

# University of Greenwich

**March 2009**

## **Annex to the report**

### **Contents**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
Outcomes of the Institutional audit	3
Institutional approach to quality enhancement	3
Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students	3
Published information	3
Features of good practice	4
Recommendations for action	4
<b>Section 1: Introduction and background</b>	<b>4</b>
The institution and its mission	4
The information base for the audit	5
Developments since the last audit	5
Institutional framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities	7
<b>Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards</b>	<b>8</b>
Programme approval, monitoring and review	8
External examiners	10
The Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points	11
Assessment policies and regulations	13
Management information - statistics	15
<b>Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities</b>	<b>15</b>
The Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points	15
Approval, monitoring and review of programmes	15
Management information - feedback from students	16
Role of students in quality assurance	16
Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities	17
Other modes of study	18
Resources for learning	19

Admissions policy	20
Student support	21
Staff support (including staff development)	22
<b>Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Section 5: Collaborative arrangements</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Section 7: Published information</b>	<b>27</b>

## Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Greenwich from 09 March to 13 March 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

### Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

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

As the University of Greenwich will be subject to a separate audit of its collaborative provision, these judgements do not apply to that provision.

### Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Since 2006, the process of enhancement has been managed by the Learning Enhancement and Student Support (LESS) Working Group and by its successor, the Staff and Educational Development (SED) Working Group, which have sought to introduce a more corporate approach to enhancement and a greater impetus to central enhancement initiatives. The University has adopted a series of interrelated action plans, one of which, the Change Academy Action Plan, while not designated an enhancement strategy, nevertheless serves as such. For 2008-09, drawing on these action plans, four key themes have been highlighted, on which work has begun, and there is evidence of widespread and effective induction procedures and employability initiatives being developed.

### Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The framework of the research environment described in the QAA Review of research degree programmes in 2006 remains in place but significant evolutionary change has occurred since that date.

The University's Research Degrees Committee has quickly developed a series of mechanisms, to ensure regular and thorough review of all aspects of research degree study, which should further enhance support for students and for the continued maintenance of standards. Students met by the audit team confirmed that, in schools where there are very few postgraduate research students, the research environment does not present any problems of isolation.

There have been other incremental changes since 2006, some in response to the 2006 Review, including the exclusion of members of the candidate's supervisory team from appointment as an examiner; improved training on the selection of research students; improved training for supervisors, and the exclusion of a student's supervisors from any formal University appeals procedure.

### Published information

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

## Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following area of good practice:

- the Greenwich Portal as a comprehensive and effective means of communication with staff and students (paragraph 158).

## Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers essential:

- in order to eliminate ambiguity about the nature and standing of its taught undergraduate awards, to review the nomenclature and status of those awards that fall outside the scope of *The Framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) but nonetheless uses its terminology (paragraph 53)
- ensure that, in reaching assessment board decisions, the regulatory framework is applied consistently, and judgements do not undermine the University's assurance of the standards of its taught undergraduate awards (paragraph 68).

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- to reflect further on the ways in which central oversight of school-based periodic review is maintained and consider in particular whether provision for light touch reviews, and the relationship between professional, statutory and regulatory body reviews and internal reviews, should be more closely defined (paragraph 41)
- to clarify the roles of individuals and deliberative committees in the approval and appointment of external examiners and the operation of the external examiner system (paragraph 43)
- to implement mechanisms to maintain institutional oversight of the cumulative effect of minor changes and derogations on programmes (paragraph 56)
- to ensure the consistency, continuity, coherence and support of student representation in quality management at all levels (paragraph 89)
- in line with the recommendations of the 2004 audit, to make training compulsory for postgraduate research students who teach, and ensure institutional consistency in monitoring their teaching (paragraph 150).

## Section 1: Introduction and background

### The institution and its mission

1 The origins of the University of Greenwich (the University) can be traced to the Woolwich Polytechnic, which opened in 1891. The name was changed to Thames Polytechnic in 1970 and University status was awarded in 1992. The University is located in three main campuses in south-east London and Kent: Greenwich, Avery Hill and Chatham Maritime. The Greenwich Campus, which is located in the former Royal Naval College, is a world heritage site.

2 The 2007-08 student population across the 11 schools/institutes on the three campus sites comprised, at undergraduate level, of 5,378 at Avery Hill, 6,597 at Greenwich and 2,939 at Medway; at postgraduate taught level, 1,236 at Avery Hill, 2,352 at Greenwich and 1,620 at Medway. At postgraduate research level, there are 93 at Avery Hill, 163 at Greenwich and 183 at Medway. The largest schools are Business, with 3,597, Health and Social Care with 3,211 and Education and Training with 2,785. The smallest institute is the Greenwich Maritime Institute with 60 students.

3 The University has a regional network of 11 general and specialist further and higher education (FE and HE) partner institutions, plus other affiliated FE/HE institutions and an approved regional University Centre of Folkestone, as well as a link with Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU), providing sub-degree and degree programmes. Post-compulsory education and training is provided through a national network of more than 20 further education colleges. There is also extensive overseas collaboration. The University has developed not only these specific strategic partnerships, but also Lifelong Learning Networks (LLN). Currently, it is taking the lead in piloting a LLN involving 11 FE and HE partners in the Kent and Medway subregion of the south-east. In addition to this development, are a further three LLNs in south and south-east London and on the Thames Gateway Network for the Creative and Cultural Industries. The University's collaborative arrangements will be the subject of a separate audit.

4 The University states in its Institutional Briefing Paper that 'a commitment to access and widening participation, to the provision of vocationally relevant education and to partnership are each important in shaping the character and mission of the University'.

