QAA

University of Leeds

Institutional Review
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

February 2012

Contents

About this review

This is a report of an Institutional Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the University of Leeds. The review took place from 6-10 February 2012 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Jenny Gilbert
- Dr David Lamburn
- Professor Denis Wright
- Mr Daryn McCombe (student reviewer)
- Dr Richard Brown (review secretary).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the University of Leeds and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. In this report the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - threshold academic standards[1]
  - the quality of learning opportunities
  - the enhancement of learning opportunities
- identifies features of good practice
- makes recommendations
- affirms action that the institution is taking or plans to take
- provides commentaries on public information and the theme topic.

A summary of the key findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

In reviewing the University of Leeds, the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The theme for the academic year 2011-12 is the First Year Student Experience.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[2] Background information about the University of Leeds is given on page 3. A dedicated page of the website explains the method for Institutional Review of higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland[3] and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

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[1] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx
[3] www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/ireni/pages/default.aspx.

Key findings

This section summarises the QAA review team's key findings about the University of Leeds.

QAA's judgements about the University of Leeds

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at the University of Leeds (the University).

- The academic standards of the University's awards **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at the University **meets UK expectations**.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University **is commended**.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at the University of Leeds.

- The University's comprehensive and detailed policies and procedures for the admission of students to the University (paragraph 2.5.1).
- The extensive development and success of initiatives which contribute to the University's widening participation strategy (paragraph 2.5.2).
- The University's deliberate and coordinated approach to the enhancement of its provision, in line with its aspiration to create a distinctive Leeds graduate (paragraph 4.1).
- The strategy to develop students' employability and career options through 'LeedsforLife' and its implementation (paragraph 4.3).

Recommendations

The QAA review team **recommends** that the University of Leeds should:

- review its nomination and appointment procedures for external subject specialists by January 2013 to ensure objectivity in the course approval process (paragraph 1.4.2)
- enhance its guidance to external subject specialists by January 2013, in order that the reports from external subject specialists assure the University of the academic standards of new programmes (paragraph 1.4.3)
- ensure that continuity of supervision arrangements is provided to postgraduate research students working under the single supervisor model by January 2013 (paragraph 2.10.5)
- develop a more systematic and transparent approach to implementing its stated intention to provide postgraduate research students with opportunities and training to teach, by January 2013 (paragraph 2.10.6).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms the actions** already being taken by the University of Leeds to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its

students. These actions are listed below.

- The action being taken by the University to address variability in the promptness and usefulness of feedback provided to students on their assessed work (paragraph 1.3.5).
- The action the University is taking to address variability in the quality of teaching by postgraduate teaching assistants (paragraph 2.1.1).
- The introduction of the Personal Development Recording system as a way of bringing improved consistency to the supervision of postgraduate research students (paragraph 2.10.4).
- The University's holistic approach to partnership as a joint enterprise that recognises the mutual obligations of staff and students (paragraph 2.14.2).

Public information

The information that the University provides about its higher education is current, reliable, useful and accessible to students.

The first year student experience

The university has a considered and well-planned approach to the first year student experience. Students receive extensive information, the support from staff is effective, assessment initiatives are being developed for first year students, and progression is carefully monitored.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the operational description and handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining Institutional Review for England and Northern Ireland.[4]

About the University of Leeds

The University of Leeds is one of the largest research-intensive universities in Britain, offering a broad range of programmes of study. In the academic year 2011-12 it enrolled 27,640 full-time and 3,280 part-time students onto 546 graduate and 299 postgraduate award-bearing taught programmes of study. The University has 2,140 postgraduate research students and employs nearly 8,000 staff.

The University's ambition, as stated in the Strategic Plan and Strategy Map, is that: 'By 2015 our distinctive ability to integrate world-class research, scholarship and education will have secured us a place amongst the top 50 universities in the world.'

The University has continued to rationalise its collaborative provision, and its exit from accredited taught provision is well advanced. Collaborative research degree arrangements with York St John University and Leeds Trinity University College are continuing.

In the last QAA Institutional Audit in 2008, the University received judgements of confidence in the management of the academic standards of its awards and confidence in the management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Since the last Institutional Audit the University has introduced a number of changes, including initiatives to improve representation, support and employability skills for students

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[4] www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/ireni/pages/default.aspx.

on taught and research degree programmes, and new buildings to improve the environment. The University intends to continue to provide a high quality experience for students by further integrating research and learning opportunities, increasing student employability, and widening participation. It has identified the need to be prepared for and responsive to external changes, such as the introduction of the Key Information Set and the impact of the new fees regime.

Explanation of the findings about the University of Leeds

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.[5]

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a brief glossary at the end of this report. A fuller glossary of terms[6] is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the review method, also on the QAA website.[7]

1   Academic standards

Outcome

The academic standards at the University of Leeds **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards. The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1   The review team found that the University approves and reviews its programmes with explicit and considered reference to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and a number of relevant public, statutory and regulatory body frameworks. The University's committee structures are clearly defined and articulated. There are robust approval, monitoring and review procedures, which ensure that the learning outcomes of the University's programmes match their award level descriptors and that the modules for each programme provide a sufficient volume of study for the outcomes to be met.

1.1.1   The Taught Student Education Board (TSEB) and the Graduate Board have delegated responsibility for taught and postgraduate research provision respectively. The University's Ordinances and Regulations provide common internal reference points for all Schools that link to national and international reference points, and policy and guidance are reviewed with reference to changes in the Academic Infrastructure. The Academic Quality and Standards Team (AQST) works in partnership with Schools to secure standards, which are monitored through module and programme review, Annual Health Checks (AHCs), the external examiner system and the periodic Student Academic Experience Review (SAER). Issues arising from quality assurance processes are collated by Faculty Taught Student Education Committees (FTSECs) in the annual Student Education Summary Statement, which is considered at the TSEB and then circulated to Schools. The University's committee structure and processes, as described above, enable the overview of changes to the Academic Infrastructure referred to in the findings of the previous Institutional Audit.

