

# University of Nottingham

**November 2009**

## **Annex to the report**

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## Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) carried out an Institutional audit of the University of Nottingham (the University) from 23 to 27 November 2009. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards the University offers.

### Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

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

### Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University's commitment to enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities is manifest in several important initiatives outlined in Section 4 of this annex. The current revision of the Learning and Teaching Strategy offers the University an opportunity to articulate a clearer strategy for these initiatives and introduce more effective mechanisms for their evaluation.

### Postgraduate research students

The University's arrangements for securing the quality and standards of its research degree programmes are sound and 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 by QAA.

### Published information

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

### Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following features of good practice:

- the University's systems for listening and responding to the student voice (paragraph 75)
- the integrative activities across separate campuses that help to secure equivalence of the student experience (paragraphs 71, 99, 127)
- the contribution of the graduate and student service centres for supporting and enhancing the student experience (paragraphs 98, 150).

### Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- to strengthen institutional oversight of the outcomes of annual monitoring conducted by schools (paragraph 34).

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- in its review of the new School Review process, to consider strengthening the evidence base used, in order that the process may contribute more fully to the assurance of quality and standards (paragraph 40)
- extend the academic scrutiny of external examiner reports at institutional level (paragraph 45)
- expedite the planned harmonisation of its assessment practices (paragraph 58)
- reflect on how it may satisfy itself that its policy on sharing external examiner reports with students is implemented consistently (paragraph 162).

## Section 1: Introduction and background

### The institution and its mission

1 The University began as an adult school in 1798, becoming University College, Nottingham in 1881. A School of Agriculture was established when in 1947 the Midland College of Agriculture at Sutton Bonington merged with the University College. In 1948, the University College was awarded a Royal Charter and became the University of Nottingham.

2 Most of the University's provision is located on University Park, a 330-acre site three miles west of Nottingham city centre. The University has two other campuses in Nottingham (Jubilee and King's Meadow), a Medical School based at campuses in Nottingham and Derby, and the Sutton Bonington Campus, which is 10 miles south of University Park and hosts the Schools of Biosciences, and Veterinary Science and Medicine. The University also has two international campuses, at Semenyih, close to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and Ningbo, Zhejiang Province, China.

3 Teaching takes place across a broad range of disciplines which are organised into five faculties: Arts; Social Sciences, Law and Education; Science; Engineering; and Medicine and Health Sciences. With the exception of Engineering, the faculties comprise several academic schools (some of which are subdivided into departments) and a number of institutes and centres focusing on research. The Faculty of Engineering comprises four teaching and learning departments and five research divisions. For clarity and brevity, all academic schools and the four teaching and learning departments in the Faculty of Engineering are hereafter referred to as 'schools'.

4 In 2008-09 the University had a total of 36,932 students, shown by programme level, mode of study and country of study below.

### Students based in the UK

Level	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Undergraduate	21,487	1,417	22,904
Taught postgraduate	2,432	1,200	3,632
Research postgraduate	2,182	492	2,674
No award	564	683	1,247
<b>Total</b>	<b>26,665</b>	<b>3,792</b>	<b>30,457</b>

**Students based in Malaysia**

Level	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Undergraduate	2,491	0	2,491
Taught postgraduate	133	205	338
Research postgraduate	79	34	113
No award	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,703</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>2,942</b>

**Students based in China**

Level	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Undergraduate	3,252	0	3,252
Taught postgraduate	259	22	281
Research postgraduate	0	0	0
No award	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,511</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>3,533</b>

5 According to the University Plan 2007 to 2010, the University aspires to be among the world's greatest universities and distinguished for its international reach, commitment to learning and world-class research.

**The information base for the audit**

6 The audit team had access to the reports of the following QAA reviews: the Institutional audit of the University, March 2005; the Major review of healthcare programmes report of the University, Allied Health Professions, June 2006; the Major review of healthcare programmes report of the University, Nursing and Midwifery, June 2006; and the Review of postgraduate research degree programmes for the University, July 2006.

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

8 The University's Students' Union produced a student written submission covering the accuracy of the information provided for students, the experience of students as learners, and students' involvement in quality assurance processes.

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

**Developments since the last audit**

10 QAA's last audit of the University in 2005 resulted in a judgement of broad confidence in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The report noted three features of good practice and made three recommendations where action was considered advisable, and one where action was considered desirable. The advisable recommendations related to the monitoring of assessment schemes for joint honours programmes, with particular reference to consistency in the regulations for borderline classifications and the coordination of the scheduling

of examination boards where the results of joint honours students are considered; the development of the University's policies and procedures for periodic review and audit, to ensure the consistent application and implementation of systematic and uniform requirements for the inclusion of independent advisers external to the University in the membership of all panels; formal agreements for the operation of collaborative arrangements to preclude serial arrangements for provision leading to awards of the University, and also to include a means for the University to approve all information produced by collaborative partners for publicity purposes. The desirable recommendation related to reviewing the continuing appropriateness of its policies and procedures for the management of the quality and standards of its awards offered at the international campuses.

11 An annex to the Briefing Paper described the University's response to each of these recommendations, including the revision of the University Quality Manual to ensure consistency of assessment processes for joint honours programmes; that external members continue to be appointed to all review panels; the modification of the Quality Manual in respect of collaborative courses to reflect the auditors' recommendations; and the creation of a Transnational Education Committee with the responsibility of making recommendations to the Learning and Teaching Committee on any changes to policy necessary to assure quality and standards on the international campuses. The audit team regarded these responses as comprehensive, appropriate and satisfactory; any particular comments on the areas touched on by the recommendations of the last audit appear in the relevant sections below.

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

12 The University's chief academic and administrative officer is the Vice-Chancellor. The Vice-Chancellor is supported by six pro-vice-chancellors who each take responsibility for a group of schools and a specific area of University policy such as teaching and learning or international matters. The Vice-Chancellor and the pro-vice-chancellors, along with the Registrar and the Chief Financial Officer, normally meet together once a week, in Management Board, which is a joint committee of Council and Senate.

13 Leadership and management at the two international campuses are the responsibility of a Provost in China and a Vice-President in Malaysia who share a reporting line to Management Board through the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Internationalisation. The Provost and the Vice-President perform very similar roles; the different titles merely reflect local higher education nomenclatures.

14 The academic authority of the University is the Senate which meets three times a year and is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. Membership of Senate includes the pro-vice-chancellors, the faculty deans, the Provost and Vice-President from the international campuses, heads of schools and students. Senate has responsibility for regulating and directing the academic work of the University in teaching, examining, research, awarding degrees, as well as the regulation and superintendence of the education and discipline of students.

15 Many of the day-to-day academic decisions and issues and the functions of Senate are delegated to its committees. The Learning and Teaching Committee, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning, has overall responsibility for the University's academic quality and standards, under delegated powers from Senate. A key part of its work is to develop and review the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy in accordance with the University Plan. It has a Transnational Education Committee, which provides advice on matters of policy and strategy concerning transnational education, in particular with regard to the management of quality and standards at the international campuses.

16 Other Senate committees with important roles in the management of standards and quality include the Postgraduate Strategy Committee, which leads the development, and

oversees the implementation of, postgraduate policy; and the Student Affairs Committee which is responsible for formulating and overseeing the implementation of strategy and policy in the areas of student support, accommodation, recruitment, admissions and widening participation.

17 Operationally, the primary responsibility for the maintenance of standards and quality rests with the heads of schools who report directly to the pro-vice-chancellor overseeing their faculty. It is up to heads of schools to determine precisely how they discharge this responsibility, within the parameters of the University Quality Manual. This limited discretion is to allow for disciplinary differences and the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. Most schools have their own teaching and learning committees and many of the larger ones have separate committees for undergraduate and postgraduate business.

18 For the purposes of quality assurance, the five faculties are grouped into three academic boards: Humanities; Science and Engineering; and Medicine and Health Sciences. Academic boards' remit is to assure the quality and standards of academic provision in the schools allocated to them. In practice, this involves considering both internal and external reviews of schools and subject areas, and making recommendations as appropriate. Membership of academic boards includes students.

19 The vice-deans play a particularly important role in the management of quality and standards. There is a minimum of one undergraduate vice-dean and one postgraduate vice-dean per faculty. The vice-dean is a member of the relevant academic board and is responsible to that board for ensuring that the schools in their faculty adhere to the University's quality assurance processes. A vice-dean chairs each academic board, and these three individuals are also members of the University Learning and Teaching Committee.