5 The University's mission statement, published in its corporate plan for 2006-11, is as follows: 'The University of Greenwich aims to provide high quality education, research and enterprise for international, national, regional and local communities. In doing so it focuses on: expanding opportunities for students of all ages and many backgrounds providing programmes with an emphasis on employability; the application of enterprise and research to defined need'.

### **The information base for the audit**

6 The following documents provided the evidence base for the current Institutional audit report:

- QAA Institutional audit report, 2004: QAA Review of postgraduate research programmes, 2006; QAA Collaborative provision audit, 2006 (CPA)
- External reports from the National Youth Agency, Royal Institute of British Architects, Training and Development Agency and the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)
- University of Greenwich Institutional Briefing Paper
- University of Greenwich students' written submission (SWS)
- The University's internal documents
- HEFCE circular 2006/45, *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework. Phase two outcomes*
- The notes taken by the audit secretary of audit team meetings with staff and students during the briefing and audit visits, and agreed with the team.

### **Developments since the last audit**

7 The four 'advisable' recommendations in the 2004 Institutional audit related to the provision of additional guidance to support the quality assurance of provision through Annual Reporting and Planning Documents (ARPDs); in the interests of transparency to students; expediting the process of determining which aspects of assessment policy should be universally applicable and standardised across schools or incorporated into University regulations; strengthening arrangements to ensure parity of treatment for combined honours students, and training support for research students involved in teaching or demonstration. The first of these has been acted upon by the University revising its ARPD template and providing additional guidance notes. Following the 2006 Collaborative provision audit, further comments were made by the University about the ARPDs, which have led to additional amendments to the template and a greater analytical and strategic steer being provided, with clear links to academic and resource planning.

8 The draft ARPDs go to the Vice-Chancellor's Group (VCG) , whose members, as line managers for particular schools and offices make their comments for schools or offices to revise or amend accordingly; the Office of the Vice-Chancellor then disseminates the component sections of the ARPD to the appropriate managers and deliberative and executive committees and subcommittees of the University.

9 It was the view of the audit team that while much of the 2004 recommendation had been acted upon, the 'effective channel for institutional oversight' could be improved by a combined summary feedback of all of the component parts of the ARPD being disseminated to the wider University community of schools and offices, in addition to the multiplicity of the individual feedback mechanisms, to achieve the more holistic institutional response to individual ARPDs as mentioned in its Institutional Briefing Paper. Further commentary on the substantive use of ARPDs can be found elsewhere in this report in paragraphs 78, 88, 89, 112, 113, 119 and 120.

10 The University has extensive Academic Regulations for Taught Awards and also school Assessment policies, which are approved by the Learning and Quality Committee (LQC). After the 2004 audit, these were amended to incorporate extenuating circumstances and handing in of late work, thereby improving the transparency of information to students.

11 At the previous Institutional audit, recommendations were made to improve the parity of treatment for combined honours students. The University has subsequently put in place a number of actions to improve and enhance the support for these students through cross-school induction timetabling; personal tutors and supervisors in the respective schools with joint responsibility; establishing lead school responsibility for progression and achievement at progression and award boards (PABs); an electronic digest for cross-school information, and a combined honours group on Greenwich Portal.

12 The University, in response to the 2004 audit report, is now providing skills training for postgraduate research students, in addition to online research-skills modules. Teaching induction workshops are also available for postgraduate research students involved in teaching or demonstrating, but these are, currently, optional. Monitoring and support for students in this latter context does occur, but on an informal basis.

13 It was the view of the audit team that the response from the University could be strengthened by making this mandatory, with the training requirement overseen and monitored by the Research Degrees Committee (RDC), (see paragraph 150).

14 At the previous 2004 Institutional audit, there were five recommendations classified as 'desirable' relating to making explicit the University's approach in relation to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA; central consideration of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRB) reports; giving greater priority to promoting students' involvement in quality management; ensuring full implementation of teaching staff appraisal and its relationship with learning and teaching and other institutional strategies, and more systematic training and continuing staff development for research supervisors. These were acted upon as shown in paragraphs 15 to 20.

15 The University now formally notes new editions of sections of the *Code of practice* and requests feedback from relevant parts of the institution about their consideration of the precepts. Additionally, a Guide to Quality has been published, identifying which parts of the University are responsible for maintaining consistency with the *Code*.

16 The 2009 audit team noted that while PSRB reports proceed to the Learning and Quality Unit and are reported to the University via the schools' ARPDs, the wealth of detail on other matters provided in the ARPDs could lead to the full impact of these reports being overlooked. The team found strong evidence of influential practice in the PSRB section of Architecture, Health and Social Care and Pharmacy ARPDs which, in its view, could be of great benefit to the wider University community. Although it is acknowledged that LQC now receives an annual overview

report of the outcomes of PSRB visits, the team would encourage the University to become more proactive in disseminating the outcomes of PSRB visits and reviews to a more inclusive/institutional audience, especially given its mission of vocational education.

17 The University acknowledges that it has sometimes struggled to ensure 'active and dynamic student participation in the formal student representation system'. Immediately following the 2004 audit, the University took steps to ensure that the Students' Union was providing consistent and appropriate training for its student representatives, accompanied by a student handbook. Owing to the Students' Union organisational change, the handbook and training were not available this academic year. Further comment on this matter is provided in paragraphs 86 and 87.

18 The audit team saw evidence of student representation at school and programme level and also of student officers on all of the senior committees of the University. However, representation within schools continues to vary in the level and nature of participation. Further comment on this matter is provided below in paragraphs 88 to 90.