1.1.2   New programme proposals are submitted by the relevant School Taught Student Education Committee (TSEC) to the FTSEC and are recommended for approval to the TSEB. The process is overseen administratively by the AQST, which works with the Schools to ensure that programmes are mapped to the correct level of the FHEQ. All new programme proposals are sent to external subject specialists to ensure that they align with appropriate external reference points. For postgraduate research programmes, the Programmes of Study and Audit Group (PSAG) of the Graduate Board ensures that they are

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[5] The full body of evidence used to compile the report is not published. However, it is available on request for inspection. Please contact QAA Reviews Group.
[6] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx.
[7] See note 4.

aligned to the FHEQ. Many programmes are subject to public, statutory and regulatory body accreditation, which makes use of external reference points. The University monitors the programme level annually through module and programme review, which feeds into the AHCs, the external examiner system and every five years through the SAER, where a review panel including an external subject specialist formally considers the programme for re-approval.

Use of external examiners

1.2   The review team found that the University has a consistent and well-monitored system for the appointment and induction of external examiners for its taught and research degree programmes, and that external examiners' reports were integral to and made an effective contribution towards the management of standards.

1.2.1   AQST monitors the appointment of all external examiners for compliance with University policies and procedures. The University's procedures for the appointment of external examiners for taught programmes are reviewed annually, taking into account the relevant section of QAA's *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*). Nominations for the appointment of external examiners from the Heads of Schools for taught programmes are approved by the Faculty Pro-Dean for Student Education, and the nomination form includes safeguards against reciprocity between the School and the external examiner's institution. All new external examiners on taught programmes are mentored and Schools provide clear guidance to external examiners on assessment regulations and procedures, and on the production of annual reports.

1.2.2   Reports from external examiners on taught programmes are scrutinised by AQST. Any issues are dealt with at the appropriate level and a written response is made to the external examiner via AQST. An annual summary of taught external examiners' reports from the Schools' TSECs is prepared for each FTSEC and an institutional summary is scrutinised by the TSEB to identify common themes and share best practice, a development which is in line with the findings of the previous Institutional Audit. External examiners' reports are also considered by AHCs and SAERs. There is student representation on each of these committees and the University intends to make external examiners' reports for taught provision, and the University's responses, available to students on the intranet (see paragraph 4.4).

1.2.3   Recommendations for the appointment of external examiners for postgraduate research programmes are made by the supervisors and Postgraduate Research Tutor for approval by the Graduate Board Examinations Group. Postgraduate research supervisors are expected to have prior knowledge of UK postgraduate research standards and hold a senior position in a higher education institution. Postgraduate research examination reports are checked by Research Student Administration and monitored by the Graduate Board Examinations Group.

Assessment and standards

1.3   The review team found that the University's procedures for the design, approval, monitoring and review of its assessment strategies were effective in allowing students the opportunity to demonstrate that they had attained the learning outcomes for their programme awards.

1.3.1   The University's set of common internal reference points ensures consistency in assessment. Each School has a Code of Practice on Assessment which is updated and

approved annually by FTSECs, and any changes are circulated to Schools in the annual Student Education Summary Statement. An assessment template is now available and annual information sessions are held for staff, developments which address the recommendation from the previous Institutional Audit that the University should ensure adherence with QAA's *Code of practice* regarding the variation in assessment practice between disciplines. The design of assessment strategies is also part of the training undertaken by all staff new to teaching.

1.3.2   As part of programme approval, the external subject specialist is asked to consider the appropriateness of the assessment strategy, and external examiners check that summative assessment strategies are appropriate for the level and learning outcome of modules prior to the delivery of the programme. The review team saw evidence that assessment strategies are linked to learning outcomes in programme specifications; that external examiners' reports on taught programmes require comment on assessment methods in relation to learning outcomes; and that programme assessment is scrutinised annually through module and programme review.

1.3.3   Boards of Examiners for taught programmes operate within a consistent framework across the University, and standard classification software is provided for the consideration of marks and the calculation of degree classification for all Schools. Although Boards cannot change marks, some discretion is permitted within a narrow margin at degree class boundaries. The TSEB considers the profile of degree classifications awarded annually and a sub-group is working on the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR). The TSEB also carried out an examination of the University's unified degree classification system following comments from some external examiners. For postgraduate research degrees there is compulsory training for all staff who act as examiners, and examiners' reports for postgraduate research are considered by the Graduate Board Examinations Group to ensure consistency of practice.

1.3.4   Students welcomed the University's new and more consistent approach to plagiarism and the review team noted the Graduate Board's intention to review plagiarism in the postgraduate research context, based on the successful work undertaken for taught programmes. Students also commented on the improved relationship between the Student Advice Centre and the University, which has reduced student concerns about academic appeals (see paragraph 2.6.1).

1.3.5   The University acknowledges that feedback on assessment provided to students requires improvement. Timely, relevant and effective feedback is a key element of the partnership agreement between the University and its students. It is also part of the Curriculum Enhancement Project and the focus of a number of other projects, including the Academic Development Fund for Learning and Teaching projects 'Making Assessment Relationships Known' and 'Developing World Class Assessment and Feedback Tools for Engineering'. From meetings with staff and students the team gained a clear impression that progress was being made and **the review team affirms** the action being taken by the University to address variability in the promptness and usefulness of feedback provided to students on their assessed work.