20 The Quality Manual is the University's central source of information about the policies and procedures underpinning the management of quality and standards. It is available to staff and students on the University's website. Allied to the Quality Manual is the Good Practice Guide that aims to disseminate good practice in the management of quality and standards which the University has identified in periodic review and annual monitoring. Adherence to the Quality Manual is mandatory, while schools are requested to give careful consideration to adopting the practice in the Good Practice Guide where appropriate.

21 The provisions of the Quality Manual and any other University regulations regarding the management of standards and quality pertain to all campuses. Where there is a need to set out separate procedures or requirements for the international campuses (for example, to facilitate local implementation of the student appeals procedure), these appear in the body of the Quality Manual.

22 The responsibility for designing, coordinating, monitoring and maintaining the University's quality assurance policies and procedures lies primarily with the Academic Services Division. It is also responsible for ensuring that the University considers and responds to changes in the external quality assurance environment. Other administrative units with important roles in the management of quality and standards include Information Services, whose remit includes the libraries and computing, the Graduate School, and the International Office and Planning and Management Information Division which supports the University's periodic review system.

23 Overall, the audit team regarded the various components of the University's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, that is, the principal policies and procedures, the associated committee functions, and the supportive and professional role of the Academic Services Division and other administrative units, as robust and generally effective. The team did, however, identify some areas where the University may wish to consider strengthening the Learning and Teaching Committee's oversight of how schools discharge their responsibilities. These areas are discussed in Section 2 .

## Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

24 The University uses programme design and approval to define its award standards, assessment and examinations to apply those standards, and monitoring and review to secure their continued relevance and application. Externality in these processes is incorporated through external advisers for programme approval and periodic review, through the role and influence of external examiners and, where relevant, through reviews by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

25 In addition, external reference points, notably the Academic Infrastructure, published by QAA, inform and calibrate the University's own academic and educational frameworks. The Quality Manual accords with the precepts of the *Code of practice* and details the University bodies responsible for maintaining oversight of the various sections of the *Code*. The University monitors revisions of the *Code* to ensure that its own procedures continue to reflect the *Code's* precepts. Similarly, the University of Nottingham Qualifications Framework is consistent with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and serves to calibrate all new programme and course proposals. These take the form of publicly available programme specifications, with references to relevant subject benchmark statements, and which serve as the fundamental source of information for University regulatory, administrative and quality assurance purposes.

26 The University has given considerable thought to assuring the quality and standards of programmes offered at the international campuses: schools are responsible for their provision on all campuses, with that on the international campuses forming part of each school's regular annual and periodic reviews. Internal examination boards have parity wherever they are held, and programmes offered at more than one campus are assessed by a single examination board. Representative international campus examiners attend final examination boards with the external examiner(s) present.

### Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

#### Approval

27 Schools initiate new programme proposals following a twin-track procedure set out in the Quality Manual. A business case, including the programme's academic rationale, evidence of demand, likely recruitment, projected fees and required resources, has, until the current academic year, been considered by the faculty dean and, where there are significant resource issues, by the faculty pro-vice-chancellor. The University has now revised this process for programmes delivered at its UK campuses to give further structure to the business case and to allow for greater institutional input and higher level decision-making in order to promote a greater correspondence with the University's aims. Proposals will now be considered according to set criteria by a University programme approval panel, rather than by faculty officers. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Internationalisation considers the business case for proposals originating from the international campuses.

28 Following business case approval, consideration of the educational case for the new programme is based upon a programme specification screened by the Academic Services Division to ensure compliance with the Quality Manual, and accompanied by appropriate external expert advice. Information required in the programme specification includes module details, course structure, teaching and assessment modes, learning outcomes, reference to relevant subject benchmark statements and, where appropriate, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. An external adviser, defined by the Quality Manual as an academic peer external to the institution, is required to comment on the proposed programme's overall coherence, the relationship of the curriculum and assessment to intended learning outcomes, the degree to which current research informs the curriculum, the appropriateness of proposed standards, and the programme's congruence with subject benchmark statements and other external reference

points. Following comments on the proposal from the school's representatives on the academic board, the case is scrutinised by two vice-deans, acting on behalf of, and reporting to, the board. This in turn reports periodically to the Learning and Teaching Committee which may request further information on any programmes considered to have policy implications for the University.

29 Where new programmes are offered at the international campuses, a programme specification is considered by the relevant academic board in the usual way. Where a programme already exists at another campus, only the business case need be submitted. The title, structure, content and assessment of the same programme may vary between campuses, so long as these comply with the University's regulations and its Qualifications Framework, and the learning outcomes remain the same. In such instances a separate programme specification is needed, but formal approval is not required. Similarly, modules delivered across multiple campuses must achieve the same learning outcomes to the same standards and cover the same core subject matter, but some variation of content and assessment is permitted to reflect local circumstances.

30 New modules must be supported by the originating school and submitted with standardised module specification details to the Academic Services Division who grant approval or refer to the relevant vice-dean. Schools have a duty to consult with any other schools that are likely to have a legitimate interest in the creation of the module, for example if the subject matter of the new module has any overlap with provision in another school.

31 The audit team saw a range of evidence about programme approval, including specimens of the process in operation, which were wholly consistent with the description given above. On this basis, the team concluded that programme approval is robust and makes an effective contribution to the University's overall management of its academic standards.

### **Annual monitoring**

32 Schools are required to undertake annual monitoring of programmes at a time decided by each school, normally in the summer or early autumn. Monitoring includes consideration of external examiner reports and responses to these; results from the two principal vehicles for soliciting student feedback on their learning experiences: the Student Evaluation of Modules and Student Evaluation of Teaching; student-staff feedback committee reports; and National Student Survey (NSS) data. Schools also consider a Quantitative Data Set generated by the Planning and Management Information Division each September for the previous year which includes data on admissions, student profiles, progression and completion rates. To date these have only been available for the UK campuses, but from the current academic year similar datasets will be provided for the international campuses. The outcome of annual monitoring is a report which remains within the school. However, the Examinations Office provides the relevant academic board with a summary report on external examiner reports, responses to these and actions taken, and the Board also receives copies of the aggregated Quantitative Data Set and a commentary from the Academic Services Division.

33 The University views annual monitoring both as a regular quality assurance mechanism and as a catalyst for reflection and enhancement. It has recently sought to improve further the effectiveness and transparency of the process. In 2008-09, Learning and Teaching Committee proposed that schools should submit an annual monitoring report to academic boards informed by the evidence summarised above. However, this proposal was rejected by the schools through the academic boards and, following discussions between Learning and Teaching Committee, the boards and Academic Services Division, from the end of the current year Academic Services Division will provide boards with summary reports of annual monitoring data by school, including Quantitative Data Sets, NSS results and summaries of external examiner reports.

34 On the basis of several specimen annual monitoring reports provided, the audit team concluded that the process is a valuable mechanism for reflection and evaluation within schools. However, given that the reports themselves are confined to schools, the team had reservations

about the University's capacity to maintain effective oversight of annual monitoring, and to identify any strengths or weaknesses which the process may highlight, on the basis of the summary reports prepared outside the school by Academic Services Division. In consequence, the team considers it advisable for the University to strengthen institutional oversight of the outcomes of annual monitoring conducted by schools.

### **Periodic review**

35 Following the last QAA audit the University merged its dual processes of University Quality Audit (an audit of school mechanisms for managing quality and standards) and Course Review (a five-yearly review of all taught courses involving external specialist(s)) into a single system of School Review, with 2008-09 as the transition year. The audit team read a number of Quality Audit and Course Review reports, and judged these to be an effective means for reviewing and reporting on academic standards and the systems that underpin them.

36 School Review, overseen by the Planning and Management Information Division, encompasses research, innovation and knowledge transfer as well as learning and teaching. Review team members are typically senior academics, with one acting as chair, senior administrator(s) and a student member. There is also at least one external member who should combine academic standing in the principal subject area of the school under review with experience of quality auditing.

37 At the centre of the Review is an internally authored school information pack which includes a reflective and evaluative document providing a commentary on the information pack provided and summarising the school's strategy for enhancement. The school information pack includes a section on learning and teaching exemplifying how the school manages the quality and standards of its provision. The review team is required to determine whether the school's qualifications align with the University's Qualifications Framework, whether programme learning outcomes appropriately match relevant subject benchmark statements and are taught and assessed satisfactorily, and to identify opportunities for enhanced learning, teaching and assessment. The review includes any provision at the international campuses for which the school is responsible. The review report is forwarded to Management Board, with relevant sections sent to other responsible bodies such as the Learning and Teaching Committee and the faculty academic board.