19 The University Staff and Education Development Working Group oversees school staff development, ensures its linkage to the Learning and Teaching Strategy and reviews appraisal activity. The audit team saw evidence, through meetings with staff, ARPDs and also staff development documentation, that staff appraisal occurs on a biennial basis and is monitored by the personnel office. In the ARPDs, however, wide variations were apparent from one school to another in respect of staff appraisal, with stronger links to staff development in some schools than in others.

20 Training and staff development for research supervisors is available for both new and experienced staff, but it is not mandatory. In order to satisfy the need for impartiality, as well as exclusion from acting as an internal examiner, University regulations for postgraduate provision now exclude a member of the supervisory team from being a member of the review audit team convened in the case of an appeal. This is described in greater detail in paragraph 152.

21 In the view of the audit team the University has made progress in addressing the recommendations of the 2004 audit, but some areas for consideration still remain.

### **Institutional framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities**

22 The University's strategic position regarding the management of academic standards is stated in two key principles:

- authority for quality management is delegated to schools using mutually agreed frameworks, principles, policies and protocols
- engagement with external evaluation of University standards and quality management processes is fundamental and provides an independent and critically supportive view of those standards and processes.

23 The principal University committee responsible for the maintenance of academic standards and for overseeing the quality of learning opportunities is Academic Council, the senior deliberative body of the University. Two committees support Academic Council and also report directly to it; the Academic Collaborative Committee and the LQC. In addition, there is the Academic Planning Subcommittee (APSC) of the Executive Committee, which also reports to Academic Council.

24 The University has a central, institution-wide Research Degrees Committee (RDC) supported by the Research Students Administrative Office. In addition, there is a University-wide corporate post of Director of PG Research, who chairs the RDC and reports directly to the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research and Enterprise.

25 In order to promulgate its approaches to, and methods for, managing quality, the University publishes a quality assurance handbook. The handbook provides detail on the principles and procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of programmes, as well as the review of departments and schools. The handbook is reviewed on an annual basis and regularly updated as a web document in response to relevant changes in both the *Code of Practice* and the University's policies, practices or structure. A more general Guide to Quality provides staff and external participants with an overview of the University's approach to managing the quality and standards of its provision.

## **Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards**

26 The systems for the management of curricula and assessment provide the primary means by which the University assures the standards of its awards. The Institutional Briefing Paper identified the following mechanisms for doing so: programme approval procedures, programme specifications, annual monitoring of provision, periodic reviews, external examiners, accreditation and recognition by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs), student feedback, and staff development.

27 The majority of these mechanisms are also concerned with the management of academic quality. Those aspects most closely associated with academic standards, namely the use of external reference points in programme design, approval, monitoring and review; programme specifications; the assessment of students; external examining, and the use of relevant management information, are dealt with here under the heading of management of academic standards.

28 The University operates on the principle that scrutiny should be proportional to risk and already uses a risk-based approach to inform the way in which it manages some aspects of its approach to academic standards, such as the programme review cycle.

### **Programme approval, monitoring and review**

29 The principal University committee responsible for the maintenance of academic standards and for overseeing the quality of learning opportunities is Academic Council, the senior deliberative body of the institution. It is supported, for internal taught programmes, by the Learning and Quality Committee (LQC), which reports to it and is responsible for oversight of quality assurance policy and procedure, as well as providing cross-school oversight to ensure institutional consistency.

30 Mirroring the University committee structure, schools convene school boards, which are subcommittees of Academic Council, and school learning and quality committees (SLQC) that report to those boards and deal with strategic, policy and quality management matters. The school boards are responsible for maintaining oversight of all activity within the school.

31 In order to develop policies in key areas, the University commissions working groups, which report either to its academic or its executive arm. Key working groups include those that have considered the Academic Regulations; Joint and Dual Awards; Student Retention; Assessment; Statistics, and Academic Conduct.

32 All new programmes require authorisation or approval in principle, prior to more detailed academic development. Authorisation marks the interface between academic planning and quality assurance. Proposals for new programmes are submitted to the Academic Planning Subcommittee (APSC), which is responsible for the management of the University's portfolio of programmes, and has a dual reporting line, both to the Executive Committee and to Academic Council. Proposals for suspension and discontinuation of programmes are also made to, and authorised by, the APSC.



33 Authorisation requires all programmes to be associated with an appropriate host school or academic unit, and heads of school or unit are required to establish that there is, at first sight, a case for the development. All internal approval events are undertaken by ad hoc panels. Once authorised by APSC, the Learning and Quality Unit (LQU) maintains central oversight of the approval process through receipt of the full report of the programme approval meeting and subsequently, summary forms from the panel chair, confirming conditions have been met.

34 The ad hoc panels are required to have a member external to the University who is qualified to provide an independent view of the programmes under consideration, taking into account the needs of the discipline, the industry and other aspects of professional practice. For those considered during the audit, this was seen to be the case. The approvals process makes use of programme specifications, taking into account the FHEQ, and, where appropriate, subject benchmark statements.

35 Once programmes are approved, further changes are considered at the local level by the SLQC and, once approved locally, copies of change documentation are sent to the Banner team to update central records. Banner is an integrative suite of administrative software, which connects students and staff to the services and information they need, and is used by the University for areas such as financial records, student records, accommodation, financial aid and other services. While this enables schools to operate in line with the University's devolved structure, the audit team was of the view that the University would benefit from ensuring that local changes were more formally monitored, to ensure that there was an institutional overview of the cumulative effect of such minor changes on programmes (see paragraph 56).