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.4   The review team found that the University's procedures for the design, approval, monitoring and review of its programmes enable standards to be set and maintained, allowing students to demonstrate the learning outcomes for their awards.

1.4.1   There is a single approval process for new undergraduate and taught postgraduate modules and programmes which is overseen by AQST, and there are well-defined and

articulated regulations for the approval of taught collaborative programmes. The review team saw evidence in programme audit trails and the programme catalogue that the University had responded to a recommendation from the previous Institutional Audit to ensure that learning outcomes in programme specifications were subject specific. Schools are required to demonstrate that module learning outcomes are mapped to programme learning outcomes, and this is overseen by the FTSEC and monitored by the TSEB through the annual Student Education Summary Statement. Proposals for new and amended undergraduate and taught postgraduate modules and programmes are submitted by the School TSEC to its FTSEC, who approve at module level and recommend approval to TSEB at programme level. Proposals for postgraduate research programmes are submitted by Schools via the Faculty Graduate School Committee to the Graduate Board PSAG, which recommends approval to the main Graduate Board Committee.

1.4.2   As part of the process for new programme approval, external subject specialists are required to comment on new programme proposals. The review team noted that in two examples provided the external subject specialist had been a recent external examiner for the University, a practice which has the potential to undermine the independent nature of the advice received and does not fully align with QAA's *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*. Therefore **the review team recommends** that the University should review its nomination and appointment procedures for external subject specialists by January 2013 to ensure objectivity in the course approval process.

1.4.3   The University provides a list of suggested areas for consideration by external subject specialist during the new programme approval process. The review team observed that some of the comments from external subject specialists were very brief, which reduces the usefulness of the advice and of the assurance received. **The review team recommends** that the University should enhance its guidance to external subject specialists by January 2013, in order that the reports from external subject specialists assure the University of the academic standards of new programmes (see paragraph 2.12.2).

1.4.4   The monitoring of taught programmes is carried out by module and programme review and through the AHCs, the external examiner system and the SAERs, where the review panel formally considers the programme for re-approval. The Graduate Board PSAG has responsibility for the monitoring and review of postgraduate research programmes. Public, statutory and regulatory body reports are reviewed by the relevant FTSEC and can be referred to the TSEB if required.

Subject benchmarks

1.5   The review team found that the University made appropriate use of subject benchmarks/qualification statements in the design, approval, delivery and review of its programmes, which informed the standard of the awards.

1.5.1   The single approval process for new taught programmes requires Schools to ensure that programmes match external reference points and that benchmark statements are included in submissions. As part of the process for new programme approval, external subject specialists are required to comment on whether external reference points are being met, including the relationship to other subject provision in the same area in the UK. Annual external examiners' reports for taught programmes also refer to national subject benchmarks.

1.5.2   The annual module and programme reviews monitor the use of subject benchmarks, and the external subject specialist on the periodic SAER panel is asked to comment on the appropriateness of external reference points as part of programme re-approval.

2   Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

The quality of learning opportunities at the University of Leeds **meets UK expectations.** The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1   The review team found that the University has adopted a serious and comprehensive approach to supporting and enhancing professional standards for teaching and learning and for the support of learning.

2.1.1   The University has a clear policy for staff training and development. Newly appointed staff who are new to teaching are required to take the University of Leeds Teaching Award course, which is flexible and comprehensive, and is delivered through the Staff and Departmental Development Unit (SDDU). This requirement is monitored through a probationary period and progress is reviewed before the post is confirmed. It is supplemented by a compulsory mentoring scheme. All new research supervisors are required to complete a comprehensive training programme and staff confirmed that this requirement was complied with. The training of part-time teachers, including postgraduate teaching assistants and postgraduate research students, is also a requirement, but the team found that this was not always adhered to and noted that a review of the Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Students Engaged in Teaching was being undertaken jointly by the TSEB and the Graduate Board. **The review team affirms** the action the University is taking to address variability in the quality of teaching by postgraduate teaching assistants.

2.1.2   The University provides a comprehensive development programme for all teaching and support staff, both in response to specific needs and more broadly, for example in preparing staff to take up senior positions. Training is also provided to enable academic staff to demonstrate the impact of research on teaching, in accordance with the University's aim 'to translate excellence in research and scholarship into learning opportunities for students' (Strategy Map). The team saw ample evidence of how the good practice in research-led teaching identified in the Institutional Audit had been built on, notably through the Curriculum Enhancement Project.

2.1.3   The importance given to teaching as well as research, also identified as good practice in the previous Institutional Audit, continues to be recognised. High-quality teaching is promoted through the University's Student Education Fellowship Scheme, and staff confirmed that extensive use is made of its award holders and of National Teaching Fellows. High-quality teaching is also recognised in promotion criteria, and the annual University Teaching Education Conference is well attended.

2.1.4   Peer observation of teaching takes place, including observation of postgraduate teaching assistants, but the policy underpinning this process was under review at the time of the visit. The University operates a common annual review and development scheme informed by module reviews, although it notes that access to module surveys is variable for postgraduate teaching assistants. Staff appraisal records are passed to Heads of Schools to identify development needs and inform planning.

Learning resources

2.2   Although the University does not have an overarching learning resource strategy, the team saw evidence of a close alignment of strategic developments for the provision,

allocation and management of learning resources that was effective and enabled students to achieve their learning outcomes.