38 Reflecting the recent introduction of School Review, only two school information packs and one draft review report were available to the audit team. Besides the reflective and evaluative document, the school information packs included summaries of courses and modules offered, Quantitative Data Sets and NSS analyses, examples of course handbooks, a survey of compliance with the University's Qualifications Framework, sample summaries of external examiner reports and school responses, and examples of annual monitoring reports. One reflective and evaluative document commented that the sample summary external examiner reports included in the School Information Pack, 'omit the many highly positive comments received'.

39 The Learning and Teaching section of the draft report is substantially shorter and less detailed than those typically resulting from University Quality Audit and Course Review. It confirmed that the external panel members were satisfied with the relevance of the taught programmes and how national benchmarks had been addressed but did not provide any further detail, and did not comment on teaching or assessment.

40 The University informed the audit team that it intends to review the working and outcomes of School Review at the end of its first year of operation. The team took the view that the new procedure's use of summaries or samples of various supporting evidence, such as external examiner and annual monitoring reports, risked weakening the evidence base by omitting other valuable information. The team, therefore, considers it desirable for the University, in its review of the new School Review process, to consider strengthening the evidence base

used, in order that the process may contribute more fully to the assurance of quality and standards.

41 In addition, the University has recently undertaken a periodic review of provision at its campus in China, facilitated by a reflective and evaluative document and focusing on issues of context and environment rather than individual subject provision. The review team found evidence of comparability of standards with the UK campus in the degrees awarded, including classifications and Pass rates, and in the quality of teaching based on Student Evaluation of Teaching. The University review team concluded that the China campus complies with the Quality Manual and, 'where local interpretation of the detailed procedure is necessary this is carefully managed and the principles of quality assurance and control are maintained'.

### **External examiners**

42 In the University's view, external examiners, given their experience of comparable programmes and awards elsewhere and relevant national benchmark standards, make a vital contribution to ensuring that programmes of study and assessment are of an appropriate standard. External examiners are appointed annually for up to five years by vice-deans acting on behalf of Council and ratified by the Chair of Learning and Teaching Committee. In addition to their letter of appointment, external examiners are provided with the University's Code of Practice for external examiners, an Information Sheet directing them to the Quality Manual and other online information, and they receive detailed information on programmes, marking and assessment procedures from the head of school. The University is currently considering introducing a formal induction programme for external examiners to acquaint them with relevant university and school level information. If approved, it is envisaged that the University information will also be accessible online for those external examiners unable to attend the programme in person.

43 The external examiner report form requires comments on induction materials, the examination process, curriculum content and development, assessment design and examination procedures, the standards achieved by students and their performance relative to those on comparable courses elsewhere; the quality of teaching and learning methods, the appropriateness and comparability of standards with similar programmes elsewhere and with subject benchmark statements, as well as the school's response to any previous recommendations. Externals examining programmes offered at more than one campus are expected to comment on comparability of standards.

44 Heads of school are responsible for ensuring external examiners' reports are received promptly and that they comply with the University's format. They are received centrally and forwarded to heads of schools for consideration by relevant school committees. The Quality Manual requires school examination boards to consider the external examiner report together with that from the previous year and the school response, although the audit team were informed that this is generally undertaken by school learning and teaching committees. External examiner reports are also considered by student-staff feedback committees, although the team noted, from the evidence provided as part of the sampling trails, only one example of this happening. This is discussed in more detail in Section 7 below.

45 Schools are required to provide the external examiner and the Examinations Office with details of actions taken in response to the report which is then reviewed by the latter to determine whether these are satisfactory. The Examinations Office produces summaries of reports and responses identifying issues for consideration and examples of good practice for academic boards and for the Learning and Teaching Committee. Both annual monitoring by academic boards and School Review are based upon these summaries, and complete external examiner reports are not considered outside the school and the Examinations Office. In consequence, the audit team concluded that potentially valuable information for the University may not be

recognised. The team considers it desirable for the University to extend the academic scrutiny of external examiner reports at institutional level.

### **Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points**

46 The University's awards are calibrated against the University's Qualifications Framework, which the audit team found to be consistent with the FHEQ. Similarly the Quality Manual conforms to the European Association for Quality Assurance's Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the Higher Education Area. The Learning and Teaching Committee is responsible for ensuring the University's compatibility with the FHEQ and other external reference points, and reviews internal policies and practices in light of new national developments. For example, it has recently considered the implications of the second edition of the FHEQ, and approved changes to the University's qualification level titles as a result. Discussions are currently underway to ensure parity of the University's Ordinary Degree and Practitioner Doctorate awards with the Credit Framework for England.

47 Programme approval requires the school to specify the proposed programme's level in the University's Qualifications Framework and to detail teaching, assessment and learning outcomes appropriate to that level, as well as referring to subject benchmark statements. The external adviser is charged with expressing a view on the congruence or otherwise of the proposed programme to these elements of the Academic Infrastructure. External examiners are similarly required to confirm that standards are consistent with the level of the award and with national benchmark standards. Schools are required to consider examiner reports as part of annual monitoring, and must seek academic board approval for changes to programme or module specifications.

48 A mandatory requirement of School Review is to ensure that qualifications offered by the school are in line with the University's Qualifications Framework, that learning outcomes have an appropriate match to relevant QAA benchmark statements, and are taught and assessed in a satisfactory manner.

49 Schools with programmes subject to review by PSRBs and other external agencies are responsible for preparing submissions with support from Academic Services Division as required. If the outcome of review is other than full approval, the head of school must inform the chair of the relevant academic board. Schools consider the PSRB report internally and then forward the full report, together with their response and proposed actions, to academic board for approval. Academic board may draw the attention of the Learning and Teaching Committee to any issues with wider implications or which require reconsideration of University policy. The School is also required to incorporate the PSRB report in its Reflective and Evaluative Document for the next School Review.

50 The University maintains a central record of accredited programmes and schedule of visits to assure itself that schools are preparing adequately for PSRB visits. The audit team concluded that the University's process for the consideration of PSRB reports makes an effective contribution to its management of standards.

### **Assessment policies and regulations**

51 According to the Quality Manual, 'The University is committed to ensuring that methods of assessment are effective in measuring student attainment of the intended learning outcomes and that assessment policy and practices are effective in monitoring the validity, equity and reliability of assessment.' Generic assessment policies and regulations are set out in the Quality Manual, with individual programme details and marking criteria contained in the relevant Programme specification, and provided to students in school Handbooks and/or through other channels. Examination arrangements are coordinated across the University by the Examinations Office, but schools have some discretion in developing appropriate methods of assessment, conducting and marking examinations and, through examination boards, determining results

and degree class, in which the role of the school Examination Officer is critical. Progression regulations are set out in relevant sections of the Quality Manual's Study Regulations. Degrees and other awards are approved by the relevant academic board on behalf of Senate.

52 The membership, remit and powers of school examination boards are set out in the Quality Manual. All assessments for courses and modules leading to a University award must involve both internal and external examiners. Schools are responsible for ensuring that postgraduate students and occasional teachers involved in assessment receive appropriate training and that any summative assessments by them are moderated by academic staff.

53 Examination papers are internally moderated and externally vetted, and scripts marked anonymously. All schools are required to have written marking criteria across the full range of marks available (0-100) which are included in programme specifications and published in school handbooks. Marking schemes should include categories above 70 per cent and below 40 per cent. However, two of three exemplar schemes to which schools are directed in the University's Good Practice Guide do not fully differentiate within the marking ranges above the First class/master's Distinction boundary or below the honours/master's Pass thresholds. Following the last Institutional audit the University established a Marking and Classification Working Group to review and make recommendations on the examination process and the role of external examiners, guided by principles of fairness and consistency. The Group has progressed assessment policy in several areas, providing guidance to schools on, for example, the consideration of extenuating circumstances, the treatment of borderline candidates and clarifying the roles of external examiners in adjusting marks and in assessing programmes at the international campuses. The Group has also reviewed the issue of assessment weightings by programme level: as a result of its recommendations the number of weighting schemes has reduced from 19 (nine for undergraduate programmes and 10 for integrated master's) to seven (five for undergraduate programmes and two for integrated master's).

