report (the annual statement) drawing together common themes across the range of collaborative programmes, with particular emphasis on quality assurance processes and assessment outcomes. The audit team saw several examples of detailed reporting on collaborative programmes, although these dated from before the change in format of programme annual review reports and the new committee arrangements for dealing with them.

111 In addition, moderators comment in their annual reports on programme delivery in relation to the approval document and give examples of good practice or innovation. However, as the relevant questions on the report form are framed in a general way, moderators tend not to cover similar ground in their responses. The audit team was therefore unable to ascertain from the reports it read how systematically moderators were dealing with aspects of students' learning opportunities, such as learning resources provision and the accuracy and sufficiency of student information. The reporting process for moderators also shows up a discrepancy between the documented procedure and the associated report form. It is not clear whether their reports are to be submitted to the relevant school learning and teaching committee (as indicated in the procedure) or to the Academic Quality Subcommittee (as indicated on the form).

112 The audit team considered that further clarification was necessary as to how moderators' reports were intended to contribute to annual monitoring, particularly given the significance accorded to the moderator role in collaborative provision. The team also noted that collaborative provision had been absorbed into mainstream committee structures and quality assurance processes at the same time as programme approval and periodic review were being progressively rationalised and the focus of programme annual review was being tilted towards enhancement. The team considers it desirable for the University to keep under close review the impact of the recent decision to absorb collaborative programmes into mainstream monitoring processes, given the level of risk associated with collaborative arrangements that the University itself has recognised.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

Institutional arrangements and the research environment

113 Responsibility for the management of research degree programmes lies with the Research Degrees Board, which is guided on academic or policy matters by the Research Strategy Committee. In accordance with the *QAA Code of practice...Postgraduate research programmes*, 2004, the University has developed a comprehensive set of procedures and these are published as the *Quality and Standards Handbook for Research Degree Programmes*, which is updated annually and approved by the Research Degrees Board. Within the Academic Regulations, there are clearly differentiated regulations for the different awards the University offers: MPhil, PhD, PhD by published works, and two professional doctorates, the PsychD and the EdD, comprising taught and research components.

114 The University has developed a focused portfolio of research and, in line with its overall Academic Strategy, is concentrating funding and activity in a relatively small number of areas of strength. To this end it has created research centres and clusters, sometimes bringing together cross-cutting thematic areas. As indicated in the Briefing Paper, research students are only admitted to programmes where the supervisory team can be drawn from one of these centres or clusters, which provide the infrastructure, learning support and expertise to underpin the

proposed programme of research and study. The composition of the supervisory team is subject to the approval of the Research Degrees Board, which also has to approve any subsequent changes. Individual students' programmes are managed by schools, but students also automatically join the Graduate School and thereby belong to the broader research community of the University.

115 The Graduate School is in most respects a 'virtual' entity. Although it comprises several dedicated study areas and a social space for research students, it does not have a formal staff establishment or budget. It delivers a programme of generic training to research students (see paragraph 121 below) and, in conjunction with the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Unit, runs a twice-yearly training programme for research-student supervisors, which is mandatory for those new to the role. In addition, the Graduate School Board has been established, with student representation, as a forum for discussion of operational and academic issues.

116 It was apparent to the audit team from meeting research students that the Graduate School represented something more than simply the enhanced facilities it provides for them. It was clearly an important focal point, lending a dimension to the student experience that would otherwise be difficult to gain through the academic schools, as the population of research students is relatively small and unevenly distributed across subject areas. The team identifies as a feature of good practice the contribution made by the Graduate School in establishing a community of research students and, in particular, assisting the integration of part-time students.

Selection, admission, induction and supervision of research students

117 The application process and admissions procedures are clearly laid out in the prospectus, the Quality and Standards Handbook for Research Degree Programmes, as well as being available on the University's website. In most respects the audit team found the admissions procedures to be careful, thorough and aligned with the *Code of practice*. However, the procedures do not specify a minimum academic threshold for admission to doctoral programmes and the University is encouraged to include consideration of this in its ongoing review of admissions criteria. The team recognised that prospective PhD students are initially registered for a programme leading to an MPhil unless, exceptionally, their funding is dependent on initial registration as PhD and they are particularly well qualified on entry.

118 The audit team saw evidence in minutes of meetings that the Research Degrees Board engaged in robust and detailed scrutiny of applications, paying close attention to the subject expertise, existing supervisory load and training status of members of the supervisory team. Students who met the team indicated that they received induction through their schools and through the introductory research methods programme provided by the Graduate School.

119 Each supervisory team comprises a Director of Studies and one or more co-supervisors to provide the appropriate breadth of subject expertise. The audit team learned from meetings with students that there was potential for flexibility in developing programmes of study to include portfolio submissions, research through practice and performance or the creation of cultural artefacts, supported in each case by written expositions of theory. Students also confirmed the University's willingness to put together appropriate supervisory teams for research programmes that cut across subject boundaries.

Progress and review arrangements

120 There is a well developed system for reviewing students' progress: all students and supervisors must complete six-monthly review reports, with students being encouraged to comment on their experiences of their supervisory support. Each school has a Research Student Coordinating Group, which considers progress reports and forwards a summary to the Research Degrees Board. Students initially registered for an MPhil may transfer their registration to a PhD on making sufficient progress over the first two years, based on a presentation of their work to a transfer panel and submission of a satisfactory report and sample thesis chapter. Every PhD

student has a formal annual review involving a panel interview. The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for the review of student progress were appropriate and effective, with the Research Degrees Board maintaining detailed oversight of individual students' progress.