2.2.1   Programme and module approvals require confirmation of an appropriate level of staffing and resources as part of the approval process. Schools also take account of teaching loads in allocating human resources. The appropriateness of learning resources is monitored through module and programme reviews, Annual health Checks (AHCs) and Student Academic Experience Reviews (SAERs).

2.2.2   The Library liaises with Schools and student representatives to provide appropriate levels of service and resources, and gathers student feedback through Libqual, the National Student Survey and the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey to develop its service plans. The Library provides online resources for students to develop academic skills. Students were appreciative of the resources offered by the Library in both the student written submission and in meetings, but also raised issues around the availability of key texts, digital resources and opening hours, which the university is addressing. The Library is also active in ensuring that the virtual learning environment is developed appropriately to support student learning. The student written submission comments positively on the contribution the virtual learning environment makes to student learning, but the team met students who also highlighted the variability in quality of the information provided.

2.2.3   The University is in the process of establishing an integrated Student Education Service, and introduced Faculty Education Service Managers in line with its strategy 'to deliver an exceptional student experience' (Strategy Map). There is clear evidence that student feedback is being used to inform the development of student services. The review team met students who commented negatively on some resource-related issues arising from the management of joint honours programmes, arrangements for which have recently been reorganised to improve the experience of joint honours students.

2.2.4   The impact of the physical environment on the student learning experience is monitored through surveys, the Taught Student Education Board (TSEB) and the University Capital Group. A number of new buildings and facilities have been provided, for example the School of Performance and Cultural Industries, the School of Earth and Environment, and the Student Services Centre.

Student voice

2.3   The review team formed the view that the University has effective and comprehensive mechanisms for surveying and assessing student opinion, and that students are able to make a significant contribution to assuring, maintaining and enhancing the quality of their learning opportunities.

2.3.1   The University aims to manage the quality of students' learning opportunities 'through regular and effective dialogue at all levels between all those involved in the process of student learning and development' (self-evaluation document (SED) paragraph 24). The consequent emphasis on 'collective engagement and the sharing of responsibility between staff and students' (SED paragraph 24) is embodied in the 'Partnership' (see paragraphs 2.14-2.14.2). It was evident from meetings with students that, although awareness of the Partnership was not universal, its manifestations were becoming more widely recognised and for many staff it was already a reality.

2.3.2   Student representation is a key feature of the Partnership and an improved system of student representation has been implemented. Students are represented on all major committees, student-staff forums exist in all Schools, and minutes of meetings inform AHCs and SAERs. Additionally, there are regular formal and informal meetings of student

representatives and Leeds University Union (LUU) sabbatical officers with senior academic and support staff.

2.3.3   Students make a significant contribution to the University's quality assurance and enhancement processes. The University regularly surveys students about induction, teaching and learning, opportunities for enhancement, and central services. National Student Survey data is carefully analysed and informs action plans. Student representatives are able to participate in new module and programme approval processes and influence curriculum design and, from this academic year, students are full members of AHC and SAER teams. In the context of the partnership between the University and its students, the team also noted that LUU had catalogued 700 actions taken in response to student feedback conveyed through the student representation system.

2.3.4   The University's 'Responding to your feedback' website is a potentially powerful mechanism for sharing student feedback and the University's responses on a range of issues, and for engaging students in the monitoring of progress against agreed targets.

Management information is used to improve quality and standards

2.4   The review team found that there was extensive and effective use of management information derived from a variety of sources to safeguard standards and to promote the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

2.4.1   Management information is collated and provided centrally by the University to monitor progress against key performance indicators. It was clear to the team that extensive use was made of the information provided, for example in monitoring achievement and progression at programme level, which ultimately feeds into SAERs.

2.4.2   Central Services also review data relating to a range of functions, including admissions, equality and disability, and complaints and appeals, to monitor progress against targets and inform strategic development.

2.4.3   The team noted that effective use of National Student Survey and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey data, identified in the previous Institutional Audit, continues to be made and that other internal student surveys are commissioned for specific purposes. For example, the monitoring undertaken through the Inspire Our Students Steering Group, which reported to TSEB, was effective in setting key priorities to enhance student learning opportunities and fed into the Integrated Planning Exercise.

Admission to the University

2.5   The University has comprehensive and detailed policies and procedures for the admission of students to taught and research degree programmes and a range of initiatives for widening participation.

2.5.1   The Admissions and Widening Participation Committee and its Faculty subcommittees oversee admissions policies and procedures to taught programmes and ensure consistency in areas such as equivalence of qualifications, English language proficiency and industrial experience. School and Faculty policies are updated annually to maintain transparency and the accuracy of information to applicants. Admission to collaborative programmes follows the same principles. Decisions on admissions of postgraduate research students are taken by two members of appropriately trained staff, one of whom is usually the potential supervisor. Monitoring of postgraduate research student admission is undertaken by the Programmes of Study and Audit Group. The review team

identified the University's comprehensive and detailed policies and procedures for the admission of students to the University as a feature of **good practice.**

2.5.2   The University has adopted a strategic and proactive approach to raising aspirations and encouraging applications from under-represented groups. A range of national and local initiatives are supported by the work of Schools and Faculties, formerly through the Changing Futures strategy and more recently through the Educational Engagement strategy in the form of the Changing Futures Outreach programme, the Reach for Excellence scheme and the Access to Leeds scheme. The review team noted both the success of the Access to Leeds scheme and the successful mentoring and study support arrangements for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The team identified the extensive development and success of initiatives which contribute to the University's widening participation strategy as a feature of **good practice.**

Complaints and appeals

2.6   The review team found that the University's complaints and appeals procedures were effective.

2.6.1   Clear and comprehensive information on complaints and appeals is available to all students. The Office of Academic Appeals and Regulation deals with all taught programme appeals and students are advised to seek support through the Student Union Advice Centre. Although certain types of appeals by postgraduate research students may be considered at Faculty level, appeals against decisions at the final examination stage are always handled at institutional level. The University maintains oversight of the number, provenance and outcomes of appeals through annual reports to TSEB, the Graduate Board and Senate, and the Office of Academic Appeals and Regulation issues an annual bulletin. The student written submission commented on the positive relationship between the University and the Student Advice Centre in the handling of complaints and appeals. Students expressed some concerns about the delay in dealing with appeals, but there is a clear strategy in place to resolve issues more speedily.