36 Schools are able to decide upon the extent and depth to which programme and course monitoring takes place, on the assumption that assessment of risk will guide the level of reporting in each session, and that, within any given five-year cycle, all programmes will normally be appropriately amended, updated and formally reviewed. There are no clear guidelines on the assessment of risk. There is an optional risk-analysis tool to aid decision-making. This follows a tick-box approach and has no clear criteria as to what would be considered high or low-risk; its use is not reviewed by the University centre. The identification of programmes for review is undertaken by the school, with engagement from LQU, and the outcomes are reported to the LQC.

37 PSRB visits were seen to play an important role within the University's approach to programme review. In discussions with the audit team, it was recognised by the University that PSRB visits tended to have a programme(s)-specific focus, based on the needs of accreditation, which could be different from the requirements of the University's periodic review process. The team noted, however, that the University framework could currently allow PSRB visits to replace reviews. Although the team saw benefits from PSRB visits and consideration of their role in the review cycle, it took the view that the potential to use such visits in place of recognised internal review, without mapping the content of PSRB scrutiny onto University review requirements, could potentially limit the University's ability to ensure that its own review requirements were met in full. In relation to the review cycle, the team saw documentation showing how the review of Computing programmes had been postponed from 2005 to 2008 to align internal review with the British Computing Society accreditation process, thereby extending the formal review period from five to eight years.

38 The University indicated in its Briefing Paper for the audit visit that all internal review panel events continued to require a Chair from outside the host school. During the audit, it became clear that if a decision based on perceived risk was made to undertake a 'light touch' review, this would normally be undertaken by the school's learning and quality committee and that role would be filled by its chair. Assurance was given that the review would include staff external to the University but the University recognised it had no formal definition of 'light touch', nor any formal means of reviewing such 'light touch' reviews against a set of central criteria.

39 While the school's consideration of the review methodology to be used was supported by the LQU, the University recognised the need to reflect further on the definition and framework for 'light touch' reviews, to ensure consistency of practice and the robustness of its central oversight. It was noted that the University was developing an online system to support review and approval, which may help provide further guidance and oversight of this area. It was the view of the audit team that, with current guidance, the risk-based approach to review could reduce the level of rigour in the assurance the University was able to attain through its review cycle.

40 The quality committees of the University undertake direct scrutiny of approval, review, PSRB and external examiner reports and this activity is supported by the completion of the annual ARPD. The ARPD is disaggregated, with overview reports of each of its sections considered, as appropriate, either via the executive or the deliberative committees of the University.

41 While, therefore, the approval, monitoring and review processes seem generally robust the audit team nevertheless has some reservations: the risk-based moderation of the review cycle may impact on the future ability of the University both to maintain effective oversight of the quality of its programmes and to make progress against its strategic framework (see paragraph 35). Where PSRB or other considerations are felt to warrant a 'light touch' approach, the University should ensure that there is limited scope for variation of the length of the review cycle around the five-year period, and that its own periodic review requirements are met in full. It was the view of the team that currently, the risk-based approach to review could reduce the level of rigour in the assurance the University was able to attain through its review cycle. The team concluded that it would be advisable for the University to reflect further on the ways in which central oversight of school-based periodic review is maintained, and consider, in particular, whether provision for 'light touch' reviews, and the relationship between PSRB reviews and internal reviews, should be more closely defined.

## **External examiners**

42 External examiners are appointed to oversee individual programmes of study, grouped programmes of study with common courses, or sets of courses that run across multiple programmes. All appointments are governed by criteria made explicit in the Academic Regulations and designed to assure the independence of the nominee.

43 The appointment of external examiners is a function of Academic Council, but in practice this function has been delegated to school boards, with University-wide records maintained centrally within the online reporting system by the LQU. Discussion with staff involved in the process indicated that while there was clarity among staff over the central role of the LQU, there was a lack of clarity among staff as to the body responsible for authorising appointments. In contrast to the regulations, which delegate authority for approval for appointment to the school boards, widely held views were encountered by the audit team that the LQU had been given delegated authority to approve. The role of the LQC, for example in relation to that of the LQU or Pro-Vice Chancellor (Learning and Quality), was also unclear to staff, especially in cases where approvals might fall outside current regulations. The audit team was therefore of the opinion that it would strengthen the integrity of the external examining system if the University were to clarify further the roles of individuals, offices and deliberative committees in the approval process, and that such clarification should give particular consideration to the University's approach where applications fall outside the standard criteria. It is advisable that the University clarifies the roles of individuals, offices and deliberative committees in the approval and appointment of external examiners, and the operation of the external examiner system.

44 It is the responsibility of the LQU to ensure that new external examiners receive general information, including the University's Academic Regulations for Taught Awards, together with a pro forma and guidance on the preparation of annual reports. The information provided appeared to the audit team to offer reasonable background material and is available in electronic form to new examiners.

45 External examiners report directly to the University, using an online reporting template designed to reflect the guidance of the *Code of practice*. The report is immediately distributed by the automated external examiner system to senior school representatives, the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Quality) and the LQU, allowing responses to external examiners to be made directly online. The system not only enables schools and the University to address recommendations, but also produces a clear colour-coded guide to areas of performance that require attention.

46 The audit team recognises the effectiveness of this approach, which appears to enable the University to compare quickly external examiners' comments to fixed questions across the institution as part of its continuing review of standards at a local and institutional level. The team noted from meetings with staff and students that the student representatives who met with the team did not appear to have sight of examiners' comments, which is now an expectation of HEFCE. The team encourages the University to consider how it might, as a matter of course, make external examiners' reports available to students' representatives.

47 The LQU oversees all external examiners' reports and identifies those raising any issues of concern; it also coordinates responses to institutional-level recommendations, either directly or following consultation with appropriate departments, school or offices. An institutional summary presented to the LQC and to Academic Council identifies any salient issues and reviews the institutional-level comments made by external examiners.