Development of research and other skills

121 The University has implemented a personal development planning scheme based on a portfolio and a skills audit. The programme of generic research skills training provided by the Graduate School is supplemented by a PgDip in Social Science Research Methods, which is compulsory for students in the School of Education and the School of Business and Social Sciences. Any student with substantial teaching duties (involving more than 20 hours of student contact) has to take the PgCert in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (see paragraph 90 above), while those with fewer contact hours attend a subset of the programme. Minutes of the Graduate School Board showed that there was discussion of issues associated with research training and that when differences in practice between schools were identified these were the subject of debate and resolution where possible; provision of support for attending conferences was a case in point. Overall, the audit team considered the arrangements for developing students' skills to be fit for purpose.

Feedback arrangements

122 Students provide feedback on research methods courses through a questionnaire issued by the Graduate School. They also complete an exit questionnaire, with summaries being considered by the Research Degrees Board. Personal development planning and the six-monthly progress reviews encourage reflection and provide further opportunities for feedback. Research students are represented on all major committees and on the Graduate School Board, which the audit team considered was an effective forum for student opinion. It was clear from the minutes that the Graduate School Board was playing an increasingly influential role in bringing forward matters of general interest and concern, and students whom the team met corroborated this. Recent examples included teaching opportunities for graduate students, training on specialist IT packages, as well as the issue of funding for students to attend conferences.

Assessment of research students

123 Research students are assessed on the basis of a submitted thesis or portfolio and an oral examination. The examining panel is convened by a non-examining chair (normally the Dean of Research) and comprises at least two examiners, at least one of whom is external. For staff candidates and for the PhD by published works, assessment regulations require that there be at least two external examiners. The Quality and Standards Handbook for Research Degree Programmes gives a clear indication of the range and nature of the examiners' recommendations that can arise from the oral examination, which are consistent with accepted practice within the higher education sector. The Handbook does not present any criteria to guide assessment decisions, other than referencing the doctoral level descriptor within FHEQ, and the audit team was of the view that there might be benefit in assessment criteria being more explicit, particularly given the range of different types of research programme offered by the University.

124 The audit team noted that under the regulations, supervisors are 'allowed to participate' in the oral examination and question the candidate, but may not contribute to the deliberations of the examining panel when the outcome is determined. Discussions with staff revealed that supervisor participation was not common practice and there was a general lack of clarity regarding the role and responsibilities of a supervisor at the oral examination. In the interests of ensuring transparency in the operation of oral examinations and providing additional security to the assessment process, the team encourages the University to provide clearer guidance on the participation of research supervisors.

Representation, complaints and appeals arrangements for research students

125 Research student complaints and appeals are dealt with through the University's general appeals and complaints framework, which is available on the University website. Students are directed to the relevant procedures through the Quality and Standards Handbook for Research Degree Programmes (of which they each receive a personal copy). The procedures distinguish between academic decisions relating to assessment and other matters of complaint.

Section 7: Published information

126 The University's website provides the main point of access to its published information. Responsibility for the quality of web-based materials rests with Recruitment, Admissions and Student Records (Web team), while responsibility for the content is distributed between relevant senior staff through a system of web page ownership. Under this system, central functions liaise with schools to produce a variety of student information, comprising publicity and prospectus material, definitive programme information and academic regulations. In addition, each school has its own website containing a wide range of academic and academic-related information, including programme details, research-related information and administrative guidance. Printed materials are produced through the same responsibility chains as web-based materials; by way of illustration, school deans sign off the programme information in prospectuses, while the final document is the responsibility of Recruitment, Admissions and Student Records (Marketing team).

127 At the time of the audit the website was undergoing a process of review and update. The audit team noted that clear protocols were in place to manage the changes during the review period and also found that those areas that had already been migrated to the new software, for example, pages on public access and the student web pages (StudentZone), were comprehensive and straightforward to navigate.

128 Students who met the audit team confirmed the accuracy of pre-entry information. They were particularly positive about StudentZone; a view also expressed in the students' written submission, which pointed to the 'visible improvement' in online information over the past few years. The students had some reservations about the unevenness in the use made by staff of StudyZone (the virtual learning environment) to provide supporting materials for module delivery. This is an issue the University has recognised and is taking steps to address (see paragraph 71 above).

129 Under collaborative arrangements, memoranda of agreement make provision for checks by the University of promotional material produced by partner organisations relating to its awards. They also incorporate guidance on the content of statements describing the collaborative relationship and use of the University's logo, as well as details of the relevant roles within the University responsible for approving material or variations to recommended wording. The audit team was able to verify that partner websites displayed with sufficient prominence the requisite explanation that the University was the awarding institution.

130 Recruitment, Admissions and Student Records (Student Records team) publishes information and instructions concerning the registration process. It is also responsible for assuring the integrity of the statistical returns that underpin the teaching quality information published on the Unistats website (an independent source of public information on teaching quality).

131 The audit team concluded that the University had implemented robust systems to ensure that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information it publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

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

Tel 01425 557000

Fax 01452 557070

Email comms@qaa.ac.uk

All QAA's publications are available on our website www.qaa.ac.uk

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