Career advice and guidance

2.7   The review team found that the University has a strategic approach to career education, information, advice and guidance, which is adequately quality assured.

2.7.1   There is an emphasis on employability within the University's strategy, which is reflected in its committee structure. The University has a clear Employability Strategy which draws on the key themes from the Strategy Map and is overseen by the Employability Committee of the TSEB. Each Faculty has an Employability Working Group which provides relevant career information and resources to support students, and reports to the Employability Committee. The Employability Strategy will be articulated through the Curriculum Enhancement Project and LeedsforLife (see paragraph 4.3). There is an extensive range of employability activity which is focused on LeedsforLife, an initiative which embeds employability at all levels of the University through the Careers Centre, Schools and Faculties, and is supported by the Personal Tutoring System.

2.7.2   The Careers Centre provides support for students from the point of registration and offers accredited modules, both as electives and as discipline-specific preparation for internships, graduate employment and postgraduate study. The modules offered by the Careers Centre are quality assured through the School of Education. Careers support is also provided to specific groups, for example postgraduate research students, through the Careers Centre in association with the SDDU.

2.7.3   There is a clear strategy to improve the careers service to students, for example through the use of a dashboard, an enhanced Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey, and work with personal tutors. The Careers Centre has good and growing links with employers to provide work placements, support for students on placement, and to foster engagement with employers and alumni through LeedsforLife networking events (see paragraph 4.3).

Supporting disabled students

2.8   The University manages the quality of learning opportunities to meet the entitlements of disabled students by providing support in a variety of ways to different equality strands.

2.8.1   The University has agreed an Equality Statement which governs the overall approach to entitlement and is supported by an Equality Unit, which has a specific disability support function for both staff and students. A significant amount of information is provided pre-entry to enable students to determine what assistance they may need on admission. There is a comprehensive Equality Service website which offers guidance to students and staff, and both students and staff stated that they were aware of the Equality Service and the support it could provide. The Equality Service carries out an individual needs assessment with students who disclose that they have a disability, and staff confirmed that Admissions and Personal Tutors refer students to the site and that reasonable adjustments are made to enable disabled students to take part in University life. A sub-committee of TSEB has been set up to monitor data on equality issues and to progress an inclusive taught student curriculum. A new webpage on disability awareness has been added to the postgraduate research website and the Graduate Board receives an annual statement about postgraduate research students with disabilities.

Supporting international students

2.9   The review team found that the learning opportunities provided for international students were appropriate.

2.9.1   The University provides support to international students in a variety of ways thorough the International Student Office and LUU. The team met international undergraduate and postgraduate students who were very positive about their overall experience at the University.

2.9.2   The International Student Office uses the International Student Barometer to gather the opinions of incoming students. Extensive pre-entry information is provided to international students to prepare them for study in the UK. The International Student Office runs a dedicated induction for international students in conjunction with LUU, and an Intercultural Ambassador Scheme which facilitates student-led opportunities for intercultural experiences for home and international students. Comprehensive English language support is offered to international students to assist with their academic studies, and students who met the team were positive about the support they had received.

Supporting postgraduate research students

2.10   The review team found that, overall, the University provides appropriate guidance and support to enable postgraduate research students to complete their programmes and to enable staff involved in research programmes to fulfil their responsibilities.

2.10.1   The Graduate Board is responsible for postgraduate research provision and there are clear reporting structures for the implementation of postgraduate research policies and procedures. The Equality and Diversity Policy applies to all students, but there is separate advice for postgraduate research students who are disabled and a separate procedure for appeals.

2.10.2   To contribute to 'a world-leading, research-intensive university' (Postgraduate research project paragraph 1), the University launched the postgraduate research project with the aim of recruiting high quality research students. The project is complemented by a proposal in the Strategy Map to improve the research environment for postgraduate research, and by the formulation of a refreshed skills strategy.

2.10.3   Selection, admission and induction processes are appropriate. There is a separate prospectus for postgraduate research students, application details are available online and applicants are interviewed. Students described induction as structured and mostly useful.

2.10.4   Students are provided with a supportive research environment and each School has a postgraduate research tutor. A Training and Developmental Needs Analysis is available online and students all commented favourably on the Personal Development Plan it generated. A range of research training for different stages of the PhD process is offered to postgraduate research students and their supervisors in the form of workshops delivered by the SDDU, and students who met the team were complimentary about the content. Monitoring arrangements are effective and staff reported that there was a good take-up of the electronic Personal Development Recording record keeping system, although it is not yet fully adopted. The Personal Development Recording system is a recently introduced, University-wide system that records supervision meetings, student training and transfer from provisional registration, and formally monitors student progress. It can be used to track individual students and monitor groups. **The review team affirms** the introduction of the Personal Development Recording system as a way of bringing improved consistency to the supervision of postgraduate research students.