48 The audit team noted from review of material in the audit trails that confusion had at times been reported over who was the appointed external examiner for a programme. There were a range of examples from the review documentation, which gave the impression that external examiners were not in place. While the team identified that external examiners in those cases were working across courses, there is a need to ensure that programme leaders and internal examiners are clear about the role of the external examiner, and on their own role, in relation to the awards. It was noted by the team that the statements regarding lack of an external examiner contained in annual monitoring reports (AMRs) had not been resolved prior to the completion of the programme AMR, and appeared to arise on successive occasions, giving rise to questions regarding the ability of programme leaders to resolve these issues in a timely manner as part of the standard operational process.

49 The University considers that its external examining system is both robust and, in its use of the online system, innovative. The University adopts a dual approach, with schools and the LQU responding to, and reporting upon, examiners' commentaries, thereby providing local and central coverage of the issues that arise. Most aspects of the system are sufficiently effective, although there are key areas for improvement. The audit team concluded that there would be benefits from clarifying for staff the roles and responsibilities of individuals, offices and deliberative committees in the approval process. This would help to ensure greater shared understanding of the appointment of examiners and their role with respect to assuring the standards of the awards.

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

50 Externality in quality management is addressed through external examining; schools involvement with PSRBs; the use of external academic and practitioner team members, and independent chairs for programme approval, review events and research degree oral examinations.

51 The design of any new programme is required to adhere to key aspects of the Academic Infrastructure, in particular, the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements, to which programme specifications are expected to refer. This central principle is encapsulated within the Academic Regulations. Schools and offices are also expected to adhere to the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice* in all of their operations.

52 The programme specifications examined by the audit team adhered to the FHEQ, although the audit team was concerned that the University was granting generic credit-bearing awards, for example Greenwich Diplomas and Greenwich Certificates, to students who had obtained credits, but who had not achieved the defined outcomes for their original programmes. Such awards were not linked to the programme specifications reviewed and the University recognised that they did not meet descriptors given for corresponding qualifications in the FHEQ and credit framework. In the absence of predefined outcomes and a programme specification for the Greenwich awards, this situation is misleading, especially so when compared to the overall University statement in its Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH), which clearly states that '...All awards offered by the University must conform to the FHEQ'. The awards mentioned above are confirmed by the examination boards, but are not linked to assessed outcomes, and have credit ratings outside the credit framework referred to in the FHEQ. External examiners review individual modules, but do not consider the overall award.

53 The University recognised that using the same terminology for its own awards as was used nationally within the FHEQ, such as 'diploma', when these awards did not meet FHEQ requirements could lead to confusion and misunderstanding outside the institution. It is strongly recommended by the audit team that the University consider its approach to these awards and the terminology used, to ensure compliance with its own QAH regarding the need for all its awards to be part of the FHEQ. It is essential that the University, in order to eliminate ambiguity about the nature and standing of its awards, review the nomenclature and status of those awards that fall outside the scope of the FHEQ, but which nonetheless use its terminology.

54 Reports and the outcomes of PSRB visits are considered at school level and reported to the University via the school's ARPD, with the LQC maintaining a watching brief on the schedule of PSRB visits.

55 Following the recommendations from the 2004 QAA Institutional audit, reports of PSRB visits are also sent to the LQU, reported in the ARPD and, as of 2008-09, the LQC receives an annual overview report on the outcomes of PSRB visits. The current audit team recognised that this would further strengthen the review process by providing central overview of all PSRB recommendations. It was noted, however, that despite the importance that the University has assigned to PSRBs, these changes have only recently been implemented and consideration of PSRB reports is not taking place within the central deliberative structures. Since the team found evidence of the internal review cycles being adjusted based on engagement with PSRBs (see paragraph 37), it considered it important that these reports were considered in some detail centrally as part of the review framework. The University should also ensure that PSRB reports are considered by the institution's deliberative bodies, to identify generic issues, emerging themes and good practice.

56 The University QAH specifically allows for derogation from regulations. The audit team saw examples where such requests were being considered by Academic Council, with some approved and others rejected. The University maintains a central record of such derogations. The team was of the view that it would be useful for the University to review formally the list of approved derogations through its deliberative structures on a cyclical basis, to enable a judgement to be made on the extent of derogations by school and the potential impact that cumulative derogations could have on consistency across the University. Having reached a similar conclusion with respect to local changes to programmes, the team therefore considers it advisable that the University implements mechanisms to maintain institutional oversight of the cumulative effect of minor changes and derogations on programmes.

57 The University takes account of the precepts of the *Code of practice* through a range of mechanisms. For example, those relating to assessment and academic appeals are enshrined in the Academic Regulations, while those relating to programme design, approval, monitoring and review are embodied in the QAH, with relevant changes considered and incorporated into the QAH by the LQU. The LQC formally notes new editions of the *Code* and requests feedback from relevant parts of the University about consideration of the precepts. Staff involved in quality

assurance noted that changes were supported by training events where appropriate, such as in the case where the degree classification system was reviewed. In addition, staff are provided with updates via email and on the Greenwich Portal.

58 The University has recognised the need to respond to the European Standards and Guidelines and has developed a European strategy with each school having a European Champion. The University is working on a Diploma Supplement, which it had hoped to be ready in 2007, but which is now due during 2008-09. The University is active in the Erasmus programme and recognises the need for the Supplement to help support student exchange and credit transfer.

