

University of Newcastle upon Tyne

December 2009

Annex to the report

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Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Newcastle upon Tyne (the University) from 30 November to 4 December 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit team found strong evidence of deliberate steps taken by the University to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. The University's commitment to parity of esteem for research and learning and teaching, and its central support and funding, provide a context which encourages innovation and enhancement from both professional and academic staff.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The audit team found that the University has a sound infrastructure in place to ensure satisfactory arrangements for postgraduate research students. Action has been taken or is in hand following the Review of research degree programmes in 2006 by QAA. The University's arrangements meet the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the steps the University has taken, as a research-intensive institution, to recognise the value of teaching through its rewards and incentives for staff, and to enhance the quality of teaching by encouraging the inclusion of research in the curriculum (paragraphs 65 and 93)
- the range of ways in which the University is developing the employability of all of its students (paragraphs 87, 104 and 130).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- review the effectiveness of Internal Subject Review as a means of reporting on the consistency of local implementation of University policies (paragraph 51)

- give high priority to the development and implementation of a revised system for personal tutoring (paragraph 82)
- strengthen its oversight of collaborative provision (paragraph 120).

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- extend, as widely as possible, opportunities for students to benefit from the University's investment in learning technology (paragraph 69)
- strengthen arrangements for sharing and embedding practice that the University has identified as exemplary (paragraph 108).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 The institution's origins date back to the establishment of the School of Medicine in 1834, with Newcastle University being established with full degree awarding powers by *Act of Parliament* in 1963. The campus has been located in the city centre since the 1960s.

2 The University's vision, set out in Vision 2021, is to be a civic university with a global reputation for academic excellence. Its teaching and learning philosophy is underpinned by two principles, education for life and parity of esteem for learning and teaching with research.

3 The University is organised into three faculties: Humanities and Social Sciences; Medical Sciences; and Science, Agriculture and Engineering, with a total of 23 academic units.

4 In 2008-09 the University had 18,878 students, of whom 14,155 were undergraduate and 4,723 postgraduates (3,025 were taught postgraduates and 1,698 research postgraduates). Overall, 50 per cent of the University's students were female and 20 per cent were non-UK (14 per cent from outside the European Union), and 577 students were registered as studying on collaborative programmes.

The information base for the audit

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

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

7 In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the previous Institutional audit, March 2005
- the report of a Major review of healthcare programmes, University of Newcastle upon Tyne and Northumberland, Tyne and Wear Strategic Health Authority, December 2005
- the report of a Review of postgraduate research provision, July 2006
- the institution's internal documents
- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.

Developments since the last audit

8 A new Vice-Chancellor was appointed in August 2007 and has launched a new Strategic Plan - Vision 2021 - for the University to be 'globally ambitious and regionally rooted'.

9 In 2007-08, the roles and responsibilities of the senior management team were redefined so that there are seven pro vice-chancellors (PVCs), one responsible for each of the University's core functions (Research and Innovation, Teaching and Learning, and Engagement), one for Planning and Resources, and one for each of the three faculties. These, together with the Vice-Chancellor, the Executive Director of Finance and Executive Director of Human Resources, and the Registrar, comprise the senior management team, which meets as the Executive Board.

10 In light of the stated aim of promoting parity of esteem between teaching and research the University has introduced a Teaching Code of Practice in July 2008, clearer job summaries for academic staff and heads of school, and an equal promotion procedure between research and teaching. At the time of the audit, the Learning and Teaching Strategy was in the process of being refreshed and integrated into a 'Learning, Teaching and Wider Student Experience Strategy'.

Actions on recommendations from the last audit

11 The University has taken action on the recommendations from the last audit, updating its qualifications and credit framework, and qualifications are now mapped to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The University has also enhanced the external element of the programme approval process and now has Guidelines on External Participation in Programme Approval.

12 Central oversight of management information is now the responsibility of the PVC Planning and Resources. A new cohort analysis process has been introduced. Staff who met the audit team that confirmed that they were satisfied with the quality of cohort data.

13 The last audit recommended that the University take steps to ensure the consistency and implementation of University policies and practices at the local level. The University has made a number of changes, including the servicing of internal subject reviews by the Quality in Learning and Teaching Unit (QuILT), but the present audit team found that further action was advisable (see paragraph 51).

14 The Review of research degree provision in 2006 asked the University to ensure that supervisors' workloads were not excessive. New guidelines have been introduced and the audit team's scrutiny of workload models indicated that staff do not appear to be overloaded with supervision (see paragraph 124). Standard student representation mechanisms have now been extended to postgraduate research provision and a new student representation programme for all students was planned to be introduced in 2010.

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

15 Senate is the executive body in all academic matters and has delegated responsibilities for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities to the University's Teaching and Learning Committee (UTLC). The PVC Teaching and Learning (PVC T&L), whose brief covers all aspects of the student experience, chairs the UTLC.

16 Subcommittees reporting to UTLC have included a Regulations Sub-Committee, Quality and Standards Sub-Committee (QSSC) and a Standing Committee on Collaborative Provision. From 2009-10 QSSC will take greater responsibility for the quality of taught provision, and a new Postgraduate Research Sub-Committee will similarly take responsibility for research student provision. A new e-learning steering group has also been established.

17 Each of the three faculties has a faculty teaching and learning committee (FTLC) chaired by a dean of undergraduate studies. Beneath the FTLCs are the boards of studies. Each undergraduate and taught postgraduate programme reports to a board of studies, which has responsibility for the assurance and enhancement of the quality of the student experience and the maintenance of the standards for all awards coming under its remit. The head of school is responsible for the academic leadership of the school, taking a lead on resource and strategy, while degree programme directors take day-to-day responsibility for the management of a programme.

18 There is a graduate school within each faculty and the graduate school committee (GSC) in each faculty, chaired by a dean of postgraduate studies, is responsible for the quality management of postgraduate research programmes. From 2009-10 the GSCs will report to the newly formed Postgraduate Research Sub-Committee of UTLC.

19 The Academic Audit Committee (AAC) undertakes independent audits of all the University's academic activities and its remit includes the consistency of implementation of quality management policies and processes. AAC makes recommendations to ULTC and reports to Senate. The audit team noted that AAC had produced a number of reports on a range of issues; on some the University had acted rapidly, but not on the 2007 report on personal tutoring, where the review did not commence until September 2009 (see paragraph 82).

20 Policies, procedures and guidance relating to quality management are drawn together by QuILT in the Quality and Standards Handbook. This complements the University Regulations, which include the Qualifications and Credit Framework. The audit team found these to be comprehensive and clear. The Head of QuILT provides advice and support to the PVC T&L on all quality management and enhancement matters and acts as a cross-institutional liaison through membership or attendance of UTLC, FTLC and other strategic committees.