2.10.5   Three models of PhD supervision are outlined in the Code of Practice for Research Degree Candidatures. Two models involve two or more supervisors; for example, in science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects the student is usually placed in a supportive research group. However, the team were concerned that the single supervisor model, comprising one supervisor plus a mentor/advisor, presented a risk to the continuity of the postgraduate research student's supervision should the supervisor leave the University. **The review team recommends** that the University should ensure that continuity of supervision arrangements is provided to postgraduate research students working under the single supervisor model by January 2013.

2.10.6   Most postgraduate research students welcomed the opportunity to teach. There is a Code of Practice for postgraduate research students who teach and those who do are offered a wide range of SDDU workshops, assigned a mentor, and can complete an accredited training course. However, as a consequence of an LUU campaign for greater parity for postgraduate research students, a survey was conducted and a working group set up to review the Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Students Engaged in Teaching. The survey highlighted differences in the training for teaching and the expectations of postgraduate research students. The working group also identified significant inconsistencies in the application of the Code of Practice, for example in postgraduate research students being afforded the opportunity to teach and in the allocation of teaching hours. Therefore **the review team recommends** that the University should develop a more systematic and transparent approach to implementing its stated intention to provide postgraduate research students with opportunities and training to teach, by January 2013.

2.10.7   Student feedback is captured through the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and is analysed and acted upon, and students who met the team were familiar with the student representation system.

2.10.8   The review team found that most students aiming to pursue an academic career were well supported, although the support for some students undertaking PhDs linked with an external organisation was described as variable. Additionally, some students who were seeking alternatives to an academic career felt that they had not been offered the equivalent level of advice and opportunity. The University is addressing this issue through the 'Developing postgraduate research employability offer'.

2.10.9   Drawing on evidence from the student written submission and from meetings with students, the review team were able to conclude that there was an overall sense of community among postgraduate research students. In line with the findings of the previous Institutional Audit, the University has invested in social and research space for postgraduate research students, who recognised and appreciated the improvements. Even those who did not belong to a research group commented that there were opportunities to meet other students at School conferences. The University offers a range of training and development activities for postgraduate research students through four hubs, for example the postgraduate research conference and the Postgraduate Researcher of the Year competition, and students welcomed the opportunity to mix with colleagues from other Faculties at these events.

Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.11   The review team found that the quality of learning opportunities delivered as part of collaborative arrangements is managed effectively to enable students to achieve their awards.

2.11.1   There is a typology for collaborative provision that includes articulation arrangements and split-site PhDs. There has been a reduction in collaborative provision, some of which is being taught out, and any new collaborative arrangements must align with the University's vision and the Strategy Map. The Standing Group on Collaborative Provision advises on collaborative provision, receives reports on collaborative provision approvals, and ensures that good practice is shared. Collaborative Provision Approvals Guidance is available which, in addition to the standard approval process, requires a due diligence check, a business plan and a legal agreement, among other information.
Approval processes are carefully monitored by the Academic Quality and Standards Team (AQST) and accreditation reviews are held regularly.

2.11.2   The delivery of programmes for students studying at collaborative partners is appropriate and students are properly supported throughout. Students are provided with a handbook covering all areas of study and they have access to the same electronic resources as on-campus students. The same Curricular Ordinances and Regulations supplemented by Rules for Award apply to collaborative provision as to other taught provision.
Each partnership has a link tutor, or equivalent, with a defined role. One link tutor involved in a partnership with international articulation reported on a visit to the overseas partner to moderate assessment and assure standard equivalence. Collaborative students are represented on Departmental Academic Committees at the collaborative partners.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.12   The review team found that the quality of learning opportunities delivered through flexible and distributed learning, including e-learning, is managed effectively.

2.12.1   In addition to following standard approval processes, the approval policy for flexible and distributed learning includes the requirement to specify resourcing, delivery schedule and methods of delivery, among other information. It also specifies that there should be compliance with QAA's *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. The University delivers a small number of postgraduate flexible and distributed learning courses, and there is evidence that teams developing flexible and distributed learning programmes benefit from consultation with those operating more established programmes.

2.12.2   The review team noted that in two instances the external subject specialist did not address all the suggested areas in the external reviewer guidelines, and in one case the external subject specialist was also a very recent external examiner from a similar programme at the institution (see paragraphs 1.4.2 and 1.4.3).

2.12.3   The flexible and distributed learning student interviewed expressed satisfaction with the programme and indicated that the online enrolment was effective, an induction was provided, delivery was appropriate and that personal tutoring was supportive.

Work-based and placement learning

2.13   The review team found that the quality of learning opportunities delivered through work-based and placement learning is effective.

2.13.1   The University's emphasis on employability is evident in its approach to work-based learning. The University's policy on placement aligns with its Strategic Plan and Strategy Map and requires that all students are given the opportunity of a placement.
The Employability Committee, which reports to TSEB, has a sub-group for Placements and Internships and there is also a Standing Group on Study Abroad.

2.13.2   Work placement is an essential component of a number of programmes and there is evidence of appropriate development and oversight of the student experience on placement. Elements of placement are designated as modules and are therefore reviewed annually as part of the module review process. The Careers Centre provides integrated careers modules, specialist support for students applying for internships and oversight of some placements. A website on the Risk Management of Placements provides documentation which ensures a level of consistency across Schools. The responsibilities of University staff, students and placement providers are explained in the Risk Management of Placements Handbook, and each School has a work experience support tutor. The Student Placement Handbook makes clear the student's responsibilities and entitlements.
The student is allocated a placement tutor who maintains proactive contact during the placement, and the employer monitors attendance and evaluates the student. A student who had been on placement overseas reported being very well supported.

2.13.3   Careers development and placement are also developed through co-curricular activities under the LeedsforLife initiative (see paragraph 4.3).