59 While the audit team therefore found good use being made of the Academic Infrastructure for the majority of programmes, there was evidence that, in contradiction to its own regulatory framework, the University was making awards that fell outside the FHEQ, but were nonetheless using its terminology. In the view of the team, such awards had the potential to be misrepresented outside of the institution, a view with which the University, in its discussions with the team, accepted (see paragraph 53).

### **Assessment policies and regulations**

60 The University's Academic Regulations define a range of procedures and protocols relating to assessment, progression, awards, external examiner appointment and duties, and regulations governing cheating, plagiarism and extenuation. These regulations provide a framework within which schools are expected to operate.

61 In response to the recommendations from the previous QAA Institutional audit, which referred to speeding up the process of determining which aspects of assessment policy should be universally applicable, the Academic Regulations were reviewed in 2005. The review aimed to ensure greater University-wide consistency in key aspects of the framework, for example, use of extenuation and penalties for the late submission of work. These changes to the regulations have been made, with University-wide penalties being implemented; those with respect to late submission have been captured in the regulations.

62 To assure standards of marking and the consistency of student progression and degree classification, the University operates a two-tier examination board system managed by its schools: subject assessment panels and department assessment panels (SAPs; DAPs), addressing course and cohort standards, and progression and awards boards (PABs), dealing with individual student progression and award. Their remit and membership is defined within the Academic Regulations.

63 The University has recently undertaken further revisions to its regulatory framework, which were implemented in 2007-08. The changes were intended to enable PABs to adopt a more sophisticated approach to student progression and classification through profiling, including the greater use of interim exit awards to recognise achievement.

64 After the review of its regulations, the University introduced a new degree classification system based on three possible ways of considering student achievement: the first based on a weighted grade point average (GPA) across years two and three; the second based on final-year GPA only; and the third based on module profiles. A PAB is given three models for determining a result and is guided by whichever one gives the student the best outcome. The models for arriving at degree classifications are intended to recognise the reality of different learning patterns in a diverse student population. The method chosen, however, is linked to the results pattern, in that it allows a student who produces respectable marks only in the final year to obtain a degree class that reflects the level of achievement in the final year. PABs should only make recommendations that disregard these three methods where there are exceptional circumstances. The implications of using one or other of the three models for each student's

overall result is considered by the PAB and the award is made in accordance with the most favourable outcome for the individual student. The system was implemented for the first time in summer 2008 and feedback from staff indicated that all three methods were considered when determining the classification, to ensure equity across the student cohort.

65 The impact of the new arrangements in relation to the summer 2008 assessments was analysed by LQU and a report was presented to LQC at its September 2008 meeting. The report indicated that the revised classification system had led to an increase in First and Upper Second class awards, a situation that the University intends to monitor. The report also found, however, that around 7 per cent of the awards made did not fit with any of the three profiling methods. While this situation was noted by the LQC, no clear action to investigate further was instigated. In the view of the audit team, it was a matter of concern that a key committee of the University had not appeared to take further action to investigate a matter that would appear to raise issues about the operation of the new system and about its assurance of the consistency of its awards more generally. Meetings with staff confirmed that only the three methods approved and encapsulated within the regulations should have been applied, with variations around border lines considered by boards in exceptional circumstances. However, not all cases could be explained on grounds of exceptional circumstances. This was confirmed by the minutes of the LQC, with the University raising concerns if boards were effectively 'double discounting' by applying a borderline to uplift candidates. Although extending the number of methods of calculating the classification was intended to remove discretionary uplift at class boundaries, this had not happened and in a significant number of cases, students had benefited both from the 'best of three' calculations and by been given uplift. These cases did not fit with the profiling method and examination boards had clearly used some form of discretion.

66 A paper presented to the audit team on the final day of the audit confirmed that the report had been seen as providing an 'early warning system' about the need 'to remain vigilant about the use of discretion at the borderline in the future' rather than as an identification as 'a threat to standards requiring immediate action'. The team noted that the University had accepted that a significant proportion of awards had fallen outside its three models for arriving at degree classifications, but had not taken any action as a consequence, commenting only that '...behavioural change and the transition to a new set of regulations can take time to achieve'.

67 Overall, therefore, the audit team was of the view that although there was a regulatory framework for managing academic standards, within which schools were expected to operate, the regulations have not provided clarity as to whether this can apply at borderlines, when the year-three GPA model has been used, since it may give rise to 'double discounting', which the University acknowledges may be a problem. Additionally, there is no clear statement that there was an expectation that when the new regulations were introduced borderline cases would become the exception, which does not appear to be the case. LQC had received a detailed analysis of the impact of the new classification system, which had indicated a clear discrepancy in the system, resulting in a significant number of awards being made that were outside the new standard regulations. The LQC minutes commented on the extent of the discrepancy, but did not appear to respond to its significance, and the team could find no evidence of an action plan to resolve this situation.

68 In the light of its discussion with staff, the audit team was satisfied that the system was not operating as intended, in that there was an expectation that only three methods would be used, with few exceptional cases, but their use is very poorly defined. No action had been taken by the senior deliberative bodies on the approximately 7 per cent of exceptional circumstances, other than to continue monitoring classification in the future. The team agreed that it is essential for the University to ensure that, in reaching assessment board decisions, the regulatory framework is applied consistently and judgements do not undermine the University's assurance of the standards of its taught undergraduate awards.

## Management information - statistics

69 The central analysis by LQC of external examiners' feedback provides an effective use of summary statistics, to consider a range of matters, from examiner attendance at examination boards through to specific questions around standards and the comparability of programmes.