54 The University currently recognises three schemes for classifying honours and integrated masters degrees, although one of these applies only to students who entered before September 2004. Of the other two, one is based upon the arithmetic mean for schools which, according to the Quality Manual, have traditionally found no difficulty in using the entire 100 marks in the percentage scale, while the other 'thresholds' scheme recognises, '...the problems of classifying degrees, particularly first class honours, where marking conventions effectively discount the use of marks at both ends of the percentile range,' and is used by two schools. In May 2007 Taught Courses Committee and Teaching Committee (the Learning and Teaching Committee's predecessor) noted that, '...the minor differences in outcome arising from operation of the two degree classification methods could be accounted for by the marks typically gained in the two groups of Schools'.

55 Schools responsible for joint honours degrees must select one or other of the above schemes for classification, although Ordinary degrees, sub-degree undergraduate and graduate awards are all classified according to the arithmetic mean. Most recently, those schools using the thresholds scheme have been formally requested to reconsider this in view of the University requirement to use the full marking range, with the aim of moving to universal adoption of the arithmetic mean for determining degree class.

56 There is a single scheme for the overall classification of taught postgraduate programmes, with the boundary for a distinction set at either 68 or 69 according to the individual programme specification. Borderline candidates are further considered by examination boards as set out in the programme specification; those registering on programmes from this year on must be considered by an explicit weighted profiling system, examples of which are available in the Good Practice Guide, and made available to students at the start of their studies.

57 In September 2008, the Marking and Classification Working Group noted that, 'External examiners have commented on a perceived reluctance in some schools to use the full range of

marks and this may have had a knock-on impact on degree classification in particular in relation to firsts...', but that, '...an analysis of module mark statistics for 2006/07 ...showed that with a very few exceptions, Schools/Departments appeared to be using the full range of marks available'. However, comparable external examiner comments relating to issues of marking range are included in the reports on examining in 2007-08 received by the Humanities Academic Board and the Learning and Teaching Committee in April and May 2009. Moreover, the Marking and Classification Working Group noted that, 'A comparison with other Russell Group institutions in relation to the number of firsts awarded has been undertaken and a number of schools identified as outliers have been asked to consider this'. Issues of marking range and degree class distributions remain under review by the Group and by the Learning and Teaching Committee.

58 It was evident to the audit team that in recent years the University had made considerable progress in developing a more consistent institutional approach to assessment. However, the team concluded that there remains scope for further progress particularly in respect of different marking schemes. The team, therefore, considers it desirable for the University to expedite the planned harmonisation of its assessment practices.

### **Management information - statistics**

59 The Planning & Management Information Division provides schools annually with a standardised data set including admissions, student cohort characteristics, progression and completion rates and qualifications achieved, which schools must consider within annual monitoring and at School Review. Academic boards receive aggregated data sets for their schools, while Learning and Teaching Committee and other university-level groups receive institutional data, together with information on comparator institutions. Other data sources, such as Unistats and NSS results are also considered by the University. The audit team saw instances where such information informed discussion and policy at school, academic board and institutional levels and concluded that it made an effective contribution to the management of academic standards.

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

## **Section 3 Institutional management of learning opportunities**

### **Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points**

61 The University pursues a close alignment between its own processes and procedures for the management of learning opportunities, particularly as they are expressed in the Quality Manual, and external reference points, such as the QAA *Code of practice*.

62 The Learning and Teaching Committee has primary responsibility for keeping abreast of revisions to the *Code* and recommending any concomitant changes in University policy. The audit team saw several examples of this process in action, leading to changes, for example, in the use of external advisers in programme approval and arrangements for the supervision of postgraduate research students. The University publicises revisions to the *Code*, and other external reference points, through committee representatives and publications such as its learning and teaching magazine, The Hub.

63 The University plays an active role in QAA consultations on changes to the *Code of practice*, including in the recent revisions to the section on careers education.

## Approval, monitoring and review of programme

64 The University's procedures for programme approval, monitoring and periodic review, described in Section two, each expect University staff, and external experts where they are involved, to consider the availability of appropriate learning opportunities for students, alongside academic standards. Salient features of these processes include the referral of proposed new programmes to Information Services to ensure that adequate learning resources are available; the use of a raft of evidence about students' experiences of their learning opportunities in the preparation of annual monitoring reports; and the inclusion within the school Information Pack for School Review of a standard array of information about students' learning opportunities, including an analysis of NSS results and external examiner reports.

65 The audit team's scrutiny of a range of documents associated with these processes confirmed that they were each contributing to the sound management of learning opportunities. However, the team had some reservations about both the confinement within schools of annual monitoring reports, and the use of summaries and samples of evidence in the new School Review process. These reservations are described in more detail in Section 2.

## Management information - feedback from students

66 Feedback from students is an important part of the evidence base for both annual monitoring and School Review. At school level, modules are evaluated through Student Evaluation of Modules and feedback on teaching quality is gathered through Student Evaluation of Teaching. The University also gathers information on the student experience at its UK campuses through its own Student Satisfaction Survey, and reviews the results of external surveys including the NSS, the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and the International Student Barometer, mainly through the Student Affairs Committee. An overarching report on student satisfaction is prepared for the Learning and Teaching Committee by the Survey Unit and data is disseminated to all staff through The Hub magazine.

67 The University encourages students to take part in opinion surveys including the NSS and takes the outputs seriously. For example, in response to low scores in assessment and feedback in the NSS and the University's own satisfaction survey, a working group of the Learning and Teaching Committee was set up in 2006-07 to produce new guidance in time for the 2007 assessment period. This encompassed minimum levels of feedback and included an optional feedback template. The University maintains that the effectiveness of this approach is reflected in improvements in the corresponding NSS scores.

68 The University is currently developing online systems for student evaluation of modules and teaching. These will be applied on all campuses, including the international campuses, to replace the paper-based systems presently in use.

69 The University also operates student-staff feedback committees whose role is to ensure that the concerns of students about their courses of study are represented to the academic staff throughout the academic year. The committees are constituted at school level and normally comprise one or two student representatives from each year group and a handful of staff. The student members normally outnumber the staff and the students are encouraged to take an active role, including chairing the meetings and minuting them. Some schools have a single committee for undergraduate and postgraduate business; others have separate committees. The committees also operate on the international campuses.

70 The audit team saw a number of examples where issues raised by students at student-staff feedback committees had led to changes in practice. The team also noted that the effectiveness of these committees is monitored by faculty academic boards and during School Review.

71 The audit team concluded that the University provides students with an ample number of opportunities to provide feedback within different levels of the University, and saw much evidence that the University treats this feedback seriously and has systems in place to respond to any problems which student feedback exposes. The team noted, in particular, the University's plans to make the extensive range of feedback mechanisms more or less common to all campuses within the near future. This contributed to the team's identification as a feature of good practice the integrative activities across separate campuses that help to secure equivalence of the student experience.

### **Role of students in quality assurance**

72 The University has a culture of student engagement in quality assurance across its campuses, manifest in students' membership of all relevant committees at institutional level, the course representative system, student-staff feedback committees, student involvement in School Review and student nominations of staff for the Lord Dearing Awards for Learning and Teaching.

73 Students are represented on the University's central committees, including Senate and the Learning and Teaching Committee, mainly by officers of the Students' Union. The Union's Education Officer also has regular meetings with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning.

74 Within schools, each programme has a course representative, elected at the start of the academic year, who is a member of the Student Staff Feedback Committee. The Students' Union provides training for student representatives and this is supplemented by the University for specific processes such as School Review and Appeals. The Students' Union has also developed a network of school representatives and faculty coordinators to provide its officers with a detailed picture of students' views, which they can then represent to the University.

75 During the audit visit the audit team met a number of Students' Union officers and student representatives from the UK and one of the international campuses, who all agreed that the University had a positive culture of student representation and a willingness to listen and respond to students' views. In the light of these comments, allied to the comprehensiveness of the student representation system (including at the international campuses) and the University's contribution to preparing student representatives for specific functions, the team identified the University's systems for listening and responding to the student voice as a feature of good practice.

### **Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities**

76 According to the Learning and Teaching Strategy, the University regards research-led teaching as fundamental to its stated goal of maintaining the highest academic standards, experiences and outcomes in all learning and teaching activities. In practice, the University aims to facilitate research-led teaching in a number of ways, including two research centres - the Institute for Research into Learning and Teaching in Higher Education and a Learning Sciences Research Institute - the involvement of research active staff from other institutions in programme development and approval; and the identification, within the academic promotion procedure, of a specific career path combining research and teaching (albeit without an explicit link between the two).