21 The audit team found that the University's committee structure and its framework for managing academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities were clearly specified and effective.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

Programme approval

22 The procedure for approving new programmes has three stages. The first, known as school and faculty endorsement, focuses on the appropriateness of a programme and its fit with school and University priorities. At this stage proposers must demonstrate that they have consulted with potential employers or external experts.

23 Following endorsement by the school and faculty, proposers develop a full programme proposal for consideration by the faculty and University. At this stage proposers are required to consult formally with external experts, to provide a business case, and to demonstrate how the programme addresses the University's graduate skills framework and the needs of students with disabilities.

24 On the basis of this documentation, and following discussion with the proposer at the faculty teaching and learning committee (FTLC), the FTLC may grant approval 'in principle' to the new programme. It then proceeds to the third stage which is consideration by the University's Teaching and Learning Committee's (UTLC's) Standing Committee for Programme Approval. This group comprises two members of UTLC from faculties other than the faculty hosting the programme and a member of staff from the Quality in Learning and Teaching Unit (QuILT).

Their role is to ensure that the process of development and approval has been carried out properly by the host school and faculty and that the programme aligns with the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy. If they are satisfied that this is the case, the programme is forwarded to the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Teaching and Learning (PVC T&L) to be approved on behalf of UTLC.

25 The audit team saw documentation relating to the approval of new undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The team was able to verify that the published procedures had been followed and that scrutiny of the proposals had been detailed and robust. There was appropriate use of the Academic Infrastructure and external expertise, and due consideration had been given to the assurance of academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities.

Programme changes or withdrawal

26 The procedures for approving changes to programmes or withdrawal of programmes are similar to those described above. Minor changes can be approved by boards of studies but major changes require approval by FTLC and ratification by UTLC. The closure or withdrawal of a programme has to be approved at academic unit, faculty and university level, and includes a requirement to continue appropriate provision for students currently registered.

Annual monitoring

27 The current procedure for annual monitoring requires each board of studies to complete a report, which: confirms that they have carried out quality management procedures as required by the University; comments on a wide range of matters relating to the operation of the programme; reflects on student survey data; and sets out an action plan for the coming year. Boards of studies are also required to include points raised by external examiners.

28 The reports produced by boards of studies are considered by faculties and feedback is given. The faculties then submit summary reports to the Quality and Standards Sub-Committee (QSSC), highlighting any trends or common issues and identifying matters for attention by the faculty or University.

29 The audit team saw examples of annual monitoring review (AMR) reports and their consideration by faculties and the University. Although these confirmed that the process is thorough in principle, they also revealed that the report forms are not always completed fully and that in some quarters AMR is felt to be a 'tick box' exercise that adds little value. At the time when this audit took place a new procedure was about to be introduced.

30 The new procedure will cover a similar range of issues and information but it will give greater emphasis to ongoing programme development and enhancement. The annual report will take the form of an evaluative commentary and will no longer require boards of studies to certify that they have complied with institutional policies and procedures. Besides monitoring the reports as at present, faculties will be encouraged to adopt a risk-based approach and to seek clarification and/or further documentation from boards of studies where they see fit.

Programme review

31 As with AMR, the University has reviewed its procedures for the periodic review of programmes and has agreed new arrangements that were, at the time of the audit, about to be introduced. The current procedure, called Internal Subject Review (ISR), requires provision to be reviewed in depth every six years. It requires a board of studies to submit a detailed commentary covering all aspects of the programme along with extensive supporting documentation. This information is scrutinised by a review team of four experienced academic staff, including one representative of UTLC, a further member of academic staff nominated by UTLC, one from another faculty and an external, independent expert.

32 In the course of the review the panel meets with staff and with students and evaluates the provision against 52 criteria. In their report the panel is required to comment on key aspects of the provision, to recommend improvements where necessary and to identify matters that deserve wider dissemination. The board of studies is invited to respond to the report, and the report and response are then considered by FTLC and QSSC. Although the process normally results in revalidation of the programme, it also generates an action plan, and this is followed up with a further review and report a year later.

33 The new ISR procedure will retain the present scope and much of the current method but aims to be more supportive and enhancement-led. It will involve more participants, who will receive training, and review panels will include student members. There will be better links with annual monitoring and professional body accreditation and the present list of 52 criteria will no longer be used.

34 The audit team saw documentation from recent programme reviews. It noted that the process had been carried out thoroughly and comprehensively, with involvement by external experts and students. There had been appropriate use of the Academic Infrastructure and consideration had been given both to academic standards and to the quality of students' learning opportunities.

External examiners

35 The University makes a strong and scrupulous use of independent external examiners to ensure that the standards of its awards are aligned with national expectations, to assure the fairness of its assessment procedures and to help identify good practice. External examiners are normally appointed for a period of three years, in accordance with criteria which ensure their academic standing and independence. On appointment all external examiners are provided with a standard pack of information and those new to the role are asked to visit the University in order to be briefed personally and to meet relevant staff.

36 External examiners are required to submit annual reports using a standard form. These are circulated to relevant staff in faculties and academic units, and to QULLT; any issues that might put the standard of awards at risk are immediately brought to the attention of the faculty dean and the PVC T&L if necessary.

37 The reports are considered by boards of studies with students present and written responses are sent to external examiners, addressing matters they have raised. Anonymised reports, together with the responses, may also be shared with students in staff-student committees and the University encourages external examiners to meet with student representatives.

38 Each year FTLCs review all external examiners' reports and the responses from boards of studies, and prepare a summary for QSSC. In turn, QSSC considers the reports from faculties and submits an overview report to UTLC. By this process matters of institutional relevance and concern are identified and information about good practice is shared between academic units.

39 The audit team saw a sample of external examiners' reports, responses from boards of studies and summaries to QSSC and ULTC. It was evident from these documents that the process of scrutiny was thorough and detailed and that issues identified by external examiners were being followed through. The summaries indicated that external examiners generally endorsed the standards of the University's provision but that some clarification about their role in moderation was needed: the Briefing Paper stated that a detailed handbook for external examiners was being prepared, which would include guidance on this matter.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

40 The University takes account of the Academic Infrastructure by a variety of means. QuILT keeps track of revisions to the *Code of practice* and the precepts of the *Code* are reflected in the policies and procedures in the University's Quality and Standards Handbook. The procedures for programme approval, programme review and external examining all include explicit references to the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements; there is a requirement in the procedure for annual monitoring to take account of developments in the benchmark statements and the audit team saw evidence of this requirement being met.

41 Programme specifications are prepared in the course of programme approval and are reviewed during periodic review; as noted above, there is a procedure for approving changes in the interim. The programme specification templates are comprehensive, and include a requirement to map the coverage and assessment of programme outcomes to individual modules. However, the University uses these documents primarily for quality assurance, and does not regard them as the primary point of reference for students.