70 The Planning and Statistics Unit's (PAS) formal role includes managing the University's HESA return, and therefore the University's quantitative Teaching Quality Information/Unistats data. PAS, via the University's management information system, manages the links with Unistats. It provides both internal and externally published data on student performance, on both a formal basis annually and ad hoc, in response to specific requests for detailed management information. For example, the outcomes of the applications and the progression analyses by PAS are reported annually to Academic Council and PAS monitors the performance of the University against a range of benchmarks.

71 The last five years have seen the development of Advizor, a tool for analysing data in support of the monitoring, review and analysis of student achievement and the audit team saw work across the Office of Student Affairs (OSA) and the Partnership Division in monitoring and review of statistical data related to student achievement. A recent report by OSA on student welfare and achievement for the Secretary and Registrar included working with the Recruitment and Admissions Office, with the objective of gaining the Frank Buttle Trust Quality Award for Care Leavers, which the University achieved in June 2008.

72 The University uses data analysis for both its development of policy and integrating key targets within the planning framework. This is currently used by key staff within schools to monitor performance and allows comparison with University norms. For example, the policy created in 2006 to deal with student retention identifies programme-level data requirements for analysis within ARPDs. This analysis is influencing the way the schools respond to the retention question.

73 The audit team concluded that limited confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the taught undergraduate awards that it offers. The standards of postgraduate research awards are considered in Section 6.

## Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

74 The major emphasis of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy is on learning enhancement and continuous improvement in its students' learning experience. It highlights the appropriate use of new technology to support the learning process.

### Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

75 The University makes use of external indicators and has, for example, previously found through internal information and HEFCE Performance Indicators that its rate of attrition was above the national average. A student retention policy was developed and agreed by Academic Council in May 2006, with progress against targets being monitored.

76 The University makes use of external benchmarking opportunities, and the student centres on each campus are currently preparing for assessment by the national Matrix Quality Kite Mark for excellence in the provision of information, advice and guidance.

### Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

77 Whether programmes are being initially approved or reviewed, the associated documentation must provide a summary of the resources and facilities required or being used. For new programmes, the documentation must also describe the rationale for bringing the programme into being, both in academic terms and from the point of view of the market, and refer to teaching, learning and assessment strategies.

78 The Academic Reporting and Planning Document (ARPD) plays an important role in the monitoring process by requiring schools to provide commentary on, among other things, the provision they have made for gathering student feedback; how they have addressed the needs of international students; their student progression profiles; and what their approach has been to the monitoring and review of programmes. On current evidence, the University believes that the approaches taken by schools to the monitoring of courses and programmes, as reported in their ARPDs, are relatively conventional.

79 The University also undertakes some reviews of activity at programme level, for example, work identified in the Developing Student Employability proposals, which define action in four main areas: core competencies; work placement; development of curricula; and links with employers. Each school is required to identify the primary focus for their employability-based activities through the ARPD.

80 Periodic review of a programme was seen by the audit team to take account of the experience of students and the views of staff and external examiners.

### **Management information - feedback from students**

81 The audit team saw evidence of the University using a variety of means to gather student feedback, including end-of-course module evaluation questionnaires (MEQs) and staff-student liaison meetings. Student representative systems appeared to be in place, but student representatives lacked any central training or guidance on their role. There also appeared to be variations in the way responses to feedback was given to students, with some representatives reporting they were not aware of actions taken in response to their feedback.

82 The outcomes of the National Students' Survey (NSS) and University Students' Survey (USS) are discussed widely at a range of levels: within schools, at the Learning and Quality Committee (LQC), and at Academic Council. Following the NSS in 2007, the University required that each school, along with the Office of Information and Library Services (ILS) and the Office of Student Affairs (OSA), draw up action plans based on the strengths and weaknesses identified.

83 The audit team did, however, see evidence of intervention based on student feedback. For example, OSA, the Education Development Team (EDT) and the Learning and Quality Unit (LQU) had carried out a substantial centrally funded project on assessment and feedback to students in the light of NSS results. The project, which is now continuing into 2008-09, has focused on the identification of current and effective practices. Improvements have been recorded in relation to the dissemination of clear assessment criteria; clear and fair marking; feedback being prompt and detailed, and in noting the fact that feedback on student work has helped clarify understanding.

84 Each campus has a Student Centre, which draws together elements from each of its service areas, including comprehensive user statistics and feedback, for inclusion in an annual report that is presented to the OSA management team. Additionally, a joint three-centre report is provided annually for consideration at Academic Council.

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

85 Opportunities for student representatives to contribute to discussions regarding curriculum delivery and evaluation issues exist in programme committees and school boards. Representatives on these committees are nominated by their peers or invited to participate by members of staff. At institutional level, Students' Union of the University of Greenwich (SUUG) sabbatical officers are ex officio members of Academic Council and the SUUG Vice-President (Education) is a member of other University-level committees, including LQC.

86 The University acknowledges that it has sometimes struggled to ensure 'active and dynamic student participation in the formal student representation system'. However, it did, as a response to the QAA's recommendation in its 2004 Institutional audit report, work with SUUG to implement a programme of activity to improve student representation. This resulted in the production of



a comprehensive student representatives' handbook, which clearly set out the various levels of student representation and the role of the Student Representatives Council (SRC) in providing a forum for selected school representatives to meet with SUUG officers. This was accompanied by 'Stand Up and Stand Out', a publication encouraging students to participate as representatives. Student representatives were, until recently, trained and supported by the SUUG training officers, who were delivering the wider, Be Involved to Evolve (BITE) skills and employability training programme with the involvement of the LQU. According to the extent of their involvement as representatives or in training representatives, students were eligible for certification at three levels: Volunteer Recognition Certificate, Representation Certificate and Leadership Certificate.