77 Staff whom the audit team met, including some who had recently experienced the academic promotion procedure, confirmed that the procedure operated as it was set out, and, moreover, described a more general expectation that academic staff who are active in research should also teach. However, the students' whom the team met were largely unable to articulate how their experience was enriched by the research interests of teaching staff. Indeed, when the team raised the issue of research with undergraduate students, it heard several examples of research detracting from the learning experience, mainly due to a perceived tendency for staff to prioritise research over teaching, such as through research sabbaticals. In this context, and

against the background of the commitments in the Learning and Teaching Strategy, the team concluded that the University might wish to reflect on the effectiveness of its approach to research-led teaching.

### **Other modes of study**

78 The University has a small number of distance-learning programmes which are approved through the same mechanism as campus-based programmes. E-learning is a much more substantial area of activity. Detailed guidance on the quality assurance of both modes is provided in a dedicated section of the Quality Manual.

79 The University has invested heavily in the technological and human resource systems required to support effective e-learning across the institution. This investment is manifest in a dedicated e-learning website (El@n), providing staff with an array of examples of e-learning, self help tutorials and toolkits; a number of centres - including four HEFCE-funded Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning - which promote e-learning; regular e-learning features in The Hub (the University's Learning and Teaching magazine), and the creation of a dedicated Learning Team within Information Services which, among other activities, organises monthly meetings to promote e-learning and enable members of the University to share their practice.

80 The strategic direction for e-learning is provided by an e-learning Strategy, the implementation of which was hitherto coordinated by a Director of e-learning. This post has now changed and expanded into a Director of Teaching and Learning - in part a reflection of the integration of e-learning into the University's broader quality enhancement agenda. There is also an e-learning committee (a subcommittee of the Learning and Teaching Committee), responsible for the strategic direction of e-learning and representative of all key groups across the University.

81 The audit team discussed the effectiveness of the University's e-learning activities with staff and students. Students were particularly enthusiastic and gave examples of how it had improved the quality of their learning experiences. The team, therefore, concluded that the University has effective mechanisms for ensuring the quality of the learning opportunities in different modes of study, particularly e-learning.

### **Resources for learning**

82 Executive responsibility for learning resources, including libraries, information services and space planning, rests with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Infrastructure, Information Services and Environment. Deliberative responsibility lies primarily with the Information Services Strategy Board, which is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor and reports to Strategy and Planning Committee, a subcommittee of the University Council. The Board is responsible for leading the development and implementation of its primary strategic reference - the Information Services Strategic Plan - and the determination of capital investment priorities. The Board's remit encompasses all of the University's campuses and it pays close attention to the integration of the international campuses with those in the UK. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning is a member of the Information Services Strategy Board to promote a correspondence with the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy.

83 Operational responsibility for the provision of learning resources rests with Information Services. The University has 13 different libraries and resource centres across its campuses in the UK and overseas. To maximise access to these services, learning materials are provided electronically wherever possible, a variety of loan periods are supported, and extended opening hours are available at specific libraries and during examination periods. In addition, Information Services supports teaching using a variety of technologies, such as the interactive teaching rooms opened in September 2009. These rooms enable automatic video-capture, delivering lectures to the web within an hour of presentation and live video-streaming of presentations to the international campuses.

84 Information Services' provision is informed by a number of different feedback mechanisms including helplines and comment boxes, student-staff feedback committees, the University's Student Satisfaction Survey, dedicated surveys and focus groups.

85 At the UK campuses, space management is overseen by a Space Management Committee, an executive subcommittee of Management Board created to rationalise the use of space within the University. The committee includes a lay member of Council, a Students' Union representative and a member of the Learning and Teaching Committee. At the international campuses, space planning is the responsibility of the local executive management groups.

86 Timetabling is carried out centrally by the Timetabling Office. Timetabled rooms are checked daily for serviceability by University porters. A report on the quality of teaching spaces and facilities is considered as part of School Review.

87 The staff and students whom the audit team met, including those on an international campus, were generally satisfied with the learning resources provided by the University. The responsiveness of Information Services to feedback was commended. The team concluded that the University has established effective arrangements for the provision of learning resources.

### **Admissions policy**

88 Deliberative oversight of admissions rests with the Student Affairs Committee, which is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning and reports to Senate. Operational responsibility for admissions rests with schools, acting within the parameters of the Quality Manual, which contains detailed guidance modelled on the relevant section of the *Code of practice*. Thus, schools are responsible for setting and publishing entry requirements and for ensuring that these requirements are fair, transparent and accurate, and that they are applied consistently and fairly when making decisions. Central oversight of schools' decisions is exercised by the Recruitment and Admissions Office.

89 The Recruitment and Admissions Office in the UK operates a centralised decision-making process for many schools at undergraduate and postgraduate level. Schools within this system agree with the Admissions Office clear criteria against which decisions will be made by the Office on the school's behalf, although borderline cases will be referred back to the school. It is the University's intention to bring all schools into this framework in the near future.

90 The University's commitment to a diverse student body is expressed through its Access Agreement with The Office of Fair Access and its Widening Participation Strategy. The University, through its Access Agreement, has won national recognition for offering bursaries to UK students from lower income backgrounds.

91 Overall, the audit team was satisfied that the University implements its admissions procedures consistently and has effective institutional oversight.

### **Student support**

92 The University uses personal tutors as its primary means of providing or facilitating support for undergraduate students. According to the Quality Manual, schools are responsible for ensuring that every student is allocated a personal tutor. Students following joint degrees are allocated a tutor by at least one school (allocation in the second school is by discretion depending on the defined duties in the school). If there is only one personal tutor allocated, additional support and coordination mechanisms must be established.

93 Personal tutors are normally academic staff, although some are administrative staff (enabling health practitioners to become personal tutors in the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences) or postgraduate research students (where they are also employed by the home school to teach).

94 The role of the personal tutor varies among schools. However, the Quality Manual stipulates that all schools ensure they have a written definition of the role of a personal tutor in their School, which must, as a minimum, include acting as a gateway to the wider student support and development provision of the University. Personal tutors should have scheduled meetings with their personal tutees at the start of each academic year and at least three times in each academic year in total. For undergraduates in their first year of study, their initial scheduled meeting with their personal tutor should take place within the first two weeks of their registration with the University.

95 Each School must appoint at least one senior tutor (and some appoint more than one according to level of study or subject specialism). The role of the senior tutor is essentially to oversee the personal tutor system within the School, mainly by producing guidance for personal tutors in their School as a local supplement to the University Guidance for Personal Tutors, inducting new tutors, assisting in cases where students feel unable to approach their designated tutor and advising the head of school on the effectiveness of the school's system. Senior tutors should be members of relevant student-staff feedback committees and all automatically become members of the University's Senior Tutor Network, which facilitates the sharing of good practice and provides a mechanism for influencing the University's policy development. One member of the Senior Tutor Network is appointed as the University Senior Tutor.

96 Postgraduate taught students should receive a level of personal and academic support from their school which addresses their specific needs, paying particular attention to early progress checks and the prompt identification of any potential problems.

97 Following a review of personal tutoring by the Learning and Teaching Committee in 2006-07, 'Personal and Academic Support' was renamed 'Student Support and Development', reflecting a new emphasis on supporting all students to maximise their potential, rather than just helping those students with particular academic or personal difficulties. The review led to the piloting, in five schools, of a personal tutoring initiative of Personal Development Goals set by the student in conjunction with their personal tutor every semester. Personal development goal setting is intended to help students maximise their University experience and build up an evidence profile, which can help them gain employment after graduation. The pilot is being monitored by the Student Affairs Committee.

98 Students with particular academic or pastoral problems may be referred to a range of specialised central support services coordinated by the University's Student Operations and Support Division. These services include Academic Support, the Counselling Service, the Disability Policy Advisory Unit, the Centre for Career Development and Financial Support. In 2007-08 the University opened a Student Service Centre on the main University Park Campus, bringing all the central support services together; and in 2008-09 opened a similar facility at the Jubilee Campus, albeit with fewer support services represented. The students whom the audit team met praised the development of the new student service centres for increasing the accessibility of student support, and commended the level of service they had received from the individual support services. The team identified the contribution of the student service centres to supporting and enhancing the student experience, alongside that of the graduate centres described in Section 6, as a feature of good practice.