42 In accordance with its mission, a significant number of the University's programmes have a professional emphasis and there is a requirement to consult with employers and/or professional bodies in the development of programmes. Schools are responsible for managing engagements with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, but these interactions are monitored and supported by QuILT and the outcomes are considered by faculties and the University. The audit team saw an example of this in the documentation supplied by the University.

43 As described earlier, the University consults external academic experts in the processes of programme approval and review, as well as external examining. Its framework for managing academic standards and quality accords with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, and the PVC T&L is involved in developments relating to the Bologna Process.

Assessment policies and regulations

44 The assessment of students and the award of qualifications is conducted within an institutional Qualifications and Credit Framework, which aligns the University's awards with the FHEQ and defines the outcome levels used in programme specifications. For each level of award, the University has agreed Common Scales that define mark ranges and classifications. There is also an institutional Assessment Tariff that promotes consistency in the volume of assessment across and between programmes and guards against excessive assessment loads.

45 The conduct of assessment is governed by a suite of policies that regulate the work of examiners and include detailed guidance on matters such as the use of electronic assessments and assessment of students with disabilities. Staff are made aware of these requirements by means of bulletins and mandatory training for key personnel.

46 From its meeting with students the audit team learned that some students were not fully aware of the criteria used in marking their work. The team also noted that the criteria were not included in several programme handbooks, despite the University's guidelines to the contrary. The students' written submission also commented that the language of the University's policies relating to assessment and appeals was not easy to understand. The University will no doubt wish to take account of these matters when considering how it communicates its assessment expectations to students.

Management information - statistics

47 The previous Institutional audit recommended the University to 'ensure central oversight of the consistency and use of management information, especially at the cohort level.' In response, the University has now enhanced its arrangements for the provision of statistical information at the programme level. Via the intranet, staff are able to access statistical reports on

admissions, student profile, student progression and completion of awards. The data can be interrogated in various ways, and cohort analysis is available.

48 At institutional level the data is considered along with National Student Satisfaction data at Senate. From September 2009 UTLC is taking a greater role in the strategic consideration of this data. At programme level the data is considered by boards of studies and is noted in AMR reports. The documentation seen by the audit team included several examples of this, and University staff who met the team confirmed that the data they need for quality management purposes is easily available.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

49 As described above, the University makes use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points in a variety of ways, and this contributes to its management of learning opportunities for students. The audit team formed the view that the University's policies, procedures and practices appropriately reflect the *Code of practice*, and noted effective use of subject benchmark statements and professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements to ensure the currency and relevance of the curriculum.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

50 As noted above, the University's procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of programmes are designed to contribute to the management of students' learning opportunities as well as the assurance of academic standards. They do this by, for example, including consideration of the adequacy of learning resources and of points raised by student representatives and external examiners.

51 Although the audit team saw evidence of this, it formed the view that other claims made in the Briefing Paper for these procedures were not fully substantiated. For example, the Briefing Paper asserted that Internal Subject Review (ISR) enables the University to check that teaching is informed by research and allows it to monitor the implementation of its policies on student representation, the operation of its assessment procedures, the use of its staff performance and development review (PDR) process and the accuracy and completeness of management information relating to collaborative provision. Although these matters all fall within the scope of ISR, the audit team noted that the reporting template does not require review teams to comment explicitly on any of them. The sample reports submitted as evidence for this audit all commented on the first, but coverage of the other topics was inconsistent. In view of these omissions, and mindful that the new annual monitoring review (AMR) and ISR procedures seek to move away from a 'checklist' approach, the team recommends it as advisable that the University reviews the effectiveness of ISR as a means of reporting on the consistency of local implementation of University policies.

Management information - feedback from students

52 The University considers that collecting, understanding and responding to student opinion is an essential component of its quality management and quality enhancement mechanisms. The University's Policy on Student Opinion was updated by the University's Teaching and Learning Committee (UTLC) in November 2006 and requires service heads, module leaders and degree programme directors to collect student opinion about the service or academic programme for which they are responsible. The Student Opinion Working Group (SOWG) maintains institutional oversight on behalf of UTLC of mechanisms for obtaining student feedback and the follow-up of outcomes. The audit team looked at the notes of SOWG meetings, and confirmed that these tasks are undertaken diligently.

53 Student feedback is routinely gathered for modules. A core set of module questions has been developed by SOWG and the Quality in Learning and Teaching unit (QuILT), from which faculties and module leaders can create a module questionnaire. However, the University does not require their use and the detailed decision as to which questions to use on module or programme questionnaires lies with the faculties and/or academic units. It is therefore not possible to make direct comparisons of feedback between academic units and faculties. In spite of a policy that module surveys should be conducted on alternate occasions that the module runs, most academic units survey modules every time they run. Some academic units use virtual learning environments to conduct the surveys online, but in some cases this has resulted in low response rates.

54 Module feedback is considered in staff-student committees (SSCs), reviewed by boards of studies (BoS) and fed into annual monitoring reports (AMR). Samples of BoS and SSC minutes and AMRs seen by the audit team confirmed that student survey data is carefully considered, and responded to as appropriate.

55 The University also undertakes internal student surveys at an institutional level, particularly for first-year students. To combat concerns about survey fatigue, the University has recently introduced a focus group approach. The first focus group work was undertaken during 2008-09. The work comprised a total of seven groups of stage 2 students across different faculties and subject areas, in which factors affecting student satisfaction were explored. A research report was commissioned on the outcomes of the focus group work. The outcomes were considered by SOWG and reported to UTLC, which gave clear responses to some of the suggestions from students to improve satisfaction.

56 The University takes the National Student Survey (NSS) data very seriously. The outcomes are presented in summary to Senate, and the data is closely scrutinised by SOWG on behalf of UTLC. Tailored summary reports are sent to faculties, and academic units are provided with detailed data from their students. BoS minutes seen by the audit team confirm the formulation of action plans in response to NSS results, and from 2009-10 the annual monitoring report action plan will include actions in response to student feedback from all sources.

57 The University has recently created a website to enhance its processes for informing students about its responses to the issues raised in student surveys. The website, called 'You said, we did', includes information on all the surveys that students will be asked to take part in and the dates that they will occur. It also includes an actions page, which identifies activity in a number of areas, for example assessment and student involvement, although the audit team found that the actions do not clearly link to specific feedback.

58 Following the success of the focus group method the University intends to adopt a more strategic approach to internal student opinion surveys, with both focus groups and internal surveys focusing on specific aspects of the student experience. For 2009-10 a shortened Internal Student Survey of stage 1 students will consider induction/transition, and focus groups of stage 2 students will look at student services, including the library.