Student charter

2.14   The University has a partnership agreement, with accompanying codes of practice, which sets out the mutual expectations of staff and students. This has been in place for five years and has recently been re-launched as the 'Partnership'.

2.14.1   The Partnership includes all categories of students and sets out the mutual expectations of staff and students and, moreover, the expectations between members of

staff and between individual students. The review team found clear evidence of the joint ownership of the Partnership in the student written submission. There is a Partnership website with downloadable materials which are jointly branded by the University and LUU. The website houses tools, also jointly developed, which include Democ, a consultation tool intended for group discussion within Schools, and the site encourages Schools and students to work together to demonstrate the Partnership in action. The Partnership site also signposts support and advice to students.

2.14.2   Meetings with staff and students revealed that awareness of the Partnership is uneven: senior staff are familiar with the site; academic staff do not yet demonstrate an understanding of the concept of mutual expectations beyond that which is limited to student behaviour; first-year students and postgraduate research students evidenced limited familiarity; and other undergraduates showed greater awareness. The University intends to monitor the implementation of the Partnership twice during 2011-12 and will then review and refresh the site as necessary. **The review team affirms** the University's holistic approach to partnership as a joint enterprise that recognises the mutual obligations of staff and students.

3   Public information

Outcome

The University of Leeds **makes information about academic standards and quality publicly available** via its website. The information is clear, accessible, accurate, and up-to-date. Students find the information useful both in helping them make an informed choice when applying to the University and in preparing for what they might expect when they join. The review team's reasons for this conclusion are given below.

Findings

3.1   The University complies with the Higher Education Funding Council for England requirement that information on academic standards and quality should be made publically available.

3.2   The University provides information in a variety of forms. Electronic information is provided through an externally facing website, an online campus intranet and a student portal. The minutes of academic committees are available on the intranet; handbooks provide information on academic regulations, facilities and support services; and information on appeals and complaints is published by the Academic Appeals and Regulations team. External examiners' reports are available on the 'Responding to your feedback' website, but students who met the team were unable to recall the site or having accessed it, although the Annual Student Education Summary provided evidence that external examiners' reports were discussed with students.

3.3   The Communications and Marketing team has overall responsibility for the management of public information, supported by the recent appointment of a marketing manager to each Faculty. Schools have their own websites, and Faculty heads have responsibility for ensuring the accuracy of the information provided. Prospectuses are produced centrally following annual consultation with the Schools and are reviewed by the Student Communications Steering group. Information supplied to the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) is managed centrally, and the guidance on qualifications and tariffs is reviewed annually and approved by the relevant Pro-Dean.

3.4   The review team met with students who confirmed that they were satisfied with the information they had received prior to and while studying on their programmes.

Programme specifications are available publically via the programme catalogue and students knew where they could find the relevant learning outcomes. The team noted the University's linkage of the learning outcomes with their Employability Strategy through LeedsforLife by identifying the student's stage of career readiness at the point of admission and providing opportunities to develop employability through integrated curricular and co-curricular activities (see paragraphs 2.13.3 and 4.3).

3.5   The review team noted that the University had engaged with students and staff to promote a culture of mutual rights and responsibilities through the 'Partnership' initiative, but as yet there was limited recognition of the scheme among students and the main body of academic staff.

4   Enhancement of learning opportunities

Outcome

The enhancement of learning opportunities at the University of Leeds **is commended.** The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Findings

4.1   The review team was able to confirm that a clear strategy for enhancement is embedded at all levels within the University, from institutionally managed strategic projects and Faculty initiatives to improve discipline-specific learning, to actions taken by Schools in response to student feedback and individual steps taken by staff to raise student achievement on particular modules. The University was able to articulate clearly its approach to the formation, dissemination and implementation of its strategic priorities, and the team noted in meetings with staff the prominence which continues to be given to the Strategy Map as a driver for enhancement and the role of Strategy Project Teams in supporting the delivery of institutional priorities. The University has built on the use of the Strategy Map, recognised as good practice in the 2008 Institutional Audit, and the team identified the University's deliberate and coordinated approach to the enhancement of its provision, in line with its aspiration to create a distinctive Leeds graduate, as a feature of **good practice**.

4.2   The University has a wide range of mechanisms for the dissemination of the enhancement activity identified in the Strategy Map. Enhancement activities are coordinated by the Taught Student Education Board and the team found that staff at all levels were aware of and engaged with the projects. Annual Health Checks are used as a forum for discussing the Schools' responses to institutional priorities and include a section on good practice. These checks feed into the Student Academic Experience Review process, which has a key role in assuring and enhancing quality. The review team also identified a number of enhancement activities relating specifically to teaching and learning, including the Student Education Fellowship Scheme as a deliberate means of funding and disseminating good practice in teaching; the Annual Student Education Conference; the Student Education Bulletin; the Talking about Teaching seminars offered by the Staff and Departmental Development Unit; and the Casebook, which provides an online repository of good practice.

4.3   The review team found two examples of curriculum-focused enhancement particularly noteworthy: the Curriculum Enhancement Project, which aims to define a shared Leeds Curriculum based on clear academic principles and to broaden students' opportunities post-university; and LeedsforLife (see also paragraphs 2.7.1, 2.13.3 and 3.4), a strategy to develop students' employability through a holistic programme which encourages the development of curricular and co-curricular skills, supported by the Personal Tutoring System. The team found that the various elements of the programme were widely

recognised and appreciated by the students they met. These activities are underpinned by the developing 'Partnership' initiative, which explicitly states the reciprocal rights and responsibilities of staff and students (see paragraph 2.3.1). The team identified the University's strategy to develop students' employability and career options through LeedsforLife and its implementation as a feature of **good practice.**

4.4   The review team also noted two initiatives to improve responsiveness to student feedback. 'Responding to your feedback' provides a single reference point for the collation of student feedback and the action plans generated to address the issues raised, which when embedded will allow students to see what difference their feedback has made.
The University also plans to publish all external examiners' reports and associated action plans on this site to provide students with further information about how external feedback shapes their programmes.