99 The University plans to follow the same approach to co-locating student support services at the international campuses. This contributed to the team's identification of the integrative activities across separate campuses as a feature of good practice.

100 In 2007-08, the Learning and Teaching Committee convened an Academic Tutoring Working Group to consider ways of improving academic guidance and support to students outside formal teaching situations. The group concluded that schools should be required to publish information on the mechanisms they operate to provide academic tutoring in student handbooks and/or on their web pages, to help ensure the objectives of academic tutoring are

met. This area of work remained in progress at the time of the audit; the University had appointed an external consultant to conduct further investigations and report the outcomes to a seminar in late 2009.

101 In 2008-09 the University launched the Nottingham Advantage Award at the UK campuses, which offers students the opportunity to have their learning from extra-curricular activities recognised through modules in volunteering, employability, mentoring and the Nottingham Ambassador scheme.

102 The University offers its students a number of possibilities for studying abroad, including links through the Universitas 21 network and Socrates-Erasmus schemes. Students are also able to spend a semester or a year studying at one of the international campuses, although, at the time of the audit, few students had taken advantage of the opportunity.

### **Staff support (including staff development)**

103 New members of academic staff are given inductions at school and university levels, a mentor within their home school and a reduced teaching load during their probation to accommodate the demands of adapting to a new work environment. The audit team met both staff who had recently been through these procedures, and some who had acted as mentors to new staff, all of whom commended the system.

104 Staff development needs are identified during annual activity/performance reviews, which encompass teaching and research. All appraisers are trained and appraisees are also encouraged to undertake training.

105 The University's Academic Promotion procedure recognises three main career paths: research, teaching and a combination of the two. The procedure values all three paths equally; sustained excellence in any one of them can lead to promotion to the highest level (normally accompanied by the title of professor). However, some of the academic staff whom the audit team met regarded the University as putting a premium on excellence in research.

106 The University has a number of ways in which it supports female staff in particular in gaining promotion and seeking staff development, for example the APPLE programme. Academic staff at the international campuses apply for promotion in the same way as UK-based staff, although the criteria differ slightly to reflect local opportunities for attracting research grants and publishing papers.

107 Where poor performance is identified, the member of staff is subject to a performance improvement plan. The aim of this is to offer additional support as remedial action although it can also lead to disciplinary action.

108 Staff development services and training for staff and postgraduate students are provided by the Professional Development Unit. The work of this unit is informed by a variety of mechanisms including activity/performance review, the Learning and Teaching Strategy and evaluation feedback. The provision includes a number of formal qualifications including the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education, accredited by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and approved by the Nursing and Midwifery Council, which is taken by all new lecturers at all campuses. For part-time staff there is the Associate Teachers Programme and the Intensive Learning and Teaching Programme, also accredited by the HEA, and postgraduates are offered the Postgraduate Teaching Assistant Programme. In addition to these major programmes, Professional Development runs continuous professional development programmes, short courses, 'Promoting Enhanced Student Learning', a web-based resource to promote good practice in learning and teaching practice, international staff induction, and the Lord Dearing Awards for Learning and Teaching, designed to recognise outstanding achievement of staff in enhancing the student learning experience.

109 The University operates a peer observation of teaching process which takes place across the University, although with some variation of detail among schools. Peer observation occurs annually and the outcomes are compared by schools with the results of the student evaluations of modules and teaching to identify any potential problems.

110 The audit team concluded that the University has developed effective systems and procedures for the support and development of academic staff engaged in teaching.

111 The audit team concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

## **Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement**

112 The University's strategic approach to enhancement is articulated in its Learning and Teaching Strategy, which identifies the main opportunities for enhancement accruing from research-led teaching, student involvement in routine quality assurance processes and staff development and reward. Section 3 deals with these three areas of activity; staff development and reward is discussed below.

113 In addition, the University uses its routine quality assurance functions, including annual monitoring and School Review, to identify good practice and disseminates it through an online Good Practice Guide, which schools are encouraged to consult and adopt as they deem appropriate, the University's learning and teaching magazine, entitled *The Hub*, and a range of web-based teaching resources outlined below.

114 The Director of Teaching and Learning is a focal point for enhancement; part of his role is to coordinate enhancement activities at individual, school and University levels in order to secure successful implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The Director is editor of *The Hub*, which is published every semester and distributed in hard copy to all teaching staff. *The Hub* aims to raise the profile of teaching and learning and promote the development and sharing of good practice.

115 The University has established a number of web-based teaching resources including the Promoting Enhanced Student Learning (PESL) initiative. PESL was launched in 2003 with the aim of disseminating good and innovative learning and teaching practice. Content is managed and controlled by a management board and an editorial team. A wide range of resources has been generated and monitoring of usage reveals extensive use both within the University, nationally and internationally. Other web resources include an e-learning website offering practical advice for staff on the use of technology in teaching and an open courseware initiative: these initiatives are supported by a dedicated team in Information Services.

116 The annual Lord Dearing Awards for Learning and Teaching are a notable feature of the University's commitment to quality enhancement through staff reward. The awards have been made to individuals or groups of staff in both teaching and teaching support roles since 1999 and recognise outstanding achievements in enhancing the student learning experience. In recent years nominees have made video submissions to the judging panel and these videos have been added to the PESL web resource. More widely, the University recognises and rewards excellent teaching through its promotion processes that allow promotions up to professorial level based on excellence in teaching and learning activity (see paragraph 105).

117 The Nottingham Advantage Award is a new initiative that recognises the learning that undergraduates derive from extra-curricular activities, such as volunteering and Students' Union work. The Award is led by the Centre for Career Development and is overseen by the School of Education. Although relatively small in scale at the time of the audit, the University intends to extend the scheme, including at the international campuses.

118 The effectiveness of the University's approach to quality enhancement is measured in a number of ways including the monitoring of funded projects by the Learning and Teaching Committee, feedback to the Director of Teaching and Learning, web traffic statistics and attendance at enhancement events. Evidence of the success of the University's approach can be seen in improving outcomes in the annual National Student Surveys, involvement in four HEFCE-funded CETLs, student participation in the Nottingham Advantage Award, and the dissemination of the work of the Lord Dearing Award winners.

119 At the time of the audit, the University was in the process of revising its Learning and Teaching Strategy to put greater emphasis on those areas directly impacting on the student experience, such as assessment. The audit team regarded the revision as a valuable opportunity to articulate a clearer strategy for enhancement and introduce better ways of evaluating the impact of enhancement on student learning. Nonetheless, it was clear to the team that the University is committed to enhancing students' learning opportunities and is able to point to a number of important activities in which that commitment is manifest, particularly the Nottingham Advantage Award and PESL.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

120 At the time of the audit, the University's collaborative course register comprised eight articulation, progression and credit transfer agreements (whereby students gain entry to a University programme, some with advanced standing); five instances of joint delivery; seven off-campus delivery arrangements; and one validation of a partner's programme. There was a mixture of UK and overseas activities.

121 The University intends to limit any further development of its collaborative activity to joint awards, progression agreements, split PhD programmes, in-country teaching and distance learning. It plans not to engage in franchising nor validate more programmes for delivery by another institution.

122 Collaborative arrangements are overseen by the Transnational Education Committee (TNEC), which is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Internationalisation and reports to the Learning and Teaching Committee. TNEC's remit encompasses both the University's two international campuses and collaborative provision. In respect of the latter, the committee advises the Learning and Teaching Committee on policy and strategy and, through a dedicated subcommittee, approves, monitors, reviews and renews courses or partnerships to ensure that the standards and quality of such courses and awards are congruent with awards delivered on the University campuses. TNEC is also responsible for ensuring that the University's Quality Manual reflects the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

123 Approval, monitoring and review arrangements for collaborative provision are articulated in the Quality Manual. At an early stage in the development of a possible partnership a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is required: this records the intention of the University and its prospective partner to strengthen mutual ties; it is not a formal or legal agreement, although it is signed by a member of the University's Management Board. The International Office provides advice on the content of a MoU and a standard template is available.