Role of students in quality assurance

59 The University's student charter places an expectation on students that they will take advantage of the Union Society's provision for student representation on the University's formal decision-making bodies and the SSC of their academic unit. Every BoS has an SSC reporting to it, and there may be more than one SSC in an academic unit. These committees are regarded by the University as one of the most important mechanisms for establishing an ongoing dialogue between students and academic staff about all aspects of degree programmes. There are in addition student representatives at BoSs. Samples of SSC minutes seen by the audit team indicated that SSCs are effective, but attendance by student representatives is not very good in some cases. Adherence to University policy on student representation at SSC and BoS is monitored as part of ISR, although ISR reports seen by the team did not mention student representation (see paragraph 51).

60 In response to concerns that student representation was not operating well, in September 2008 UTLC formed the Student Representation Working Group, a partnership between the University and the Union Society. The Working Group developed a revised student representation policy and programme, taking account of best practice in student representation and engagement within the institution and from other UK higher education institutions. The new policy introduces faculty-level student forums for both taught and research students and a Student Education Committee, which reports to UTLC, chaired by the Union Society Education Officer. It also provides for SSCs to be chaired by a student with the support of a facilitator from the staff. A new course representative pack has been produced, which includes a course representative handbook. The new policy was planned to be fully implemented during 2010-11, however a new series of training sessions run by the Union Society have taken place in the early part of 2009-10.

61 The Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Teaching and Learning (PVC T&L) and Academic Registrar regularly meet with Union Society sabbatical officers and their input is sought on key institutional initiatives, such as the development of Vision 2021. There is also a University/Union Society Partnership Committee chaired by a member of Council, which meets termly in order to foster good relations between the University and the Union Society, to oversee the financial position of the Union, and to develop strategy for service and facilities provision.

62 Students are represented on institutional committees and on institutional-level project or working groups to ensure student input into the development of University policy and strategy for learning, teaching, quality assurance and enhancement. Examples include the Student Opinion Working Group and the E-learning Steering Group. From 2009-10 ISR panels will include student members.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

63 The overarching aim of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy 2007 to 2012 is to ensure that the student experience is maintained to the highest standard by delivering research-informed teaching and training. The University is research-intensive and it expects the teaching activities of each academic unit to be informed by its research activities. This message is reinforced in the University's Research and Innovation Strategic Vision, approved by Senate in July 2009, which states that the University believes in parity of esteem between teaching and research and expects all staff to respect this principle. It goes on to state that the University believes strongly that the best teaching is informed by research and expects all staff to maintain a sufficient level of scholarship to allow research-informed teaching to flourish.

64 The links between learning and teaching and research and scholarship are multifaceted, encompassing the research environment, learning and teaching informed by research interests, and opportunities for students to develop research skills and undertake research. The nature of these links was systematically explored in an institutional Learning and Teaching Conference in 2005. Since then, this theme has been further explored through QuILT/Staff Development Unit (SDU) learning and teaching seminars.

65 A requirement of the programme approval process is that the curriculum is informed by research and that the links with research or scholarly activity are made explicit. The criteria for ISR also include a requirement to check that teaching is informed by research, and in the sample of ISR reports seen by the audit team research-informed teaching had clearly been considered by the review panels. Students confirmed that research features in their taught sessions. The sample of ISR reports showed that students are taught by leading researchers, and have opportunities to engage with research subjects and methodologies and to develop research skills through project work, dissertations, and specialised modules. In one report it was noted that the curricula had been designed and delivered by leading-edge research staff, and in two of the reports practice in research-informed teaching was considered to be exemplary. The team concluded that the

University's systematic efforts to foster research-informed teaching contribute to the feature of good practice identified in paragraph 93.

Other modes of study

66 The University takes a pragmatic and inclusive approach to e-learning and maintains that its use should be driven by the needs of the University, its staff and students, not the imperatives of technology. The University is committed to embedding the development, usage and evaluation of quality-assured e-learning across the University's provision based on informed pedagogic choice.

67 Blackboard is the virtual learning environment (VLE) maintained by the University, to which all students have access. The extent of its employment as a tool for supporting teaching and learning is an academic decision supposedly taken at programme level, although evidence suggested that the decision was in many instances taken at the module level. The students' written submission (SWS) indicated that when Blackboard is used there is a high level of student satisfaction with it, but that usage is inconsistent. There are other VLEs used in academic units and faculties. One of these, developed in the School of Computer Science, has become more widely used, and UTLC has agreed that resource should be provided to make features of this VLE available across the institution.

68 An e-learning steering group has recently been formed, reporting to UTLC as part of that committee's intent to operate in a more strategic way. The steering group will oversee the activities of a range of groups relating to e-learning, including Online Assessment and Feedback (OLAF) group, ReCap steering group, Blackboard steering group and e-portfolios steering group.

69 Specific e-learning tools to which the University is committed include Turning Point, which allows multiple choice questions to be answered during a lecture, and ReCap, which is a process for electronic recording of teaching sessions. The OLAF project seeks to provide a framework to ensure that a consistent and robust approach is taken to the delivery of e-assessment. The audit team found evidence that some staff are resistant to these new technologies. The Recap system is welcomed by students, although it is limited by the number of lecture rooms which are equipped for recording. The team heard that some staff are concerned that the use of Recap might lead to poor attendance at lectures. The team recommends that it would be desirable for the University to extend, as widely as possible, opportunities for students to benefit from the University's investment in learning technology.

70 The audit team heard that the University has only one distance-learning programme, although there are some modules taken by students on study-abroad placements which are also designated as distance learning. The University has recently revised its policy on distance-learning to make support arrangements for students explicit, in the light of changes to the *Code of practice*. In documentation the team saw an example of detailed attention being given to the arrangements for supporting placement students.

71 The University has a policy for flexible and distributed learning (FDL), which gives a broad definition for FDL and acknowledges that many modules have mixed modes of delivery that include elements of FDL. The University policy on work-based and placement learning has recently been revised to include the creation of the role of placement learning organiser. The Careers Service has developed a Work Placement Toolbox to assist in the planning and management of work-based learning, which includes examples of good practice in placement handbooks.

72 The University has developed a method of credit accumulation in response to employer demand, which allows credit to be awarded for stand-alone modules. As a partner in the HEFCE-funded North East Higher Level Skills Pathfinder, the University is growing its provision in response to employers.

Resources for learning

73 The University is currently implementing a large programme of estates development, designed to address the challenges of legacy estate and changing teaching methods, overseen by the PVC T&L. The institution's approach recognises the need for estate which facilitates new teaching methods.

74 The University library operates through three sites. There is a joint Library and Information Systems and Services (ISS) strategy, which aligns with the Learning and Teaching Strategy. This alignment is secured through the membership on UTLC of the Librarian and the Director of ISS, and through attendance by liaison librarians at FTLCs and school committees. Detailed policy on library development is set by the Librarian and Library Advisory Group, which includes student representatives. The audit team heard that priorities for development are identified from student surveys, attendance by library representatives at BoS, and periodic Library surveys. The Library has achieved the Charter Mark for customer services on five occasions since 1996.