5   Theme: First Year Student Experience

Each academic year, a specific theme relating to higher education provision in England and Northern Ireland is chosen for especial attention by QAA's Institutional Review teams.
In 2011-12 the theme is the **First Year Student Experience**.

The review team explored the theme of the First Year Student Experience at the University of Leeds. The team found that the University had carried out extensive work on the first year student experience for both home and international students, and that the Taught Student Education Board (TSEB) brought these initiatives together in a coherent way. The team found evidence in Annual Health Checks (AHCs) and the Student Academic Experience Reviews that the first year student experience was under consideration at school and programme level. Students were positive about their experience, although students on joint honours programmes identified some inconsistencies.

Supporting students' transition

5.1   The University identified the need to support students' transition into higher education and to a research-led environment as one of the key drivers for its active approach to its work on the first year student experience.

5.1.1   Staff are provided with materials such as 'Integrating Students into the Academic Community', which offers examples of good practice for dissemination. There is a comprehensive induction programme, which has recently been standardised to supplement subject-specific material and which students described as useful. Tailored support is provided for particular groups, including: an early arrival arrangement for students with disabilities; an Intercultural Ambassador Scheme to support international students; matrix accredited information and guidance for mature students; additional mentoring and monitoring for students recruited through access schemes; and induction for part-time students through the Lifelong Learning Centre. Other schemes included peer-assisted learning and mentoring, and the team met students who had found this support helpful.

5.1.2   Personal tutoring through LeedsforLife is a key part of the University's system for managing the transition to higher education. The University provides webforms to ensure that students have completed the necessary enrolment procedures and have access to the support they need. Students noted some unevenness in the operation of the personal tutoring scheme, but those who the review team met were positive about the system.
The introduction of the web-based personal tutoring system evidences a response to the findings of the Institutional Audit, which encouraged the University to ensure that variations

in personal tutoring were within expectations and that good practice could be more easily shared.

Information for first-year students

5.2   The University provides an extensive range of information for students in a variety of forms, both pre and post-enrolment. The use of the material is carefully monitored and its effectiveness evaluated. Students spoke highly of the amount and accuracy of the information they had received, although joint honours students commented on some variability in approach between Schools and the repetition of certain information.

5.2.1   The 'Flying Start' project makes a range of interactive materials, such as videos and quizzes, available to students before arrival. Students are also provided with information in more traditional formats, for example the 'Countdown to University Life' booklet.

Assessment and feedback

5.3   In all degree-level programmes, except Foundation Degrees, the first year of undergraduate study does not contribute to degree classifications, and the University is developing assessment and feedback initiatives tailored to the needs of first-year students.

5.3.1   The review team found that students were generally clear about the marking criteria and the intended learning outcomes of their programmes, which were provided in course handbooks, and the majority had received prompt feedback on assessment from their tutors.

5.3.2   The University has revised its approach to the use of the 'Turnitin' assignment submission service and is introducing a compulsory online tutorial with a strong emphasis on educating students about plagiarism rather than merely punishing offenders. Students commented that they had gained a clear understanding of the meaning and consequences of plagiarism that was frequently refreshed.

Monitoring retention and progression

5.4   Student retention is one of the University's key performance indicators and is monitored at institutional level by the TSEB under the 'Inspire our Students' theme. The University carefully monitors retention for Schools by setting benchmarks through the Institutional Planning Exercise and monitoring targets through programme reviews which feed into AHCs. Retention rates below 90 per cent are considered unacceptable and the University provides clear information to support the monitoring and progression of first-year students.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to key terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Most terms also have formal 'operational' definitions. For example, pages 18-19 of the handbook for this review method give formal definitions of: threshold academic standards, learning opportunities, enhancement and public information.

The handbook can be found on the QAA website at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/ireni-handbook.aspx.

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality:
www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx.

Academic Infrastructure Guidance developed and agreed by the higher education community and published by QAA, which is used by institutions to ensure that their courses meet national expectations for academic standards and that students have access to a suitable environment for learning (academic quality). It consists of four groups of reference points: the **frameworks for higher education qualifications**, the **subject benchmark statements**, the **programme specifications** and the *Code of practice*. Work is underway (2011-12) to revise the Academic Infrastructure as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

academic standards The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Code of practice The *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for higher education institutions.

credit(s) A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as 'numbers of credits' at a specific level.

enhancement Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of **learning opportunities**. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

feature of good practice A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

framework A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

framework for higher education qualifications A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*.

learning opportunities The provision made for students' learning, including planned **programmes of study**, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios) and staff development.

learning outcome What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

operational definition A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in reports.

programme (of study) An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

programme specifications Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of **programmes of study**, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

public information Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Quality Code Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is being developed from 2011 to replace the **Academic Infrastructure** and will incorporate all its key elements, along with additional topics and overarching themes.

subject benchmark statement A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

threshold academic standard The minimum standard that a student should reach in order to gain a particular qualification or award, as set out in the **subject benchmark statements** and national qualifications frameworks. Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that students need to achieve in order to gain any particular class of award, for example a first-class bachelor's degree. See also **academic standards**.

widening participation Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.