124 If subsequent collaboration is to involve a teaching partnership leading to a University award, a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) is required. The MoA is a detailed legal document outlining the specifics of the partnership which must be submitted to TNEC for approval. Each MoA lasts five years and must be signed by a member of the Management Board on the advice of TNEC. In determining this advice, TNEC considers whether the provisions in the MoA adhere to the University's policies, are financially viable and whether the partner is able to provide the necessary facilities, teaching and supervision at the appropriate standard. The sponsoring school

is required to seek internal advice and provide supporting evidence such as a business case, the outcome of due diligence enquiries and the report of a visit to the partner institution: for major initiatives TNEC itself can organise a site visit. If any new programmes are to be developed for the partnership, such programmes need to be approved following the University's standard procedures.

125 Once approved, collaborative provision is subject to the normal quality assurance procedures operating within schools. At the time of the audit, neither of the two extant school reviews had had the opportunity to consider any collaborative provision. However, the University's only validated programmes had recently been subject to a periodic review by Quality Audit. This demonstrated a thorough and effective appraisal of the partner and the programmes offered through the partnership and the final report, together with the partner's response, had been duly considered at appropriate levels within the University.

126 TNEC conducts formal reviews of MoAs every five years, drawing on evidence from the sponsoring school's normal quality assurance procedures including periodic review, and possibly also a visit to the partner. TNEC is also responsible for confirming the termination of a collaborative course.

127 At the time of the audit, TNEC had recently produced detailed guidance for schools enunciating the principles governing the quality assurance of provision at the University's international campuses and implementation of the requirements of the Quality Manual in respect of those campuses. This guidance was another example of the integrative activities across separate campuses which the audit team identified as a feature of good practice.

128 The audit team's review of the processes underpinning collaborative provision, and its meetings with staff, demonstrated a clear strategic approach to the development of new links and the existence of effective mechanisms for the approval of new partnerships and the subsequent review and renewal of MoAs. The team concluded therefore that, given the scale and nature of its current collaborative provision, the University has appropriate and effective mechanisms for the management of academic standards and quality.

## **Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students**

129 The University's management of the standards and quality of its postgraduate research programmes is largely embedded within the framework described in Section one above. Thus, the roles and responsibilities of the Learning and Teaching Committee, academic boards, the faculty vice-deans (in particular the Postgraduate vice-deans) and the heads of schools extend to both taught and research programmes, and many of the procedures for the quality assurance of taught programmes described in Section two, such as annual monitoring and School Review, also encompass research degrees. The Quality Manual includes the specific regulations for research degrees.

130 In addition, there is a Postgraduate Strategy Committee, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Transfer, which is responsible to Senate for the development, implementation and oversight of postgraduate policy ; and an informal Research Degrees Business Group, which, in the absence of a formal research degrees committee, helps to identify issues of particular relevance to research degree programmes that the Group's Chair, the Dean of the Graduate School, may usefully bring to the Learning and Teaching Committee's attention.

131 The audit team scrutinised a range of documents for evidence of how the University's processes for monitoring and review considered research degrees. It noted that, although the data set for annual monitoring by schools includes a comprehensive section on research degrees,

the records of academic boards and the Learning and Teaching Committee did not reveal any discussion of potential issues arising from this data beyond school level. This contributed to the team's recommendation about annual monitoring set out in Section 2.

### **Research environment**

132 The general quality of the environment for research students is reflected both in the broad range of subjects which the University submitted to the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise and the results of that exercise - almost 60 per cent of the submission was classed as 'world leading' or 'internationally excellent' - which led to a substantial increase in research funding.

133 Senate has defined a set of resources and facilities that schools must ensure are available to research students, including study space, computing, printing and copying facilities, interlibrary loans, telephones and recreational areas. Students whom the team met confirmed the availability of these resources and emphasised the responsiveness of schools to the ongoing development of their generic and specialised research resource needs. This was corroborated by the results of the 2007 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey.

134 In addition the University has a longstanding Graduate School, responsible for providing training and development for postgraduates (as well as early career researchers) and promoting a vibrant postgraduate community. Its services are discussed below.

### **Selection, admission and induction**

135 The University's admissions criteria are set out in the Quality Manual. Applicants submit a research proposal directly to the relevant school or research centre and are normally offered the opportunity to meet potential supervisors. Prior to admission applicants should be provided by the admitting school with relevant information on research opportunities and facilities in their area of interest and expertise including information on start dates and training. Students whom the audit team met confirmed the availability and supply of the requisite documentation both before and after their arrival and that the expectations it raised had been satisfied.

136 Admissions decisions are the responsibility of the head of school and the relevant vice-dean. The Quality Manual sets out both the minimum English language requirements (which, at the discretion of schools, may be made more stringent) and the academic entry requirements: an Upper Second class honours degree for entry onto a doctoral programme and a Lower Second class honours degree for entry onto an MPhil or other research masters programme. Admissions are monitored through the management information available to schools and to the Postgraduate Strategy Committee. Although there is no right to appeal the outcome of an admission decision there is a complaints procedure to deal with cases of dissatisfaction with the processing of an application.

137 The Quality Manual identifies supervisors as being responsible for ensuring that new students will receive an induction programme, the timing and content of which should reflect the diversity of needs of specific groups of research students (such as part-time and newly arriving international students). While this allows for some discretion by supervisors, the Quality Manual also contains a comprehensive list of the information to be provided as part of any induction programme, including the relevant University regulations, details of the central support services and a description of the supervisory arrangements. Students whom the audit team met confirmed the provision of relevant induction together with the relevant information from schools and the University. They also confirmed that the specific needs of part-time and international students were catered for through both formal and informal induction events. Some students recognised that their induction had included early training needs analysis.

## Supervision

138 Heads of school are responsible for ensuring the research students in their schools receive appropriate and continuous supervision throughout their registered period of study. Students whom the audit team met indicated their satisfaction with supervisors' availability, a view consistent with the results of a survey commissioned by the Students' Union in preparation for the audit.

139 The University has a policy of supervisory teams and since 2007-08 the Quality Manual has specified that new students will be allocated a supervisory team containing at least two supervisors. Although the students whom the audit team met endorsed the existence and general implementation of the supervisory team requirements, they described detailed differences in local practices which indicate that, in a small number of cases, either delays or informalities in implementation continue to occur. Such a delay in implementation had also been reported in one of the Quality Audit reports provided to the team, which elicited a formal response indicating that the school would comply in the following session.

140 Supervisors are required to discharge their responsibilities as detailed in the Quality Manual with the head of school having oversight of the necessary arrangements including ensuring that supervisors are fully aware of their supervisory responsibilities. The Quality Manual sets out the relevant responsibilities comprehensively with appropriate cross references to the underlying procedures.

141 The Quality Manual offers the option of appointing joint or lead supervisors within the team, on condition that one supervisor is designated as the primary point of contact for the student. It also describes the criteria for becoming a supervisor and outlines how staff may become involved in supervision for the first time through joint supervisory arrangements, training and mentoring. For new members of staff supervisory training is embedded in the mandatory Postgraduate Certificate of Higher Education they attend. Academic staff whom the audit team met, including both new and experienced supervisors, confirmed their understanding of these requirements.

142 A university-wide HEFCE-funded project has led to an expanded range of support for new supervisors, including tailored sessions delivered by experts in schools and centrally, and a web-based resource for skills development, good practice and guidance. Development opportunities in relation to supervision are also available to established members of academic staff with reminders being issued in relation to the relevant requirements contained in the Quality Manual. The Learning and Teaching Committee has taken a specific interest in this area and in May 2008 received a report, based on survey information drawn from across the University, which in addition to identifying existing good practice noted the divergence of development needs of new and existing supervisors and some inconsistency in the application of the Quality Manual. This led to the inception of a Postgraduate Supervisors Project, which produced a Supporting Supervisors site as part of the Graduate School website. The team regarded the site as a potentially valuable additional resource for supervisors, although it was apparently not well known to the staff whom the team met.

143 The University does not specify a maximum research student to supervisor ratio. This is, however, under consideration by the Research Degrees Business Group.

144 Supervisors are required, as a minimum, to meet with full-time students on 10 occasions a year and with part-time students six times. A record of each meeting must be placed on the student's file, which is held by the school. The students whom the audit team met understood that records were generated and generally regarded them as useful in monitoring their progress.

145 The University provides a simple pro forma for the preparation of supervision records. Such records, endorsed by both supervisor and student, inform research students' annual review and form an agreed account of students' progress. The records may also be available to the academic board and the Registry in the event of a student appeal. However, there was no evidence from the records provided to the audit team that academic boards had employed this source of evidence in monitoring students' experiences of supervision.