75 ISS provides the information technology (IT) infrastructure and furnishes the lecture theatres with a range of IT equipment. There are 40 clusters of PCs across the University, comprising 1,300 PCs in all. There is also a campus-wide wireless network.

76 Student feedback from the NSS indicates a high level of satisfaction with library and IT resources, and this was also confirmed in the SWS. ISR reports seen by the audit team made very positive comments about learning resources.

Admissions policy

77 Strategic responsibility for admissions rests with Senate, and oversight of policy lies with UTLC, while annual review and development of policy lies with the Fair Access Committee. There are separate institutional admissions policies for postgraduate and undergraduate programmes. Central management of recruitment and admissions is overseen by the Marketing and Communications Directorate and the Student Progress Service. Responsibility for undergraduate admissions activity lies with academic units, and the graduate schools in each faculty are responsible for postgraduate admissions. Documentation showed that extensive efforts are made to recruit students through visit and open days, and to keep in touch with applicants through email. Admissions statistics are noted by FTLCs, including the numbers admitted through the Partners route, and from INTO (see paragraph 112).

78 Widening participation (WP) is enshrined at the highest level in the University's values and strategic objectives. The University has a systematic approach to WP and has an institutional vision, strategic five-point plan and key performance indicators. The Partners programme is a key component of WP strategy. The programme explicitly identifies able, talented young people with the potential for success at University who live in low participation neighbourhoods in the North East and Cumbria. It offers them a range of activities and opportunities, including a supported entry route through UCAS. Graduate ambassadors visit target schools to promote the University and encourage and guide school students through the higher education application process.

79 Newcastle is the lead higher education institution on the Aimhigher Tyne, Wear and Northumberland programme. The University's Aimhigher Associates scheme aims to promote the progression of learners from state schools to the full range of higher education provision on offer. The Aimhigher Associates support individuals and groups of learners in local schools by providing a range of activities and events that support progression to higher education.

Student support

80 The University allocates a personal tutor to all students. Personal tutoring arrangements are determined at academic unit level and schools are required to report annually on their arrangements to FTLC. However, the audit team's scrutiny of the FTLC minutes from one faculty for 2008-09 revealed no evidence of this reporting.

81 A sample of programme handbooks seen by the audit team indicated that the personal tutor role can be wide-ranging, including pastoral and academic guidance and advice, acting as the administrative link between the student and the University, help in all dealings with the school and University, advice on module choice, acting as a referee, representing students in disciplinary matters, applying for concessions and acting as an advocate for a student.

82 In 2006-07 the Academic Audit Committee undertook an audit of personal tutoring, and its report was considered by UTLC in May 2007. The report noted that while the University does have a formal requirement for each student to have a tutor and provision for a minimum of contact, the University does not otherwise have a formally agreed policy and procedure on personal tutoring. The report identified a range of concerns. UTLC resolved that it should report to Senate that it had serious concerns about the outcomes of the audit and would be working towards the development of a clear formal policy and code of practice on personal tutoring. However, it was not until July 2009 that UTLC took a decision to undertake an institution-wide review of personal tutoring during 2009-10. The SWS indicated that there are some excellent personal tutors, but that some students have a very poor experience of personal tutoring. The audit team heard that some academic units had responded to adverse student feedback on personal tutoring by improving their local arrangements. Nevertheless, the team recommends that it is advisable for the University to give high priority to the development and implementation of a revised system for personal tutoring.

83 There is a range of student support services, including the student progress service, the student wellbeing service and the careers service. The service units are co-located in the new King's Gate development close to the Union Society. All have been assessed against a relevant national quality standard and most are Matrix accredited.

84 The Careers Service has a strong emphasis on employability. It runs two 20-credit modules, Career Development and Business Enterprise, in partnership with the Business School, which can be built into a student's programme. The Career Development module is aimed at supporting placements, and there are strands for tutoring learners in schools and colleges, working with learners in a community-based organisation, scheme or professional sports club, student volunteering and learning from work linked to part-time work. There are Business Enterprise modules for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. They provide students with an opportunity to work in a team and run their own business, and the modules are ultimately designed to improve student employability. Emphasis is placed upon the development of business skills, occupational awareness of new venture start-up, self-employment and the small business sector.

85 The Careers Service was instrumental in developing the Graduate Skills Framework. The framework, approved by UTLC in July 2007, aims to develop graduates who can independently self-manage, proactively interact and ethically apply their knowledge and skills in a global context. All degree programmes are required to map to the framework by 2011-12, and QuILT and the Careers Service are working together to support academic units in this work. For new programme approval a mapping template is used, and the audit team was shown an example of how this works.

86 The Careers Service is also one of the partners in the ncl+ scheme. The scheme, which is fully integrated with the Graduate Skills Framework, enables students to develop specific skills through working with one of the University's groups or services.

87 The Careers Service undertakes an annual analysis of first destination data, which is reported to UTLC and made available for AMRs. The audit team concluded that the contribution made by the careers service to the development of employability skills is a part of the feature of good practice identified in paragraph 104 below.

88 A core principle of the University is to value diversity. Institutional oversight of compliance with equal opportunities legislation is the responsibility of the Diversity Committee, which is a subcommittee of the Executive Board. It produces an annual equal opportunities monitoring report for Council, which includes the monitoring of progress on equality action plans for disability, race and gender. An equality impact assessment tool is incorporated into the programme approval process. The audit team saw evidence of equality monitoring in academic unit reports and AMRs.

89 The Briefing Paper noted that feedback from students has suggested that the integration of international students into University and campus life could be improved. The International Office acts as a key link for international students, especially as they transit into life and studies on campus, but also provides ongoing advice and support. An International Student Handbook is issued some three months before arrival, and is currently being reviewed. The Welcome Programme is an extensive induction programme designed for international students. A visa service has recently been improved through drop-in sessions, special workshops for INTO students, and a workshop on finding employment run jointly with the Careers service. There has been a recent programme of staff training initiatives to improve communications and services for international students, and the library has produced podcasts to support library induction in a range of languages.

90 The University has a variety of mechanisms for supporting students' acquisition of academic skills. Following recommendations in a report by the Academic Audit Committee into Assessment Irregularities in 2007, a new online resource, Right-Cite, was developed to help students understand the concept of good academic conduct, particularly with regard to plagiarism and collusion. As well as guidance, the website includes an online tutorial and actual case studies of what can happen in this area. The Writing Development Centre was created in 2007 to promote good writing practice across the disciplines and enable undergraduate and postgraduate students to develop their academic writing skills in a supportive environment. Key priorities are to support students in the transition from secondary to higher education and from undergraduate to postgraduate study. The Centre offers tuition, guidance and advice on all aspects of academic writing, both online and through one-to-one or group sessions. The Maths-Aid facility is a drop-in centre providing a free and confidential advice service to students on all aspect of mathematics and statistics. The SWS indicated that students have a high regard for these facilities. In particular the Right-Cite web pages are considered to be 'excellent', but students seen by the audit team felt that the awareness among students of the availability of this support could be increased.

91 The University launched its web-based personal development planning (PDP) tool in September 2005 and a workshop on integrating PDP into the curriculum is available for staff. Although student handbooks seen by the audit team all included a reference to PDP, usually pointing to the online tool which is accessible through the VLE, it was apparent from the meetings with students and with staff that the use of PDP is patchy. The University has recognised the need for change and intends to extend the e-portfolio system, currently used for postgraduate students, to undergraduates. The consequent culture change needed among the academic staff has also been noted. The recently formed e-portfolio Working Group will take this project forward.

92 Both the NSS and internal student opinion surveys indicate that feedback to students on their work could be improved, both in terms of timeliness and quality. However, the audit team noted that in one of the audit trails an approach to giving student feedback was considered to be exemplary by the internal subject review panel. The University might wish to promote this practice more widely.

Staff support (including staff development)

93 A major development since the last audit has been the increasing importance of teaching and learning in the University's human resources procedures in order to achieve parity of esteem between teaching and research. This has included an academic job summary outlining the key areas of activity of an academic member of staff and emphasising the parity of esteem between the three core functions, a formal job description of a head of school, the introduction of a teaching code of practice, the strengthening of workload modelling arrangements, and the adoption of equal weighting for teaching and research in the promotions process. The strengthening of workload modelling arrangements is seen as critical to the institutional promotion of parity of esteem for teaching and research. The audit team saw examples of workload allocation models. The team heard that there have been several promotions to reader or professor status where excellent teaching practice has been a key component of the candidate's case. The steps the University has taken, as a research-intensive institution, to recognise the value of teaching through its rewards and incentives for staff, and to enhance the quality of teaching by encouraging the inclusion of research in the curriculum, is identified as a feature of good practice.

94 An induction programme for new staff includes a welcome event hosted by the Vice-Chancellor, although the greater part of the induction process is handled by the relevant academic unit. Guidance for managers on induction is available on the Staff Development Unit (SDU) website. Recently appointed staff seen by the audit team found the induction programme very helpful. They also confirmed that they were assigned mentors. All newly-appointed and inexperienced staff are required to complete a 30-credit programme (the Newcastle Teaching Award) as a condition of probation and they can progress to take the Certificate of Advanced Studies in Academic Practice (CASAP), both of which are accredited by the Higher Education Academy. There was evidence in the sampling trails of staff attending the CASAP programme, and academic staff seen by the audit team expressed their satisfaction with the course.

95 The SDU coordinates, advises on and delivers training and development activities for all categories of University staff. The range of development opportunities includes leadership and management development programmes, academic staff development, short workshops reflecting University priorities and demands, individual coaching and tailored development events. The audit team heard that the SDU determines staff development need from a range of sources, including NSS outcomes, feedback from deans and heads of school, and QuILT.

96 The University has a well-established performance and development review (PDR) process for all staff, which was commended in the 2005 audit, and whose purpose is to help improve individual performance, to realise potential and to increase the effectiveness of the academic unit/service unit and University. Staff seen by the audit team confirmed that PDR takes place in their experience, but it was evident from one of the audit trails that PDR had not been taking place, though the team was assured that the University had taken steps to address this. The Briefing Paper stated that the use of PDR is monitored through ISR. However, in two of the three ISR reports sampled PDR was not mentioned. Heads of school are asked to confirm to deans that PDR has taken place. For administrative and professional staff the PDR pro forma also includes the University's Success Factors, which provide a benchmark for a consistent approach to standards of performance, expectations and descriptions of effective and less effective behaviour across all administrative and support services jobs and areas. For academic staff, staff development is monitored by UTLC through an annual report from SDU.

97 A new institutional policy on peer observation of teaching has recently been approved to take effect from 2009-10, which requires all academic staff to be observed at least once every two years. At the time of the audit the preparations for the new process were under way, and staff seen by the audit team spoke of the professional nature of the peer observation training.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

98 The Briefing Paper stated that the University relies on a culture of quality enhancement being embedded through academic activities across the institution and also through its organisational structures and quality management processes.

99 The refreshed Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Strategy commits the institution to embedding innovation and best practice in its learning and teaching. Progress against the strategy will be monitored through key performance indicators.

100 The emphasis on parity of esteem between teaching and learning and research and the steps the University has taken, as a research-intensive institution, to recognise the value of teaching through its rewards for staff (see also paragraph 93) provide incentives for staff to access opportunities for development of their practice in learning and teaching. The Staff Development Unit plays a key role in providing training, and staff who met the audit team valued the support that it offered. Heads of school review staff's performance and development review returns and from these identify themes for staff development that might be of value to the school as a whole.

101 The Academic Audit Committee supports enhancement through its rolling programme of audits. Except in the case of its review of personal tutoring, the University appears to consider and act upon its recommendations with reasonable speed.

102 Since the last audit the University has realigned its support for quality assurance and the enhancement of teaching and learning through the formation, in 2006, of the Quality in Teaching and Learning Unit (QULT), which brought together the former Academic Quality and Standards Service and the Centre for Academic Development. Certain members of staff within QULT have specific remits for developing and disseminating good practice. QULT has a remit for the dissemination of good practice at institutional level and collaborates with the Staff Development Unit on a wide-ranging programme of events. The audit team noted that the emphasis was on informal and voluntary opportunities for dissemination of good practice (lunchtime seminars, Learning and Teaching Conferences, Melting Pots).

103 The University involves students in quality enhancement, for example by including students on the panel for the Vice-Chancellor's Teaching Awards, involvement in the Vice-Chancellor's Think Tanks and representation on boards of studies. The students' written submission (SWS) noted, however, some issues with students being able to attend or being given notice of boards of studies.

104 Professional staff also play a critical role in quality enhancement, with several professional staff having successfully bid for Innovation Funding and the University's first National Teaching Fellow, since the previous audit, being a member of staff in the Library. The Careers Centre contributes effectively to the employability of the University's students. For example, the Head of the Careers Service led the initial drafting of the Graduate Skills Framework. The Careers Service was highly praised by students who had accessed it and in the surveys reported on in, SWS, although the SWS did note the need to increase access to its provision, including the Career Development Module. The range of ways in which the University is developing the employability of all its students is identified as a feature of good practice in this audit.

Good practice

105 The University provides funding for development projects through the Vice-Chancellor's Awards for Excellence in Teaching and the University's Teaching and Learning Committee (UTLC) Innovation Fund. In addition, in 2008-09 two teaching-related projects were successful in the newly established University Strategic Fund: one to roll out ePortfolios and the second being the Equal Acclaim for Teaching Excellence project. Findings are disseminated via Learning and Teaching Seminars and the annual Learning and Teaching Conference. There were some examples included in the audit evidence of how work from these projects has led to

developments in the University. Applicants are required to state in their bid how the project will impact upon their own learning and teaching and students as well as on that of others, how they will disseminate outcomes both within the University and outside and how they will evaluate the project. All successful applicants must provide a short written report to UTLC within a year.