146 Each School is expected to have at least one full-time member of academic staff designated as an independent school postgraduate student adviser to advise students on procedures, regulations and progress and to deal confidentially with any concern raised by students about their research studies or supervision. The role extends, where relevant, to postgraduate research students at the international campuses.

### **Progress and review arrangements**

147 The University employs formal confirmation and progression reviews for full-time doctoral students at the end of their first and second years respectively. Students registered for other kinds of research degrees, such as the MPhil, are similarly subject to annual review at the end of their first year of registration and again in subsequent years. Modifications to these processes accommodate part-time students.

148 All reviews involve the presentation of a progress report by the student, a commentary on this report by the principal supervisor, evidence of the fulfilment of any specific requirements of the programme and an interview with an independent Internal Assessor(s). The consideration of this evidence leads to a recommendation to the head of school relating to the progression of the student or to the continuation of probation (in the case of the confirmatory review), re-registration for MPhil or termination. The University provides a template for recording the process and outcomes relating to these procedures, including those that may be used by students who wish to appeal. These records form part of the student files that schools are required to maintain. Students whom the audit team met confirmed the rigour and of the review process and its helpfulness in aiding their understanding of the standards expected of them.

### **Development of research and other skills**

149 Research students, in collaboration with their supervisors, are required to create a full training record or portfolio to keep track of progress, assess skills needs, record development of research and other skills, and to supplement their curriculum vitae. Subject-specific training should be provided by schools; generic training needs, including those areas covered by the Research Councils' Joint Skills Statement, are met by the Graduate School. The School employs a team of Researcher Development Managers to coordinate and promote training tailored to the needs of particular faculties and schools. The managers also organise careers events and work experience placements and mentor individual students on the development of generic skills.

150 Research students access the services of the Graduate School primarily through five graduate centres spread across four of the University's UK campuses and one centre on each international campus. The centres also provide dedicated social spaces for research students and support for international students. The research students whom the audit team met praised the graduate centres for providing convenient access to a range of valuable training opportunities and other support. The team identified the contribution of the graduate centres to supporting and enhancing the student experience, alongside that of the student service centres, as a feature of good practice.

151 The Quality Manual stipulates that research students should undertake some form of training before they teach, and Professional Development runs a range of relevant training courses including the Postgraduate Teaching Assistant Programme, which provides entry level training in small-group teaching, assessment and demonstrating in laboratories. Schools retain

some discretion over precisely what training research students take part in before they teach, and this was reflected both in the experiences of the research students whom the audit team met and in the outcomes of the 2007 PRES survey, which indicated that postgraduates who teach were not always happy with the support they received. The team concluded that the University may wish to reflect on the consistency of the support given to postgraduates who teach.

### **Feedback mechanisms**

152 The University solicits feedback from research students through a number of different surveys, research students' membership of student-staff feedback committees and through progress and review meetings with their supervisors. The records of Postgraduate Strategy Committee and Student Affairs Committee revealed that the University had used survey results systematically to identify areas for improvement; and student-staff feedback committee minutes confirmed the involvement of research students and an engagement with their interests. Moreover, the audit team saw several Quality Audit reports which demonstrated an ongoing concern for the effectiveness of the feedback mechanisms outlined above. The team concluded, therefore, that research students have ample opportunities to provide feedback to the University and that the University is committed to responding. The University was, however, less able to demonstrate systematic monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the actions taken in response to feedback from research students.

### **Assessment**

153 The Quality Manual contains the University's Regulations for doctoral programmes and Masters by Research. Supplementary regulations for around 15 named professional doctorates also appear. The audit team noted that the regulations are helpfully cross-referenced to other relevant areas of the Quality Manual, including the Nottingham University Qualifications Framework, which illustrates the equivalence between the University's criteria for assessing research degrees and the FHEQ.

154 The University's procedures for the assessment of research degrees comprise a sub-section of the Quality Manual. Normally each research submission is examined by one Internal Examiner, and one external examiner. The latter is nominated by the school and approved by the University formally through Council, though in practice the audit team noted approval usually falls to the relevant postgraduate vice-dean on the advice of the University Registry. Examiners are required to submit independent reports on the submission to the Registry or head of school before the viva voce examination takes place. schools may appoint an independent, non-examining chair to preside over the examination and to take an additional viewpoint on the conduct of the process. Although the team was not able to determine how common this practice was, it observed that the use of independent chairs in only some examinations had the potential to promote inconsistency among different submissions. The team concluded that the University may wish to consider whether harmonisation in the use of independent chairs might achieve greater consistency.

155 Following the viva voce examination the examiners complete a joint report form and make an agreed recommendation on the award, which is forwarded for approval by the head of school and by the University. The candidate is provided with copies of the examiners' reports and a communication from the internal examiner describing the academic and presentational reasons for the recommendation and advice, if necessary, on matters to be addressed prior to any re-submission. The University undertakes to inform the candidate formally of the outcome of their submission within one week of the decision on the award being made. The students whom the audit team met confirmed their understanding of the assessment process and were clear about the standards expected of them. Evidence from recent surveys of research students, however, suggested that such confidence may not be shared by all of their colleagues.

156 The University's procedure for monitoring examiners' reports largely relies on Registry, which is responsible for considering the reports and raising any issues with the Dean of the Graduate School, who may, in turn, raise these issues at the Learning and Teaching Committee. However, the audit team's analysis of the minutes of the Learning and Teaching Committee and of academic boards did not reveal any examples of issues arising from external examiner reports being discussed. This contributed to the team's recommendation with respect to the scrutiny of external examiner reports, set out in Section 2 above.

### **Representations, complaints and appeals**

157 The procedure for academic appeals is common to taught and research degrees. It has been considered by the Student Services Committee, consulted upon through the academic boards, and it is consistent with the relevant precepts in the *Code of practice*. The number of complaints and appeals from research students is monitored by the Learning and Teaching Committee on the basis of annual data. The audit team noted that the total number of appeals was very low and that most were not upheld.

## **Section 7: Published information**

158 The University's Publication Scheme sets out the full range of its published information and describes how it may be accessed. It also contains active web links to external sites such as Unistats, which the audit team found to include all the requisite information about the University and its activities including that specified in the relevant HEFCE directives.

159 The University has an extensive public website containing comprehensive information for a range of audiences, including potential and current students. In addition to the corporate pages published by the University, each school has its own website giving information about the taught provision offered, research, administrative guidance and links to other resources in the University. The Quality Manual is available online and the Registrar's Department publishes information for students to help them understand the University's Regulations and progress effectively through processes such as registration and enrolment.

160 The University publishes an online Programme Specification Catalogue and a Module Specifications Catalogue, each containing information relevant to the current session. The audit team found these catalogues to be comprehensive and up to date. The accuracy of the catalogues is monitored by the Registry in conjunction with schools using the Annual Programme and Module Audit website.

161 The SATURN record system is the University's authoritative source of student data. SATURN's accuracy is the responsibility of the Student Records team, whose effectiveness is evident in the small number of issues arising during the regular HEFCE comparison of the HESA and HESES returns.

162 The Quality Manual identifies student-staff feedback committees as the primary means of sharing external examiner reports with students. Although the staff whom the audit team met confirmed the operation of this route, the students whom the team met were not clear about the extent of its implementation. Moreover, the documentary evidence provided in conjunction with the two extant school reviews indicated that external examiner reports had been considered at only one of the 10 or so feedback committee meetings held in two schools over the course of two years. The team, therefore, considers it desirable that the University reflect on how it may satisfy itself that its policy in this area is implemented consistently in all schools, particularly given the recommendations on annual monitoring and school review.

163 The accuracy of other information relevant to students in relation to their programmes of study, such as course related or general handbooks issued by schools, is largely the responsibility of schools, operating within the parameters of the Quality Manual. Such handbooks are supposed to be considered as part of periodic review. However, examples of the outgoing process of

Quality Audit indicated that the quality and accuracy of handbooks is not always explicitly confirmed in reports; and the new School Review process only requires the presentation of a sample of handbooks by the School. The University may wish to reflect on this in its review of the new School Review process.

164 University prospectuses are produced centrally in consultation with schools where checks are undertaken and signed off, in addition to the central checking undertaken prior to publication. The programme and module information published in the prospectuses is derived from the central records, which has been checked for accuracy by the Registrar's department.

165 In general the evidence from students, including the students' written submission and meetings held during both the briefing and audit visits, indicated their satisfaction with the information provided to them by the University and schools. Overall, the team concluded that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

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