106 The University leads two Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and is a partner in one other. The University hosts the subject centre for Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine and the University participated in the 2008 Higher Education Academy Change Academy Programme. Four members of staff have been awarded national teaching fellowships since 2005.

107 External examiners are asked in their reports to comment upon exemplary practice, commendations and recommendations. Each year faculty teaching and learning committees review all external examiners' reports and the responses from boards of studies, and prepare a summary for the Quality and Standards Sub-Committee (QSSC); in turn, QSSC considers the reports from faculties and reports to UTLC. By this process matters of institutional relevance and concern should be identified and information about good practice should be shared. A review of the external examiners' reports included in the audit trails indicated that external examiners often understood the boxes asking for exemplary practice and commendations to be invitations to comment upon the efficacy of the examination board processes and as such they were limited in their usefulness in disseminating good practice across the institution.

108 The emphasis for dissemination appears to be primarily delivered by face-to-face talking about learning and teaching developments, particularly through QuILT seminars. Other than this the audit team found limited evidence of dissemination across faculties. As such, the team welcomed the planned changes to both the Internal Subject Review and Annual Monitoring Review processes to shift the balance from assurance to enhancement. The team recommends that it would be desirable for the University to strengthen its arrangements for sharing and embedding practice that it has identified as exemplary.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

The institution's approach to managing collaborative arrangements

109 There has been growth in collaborative provision arrangements since the last audit. The University's Register of Collaborative Provision reported around 600 students across 11 partnerships, of which five are overseas. A further six new partnerships, including two overseas, had yet to recruit students at the time of the audit.

110 The fit between the University's overall strategy and vision and its set of partnerships was not apparent to the audit team, and the range of types of arrangement (according to the institution's own typology) suggested a reactive rather than strategic approach. The team noted that the University has made adjustments in the oversight of this area, but suggests that the institution may wish to consider further strengthening these arrangements, particularly given the plans to expand its collaborative partnerships.

111 The University has regularly updated its Policy and Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Collaborative Provision, most recently in December 2008. These are clear and appropriately reflect the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. They include a definition of collaborative provision and a classification of different categories of collaborative provision arrangement. However, from discussions with University staff, the audit team heard some confusion regarding which types of arrangement fell within the definition of collaborative provision and hence warranted the oversight arrangements encompassed in the policy and procedures. The University will wish to, as part of addressing the recommendation in paragraph 120, review this area to ensure consistent treatment of its collaborative arrangements.

112 In addition to the collaborative provision arrangements noted in the institution's collaborative provision register is a joint venture with INTO University Partnerships Limited, known as INTO Newcastle. This arrangement involves INTO agents recruiting international students, who are offered English, pre-entry Foundation and Postgraduate Diploma courses, taught by INTO Newcastle staff. The successful completion of these courses guarantees admission to the relevant undergraduate or postgraduate course. Further, undergraduate credit-bearing Diploma courses are offered in business and computing, the completion of which guarantees direct second year entry to the relevant University honours degrees. In the Briefing Paper the University stated that the INTO joint venture programmes are 'fully integrated into the academic and quality management structure of the University', and indeed the audit team found evidence of this within the University's structures. However, provision under the joint venture clearly includes programmes that fall within the University's own definition of collaborative provision, this being 'all arrangements in which the University makes an award (solely or jointly) or gives credit towards an award on the basis of education provided by another institution or organisation in the UK or overseas.' As part of addressing the recommendation in paragraph 120, the University will wish to assure itself that the position of this provision in the University's categorisation of collaborative provision is correctly indicated.

Approval of partnerships

113 The approval of collaborative partners follows arrangements described in the University's Policy and Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Collaborative Provision, and involves the prospective partner information, including, in more recent arrangements, a risk analysis, being scrutinised by the Standing Committee for Collaborative Provision, which then recommends to the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Teaching and Learning, whether to proceed with the partnership. In general the evidence seen by the audit team indicated this process was appropriately managed.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

114 The programme approval process for collaborative provision is initiated by the relevant faculty learning and teaching committee considering an initial outline proposal approval, and thereafter follows that for other University programmes. Collaborative provision programmes are monitored by the standard University external examining, annual monitoring and periodic review arrangements as described above (see paragraphs 22 to 39). In the case of INTO Newcastle programmes, these processes feed through the Non-Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee, which reports to the University's Teaching and Learning Committee. The audit team surveyed a selection of annual monitoring reports and found a generally robust approach, though there was evidence of variability in process and report structure. In particular, in some cases necessary actions were tracked and monitored through an action plan, while in other cases evidence of action tracking was less apparent from the documentation. In one instance there was evidence that a resource shortfall problem was occurring and had been reported repeatedly but had not been resolved. However, in general the team concluded that programme monitoring and review were occurring in an appropriate manner.

Role of students in quality assurance

115 The University stated in the Briefing Paper that collaborative provision student representation occurs through the standard processes of staff-student committee and boards of studies mechanisms. However, while evidence was seen that this is in place at the University, students based at collaborative partners, either in the UK or abroad, are not members of these committees. The audit team found no explicit mechanism for ensuring student representation at partner institutions, nor did the University's Policies and Procedures for the Quality Assurance of Collaborative Provision indicate that this was a requirement. In addressing the recommendation

in paragraph 120 the University will wish to review the way in which it assures itself of the appropriate engagement of collaborative provision students in quality assurance processes.

Published information

116 Within the collaborative agreements seen by the audit team responsibility regarding oversight of published information was not uniformly documented clearly and unambiguously to ensure that the University has complete oversight. The team also found evidence that in some cases information provided to students by partner institutions is at variance with that published by the University.

117 For example, the fees information for 2009-10 published by an overseas partner regarding a postgraduate programme was significantly different from that published by the University. It was further noted that, at another partner, the opportunities for Foundation Degree students to progress onto honours degrees at the University, though referred to in the collaborative agreement, were not clearly communicated to prospective students on the partner's website. The audit team also noted instances of partner websites containing inaccurate or out of date information.

118 The audit team also noted that the INTO Newcastle prospectus made claims regarding access to a well-supported virtual learning environment that could reasonably be read by potential applicants as having applicability to all University provision. From the evidence the team saw and heard, it was clear that the statement provided did not reflect the general University offer (although it may hold true for INTO Newcastle provision) and therefore could mislead potential students regarding the resources available to them after they had completed the introductory period with INTO Newcastle.

119 The audit team considers that, in addressing the recommendation in paragraph 120, the University will wish to review the processes by which it exercises oversight of published information in collaborative provision.

Future plans

120 The University's stated intention is to develop the number and types of collaborative provision to 'diversify and strengthen pipelines into its programmes.' The audit team recommends that it is advisable that the University strengthens its oversight of collaborative provision.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

121 The management procedures to ensure the maintenance of quality and standards for research degree students are set out in the University's Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes, supplemented by the University Regulations. Institutional oversight of research degree programmes occurs through the University's Teaching and Learning Committee (UTLC). In September 2009, UTLC delegated detailed consideration of these matters to a newly created Postgraduate Research Student subcommittee, though it was too early for the audit team to form a view of the effectiveness of this new arrangement. Quality assurance and enhancement of postgraduate research (PGR) programmes is managed within a robust framework, which includes an annual review of research degree programmes and sampled audit visits to two academic units per year in each faculty.

The research environment

122 The overall strategic direction of research is coordinated by the University Research Committee, which is a committee of Senate but also reports directly to the Executive Board. The University offers a strong research environment across its three faculties, as reflected in the institutional Research Assessment Exercise performance and the high levels of satisfaction recorded by postgraduate students in both the Higher Education Academy (HEA) Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and the International Student Barometer.

Selection, admission and induction of students

123 Admissions are governed by the Postgraduate Admissions Policy and training for supervisors on admissions processes is embedded into the research supervision training, and guidance is also provided in the Handbook for Research Students and Research Supervisors. The audit team heard evidence from postgraduate students that these procedures were operating effectively.

Supervision

124 Supervisory arrangements are clearly described in the comprehensive Handbook for Research Students and Research Supervisors, and include provisions to assure appropriate resourcing is in place and a supervisory team, rather than a single supervisor, is available to all students. Following a recommendation from the Review of research degree programmes in 2006 on supervisor workload management, The Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes now includes a stipulation that supervisors have a 'normal maximum of six full-time equivalent students' and that heads of school are responsible for ensuring that the overall workload of supervisory staff is at a level that will allow supervisors to satisfactorily discharge their responsibilities. The audit team saw and heard evidence that this regulation was being followed.

125 Supervisors are offered training in various aspects of supervision, initial training being obligatory for inexperienced staff. For established supervisors, there is no obligation to attend or engage with updating training, although the institution makes some effort to facilitate this.

126 The audit team heard from PGR students that they were aware of how to make an appeal to the University if they are dissatisfied with their supervisory arrangements.

Progress and review arrangements

127 The University's regulations stipulate that regular, structured interaction should take place between students and supervisory teams and the evidence the audit team saw indicated that this was in place, with the expected subject-based variations in frequency of interaction. These meetings are recorded in the student's Research Training Portfolio, which exists in both paper-based and electronic (ePortfolio) formats, and also serves to record skills development. The use of the electronic version, ePortfolio, which was noted as a feature of good practice in the 2006 Review of research degree programmes, is expected but not mandatory.

128 Annual progress reports are compiled for each student, and satisfactory completion of these is monitored at the institutional level. Up until 2009-10 this was undertaken by UTLC, which gave limited opportunity for detailed consideration of issues arising, but this was passed to the Postgraduate Research Student Sub-Committee in autumn 2009. The audit team noted that completion rates generally compare favourably to the sector average, though the University considered there was room for improvement and has revised its fees for the writing-up stage as part of an effort to improve submission and completion rates.

Development of research and other skills

129 Training in transferable and specific skills for postgraduate research students is centrally overseen by the Researcher Development Steering Group, which reports to the Executive Board, and is operationally coordinated by the Researcher Development Co-ordination Group, with a view to ensuring consistency in the implementation of the Roberts Review outcomes and enhancing the skills training provided.

130 Training opportunities are delivered at academic unit, faculty and pan-university level. The University Research Training Portfolio (see paragraph 127) supports this process in providing a repository for each student to record their academic and skills development. Training for students who teach is obligatory, and students may take an HEA-accredited certificate in teacher training. The audit team heard evidence of this operating effectively. The team also found evidence that high-quality, well-directed careers support for postgraduate research students was available. Overall, the team found the delivery of skills to PGR students to be appropriate.

Feedback mechanisms

131 The University participates in the HEA PRES and the International Student Barometer, and results seen by the audit team indicate a generally high level of satisfaction among postgraduate research students. PRES results are analysed and considered in some detail by faculty graduate school committees and the Postgraduate Research Student Sub-Committee, and actions were seen to be followed on the basis of this analysis.

132 Student representation occurs through faculty graduate school committees and staff-student committees. The audit team heard of some lack of awareness from postgraduate research students as to the identity of their faculty-level representative, reflecting some similar issues amongst students on taught programmes. The 2006 Review of research degree programmes noted that there was 'considerable variation' in postgraduate research student representation practices across schools and faculties and suggested that the institution might 'look at ways of increasing equity and consistency of research student representation.' The audit team noted that, at the time of the audit, this recommendation was planned to be tackled as part of the overall revisions to student representation mechanisms for implementation in 2010-11 (see paragraph 60).

Assessment

133 Assessment arrangements for postgraduate research students are described in the University Handbook for Examiners of Research Degrees by Theses. The arrangements for the handling of external examiners' reports on research degrees were strengthened following a report of the Academic Audit Committee in June 2005. The evidence seen by the audit team indicated that these arrangements were being followed and were making an effective contribution to the management of standards.

Representations, complaints and appeals arrangements

134 Complaints and appeals are clearly described in the Handbook for Research Students and Research Supervisors. The audit team saw evidence of appropriate reporting and management of complaints in faculty reports.

135 Overall, the audit team found that the University has a sound infrastructure in place to ensure satisfactory arrangements for postgraduate research students. Action has been taken or is in hand following the report of the Review of research degree programmes in 2006, through the revisions to the management of supervisors' workloads and the ongoing improvements to student representation. The University's arrangements meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Section 7: Published information

136 The University has an Information Strategy, in which it sets out its commitment to ensuring the accuracy and completeness of published information. Information available to the public is clearly set out on the Publication Scheme website, including the Student Charter. The University makes available the information detailed in Annex F of *HEFCE 06/45, Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes*.

137 The Web Strategy Group has primary responsibility for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of all externally published information. Prospectuses and other publicity material for degree programmes are the responsibility of the Marketing and Communications Directorate.

138 The Student Charter is provided to undergraduate students at registration within the Student Survival Guide. The Student Charter directs undergraduate and taught postgraduate students to their degree programme handbook and research students to the Handbook for Research Students. The audit team found degree programme handbooks to be clear and comprehensive. Programme handbooks are the responsibility of the academic unit, as is the provision of detailed recruitment information for prospective students. The Student Services Portal launched in 2008 brings together web-based information, such as links to timetables and examination schedules. Programme specifications are published by faculty on the University's website and clearly describe the programme structure. Thus information about programme structures, University regulations and registration and assessment procedures that is made available to students is comprehensive and accessible.

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

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