87 In the current year, the SUUG again promoted student representation through an updated version of 'Stand Up and Stand Out', which in this edition made reference to school but not programme representatives. However, SUUG organisational change meant that training for student representatives and a student representatives' handbook was not available, and the BITE programme did not run. SUUG officers continue to participate in committees at institutional level, however, and liaise with school representatives through the SRC. After an unsettled period, meetings between the University Secretary and Registrar and the SUUG President and sabbatical officers have also been initiated, to further develop the positive working relationship between the University's senior managers and the SUUG, referred to in the student written submission. A working group involving the SUUG and the University Secretary and Registrar is also currently reviewing the SUUG constitution and the services the Union offers.

88 Students met by the audit team reported that they were either representatives themselves or knew who their representatives were. However, evidence from academic staff, students and ARPDs confirmed that, although in many schools there were large numbers of representatives, participation in committees was variable and that the recruitment of representatives continues to be a challenge, with two schools reporting that they had no student representation on their school boards. Reporting in the ARPD also suggested that there was variation between schools in their expectations of student representation. While the majority of schools make reference to participation on programme committees and school boards, three placed emphasis on staff-student liaison meetings, with two making no mention of other opportunities for representation. In the absence of formal training, variation was also apparent in the extent to which representatives had been prepared for their role. Some had received informal verbal guidance, while in cases where written guidance was provided, this ranged from a description of the role of a representative through to basic guidance on preparing for meetings and, in one example, more detailed information on what makes a good representative and how to manage workload.

89 Student representatives are also involved in a range of other activities, including interviews, questionnaires and focus groups. The SUUG is currently working with the University on student induction and with library managers on a project related to library opening hours. One school also identified in its ARPD the valuable role played by students in periodic review.

90 The audit team noted that although significant developments had taken place since the last QAA audit, in relation to the training and support of student representatives, with the involvement of the SUUG, the University had not been able to sustain this activity in the current academic year. The team also noted that the representation, which continues to take place within schools varies in terms of the level and nature of participation. The team therefore considered it advisable for the University to ensure the consistency, continuity, coherence and support of student representation in quality management at all levels.

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

91 It is the University's aim to be 'fully research-informed', with a culture that is characterised by enquiry and innovation. To this end, the Learning and Teaching Strategy aims to set out the ways in which teaching can most easily and profitably be linked to research, scholarship and advanced professional practice, for the benefit of students. The Strategy aims to ensure that

curriculum development and approaches to learning should enable students to engage in scholarly activity and the development of knowledge, develop research skills and recognise the importance of evidence-based practice and the use of research information. Furthermore, it identifies the development of the capacity of staff to link, systematically and creatively, and as a priority, the curriculum to research, advanced scholarly activity and professional practice. To this end it is specified in the University's quality assurance handbook that level 3 and master's courses should be delivered by teaching teams, which have to include active researchers. The University also has an expectation that the majority of its staff should be involved in research or scholarship. The audit team was able to confirm, from the curricula vitae presented during validation and review, that this was the case. Students also confirmed that their learning had been informed by staff research activity.

92 The development of the relationship between learning and teaching and research, articulated in the Learning and Teaching Strategy is supported by the aim of enhancing the skills of academic staff as practitioners. An increasing level of support has been provided for the involvement of staff in pedagogic research as described in the TQEF action plan 2006-07 to 2008-09. In particular, they have been encouraged to share effective practice through the Learning Enhancement website (LENS). This website carries useful information on 42 projects, covering areas including e-learning, key skills and classroom management, which were all posted in 2007. Another valuable, more recent (2008), publication to support staff taking their first steps in pedagogic research was the Post-Conference Reflections and Abstracts from the Greenwich e-learning conference published by the EDT. The University acknowledges that these developments have been a little slow in implementation, but hopes that an EDT publication planned for May 2009: *Pushing the Boundaries: A Staff Publication for Research into Learning and Teaching*, will provide further impetus.

93 After reading evidence from the Teaching and Learning Strategy, supported by discussion with students, the audit team found that the University's approach to supporting and developing links between research and scholarship and the curricula is a strength, and makes a positive contribution to the quality of its students' learning opportunities.

### **Other modes of study**

94 The University's Corporate Plan identifies that 'the development of flexible, accessible and vocationally relevant programmes for a wide range of students lies at the heart of the University's mission'. In 2007-08, the Part-time and Flexible Learning Working Group produced plans that have focused on the development of flexible, part-time provision and short courses, including continuing professional development (CPD). A four-year, 'UG-FLEX' project, funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) has been established to 'involve stakeholders from across the University in developing new shared models of flexible curriculum design' and to support the changes in business processes and information systems that will be necessitated by these developments.

95 The University's requirement for all Foundation Degrees (FDs) to contain work-based learning (WBL) as a minimum of one-quarter of the curriculum, has placed a renewed emphasis on the involvement of employers in curriculum development and delivery, including guest lectures, case-studies and the provision of work placements. The University has seen a decline in the number of students wishing to take sandwich years. While continuing to promote opportunities for spending a year in industry, the University is increasingly placing an emphasis on other forms of work experience and work-related learning. In recognition of the importance of work placements in developing the employability of students, a Work Placement Group was established to develop a strategy for increasing the number of placement opportunities.

96 A Higher Education Academy (HEA) benchmarking exercise, undertaken in 2007, reported that, arising from its dispersed nature across the institution, the University's e-learning was characterised by its diversity in both policy and provision. The 2006-11 e-learning strategy, which forms part of the Learning and Teaching Strategy, aims to provide a set of developmental targets and focused central provision in support of a policy of 'managed diversity'. A review and update of

the strategy is imminent, pending the publication of the HEFCE/JISC e-learning strategy. Currently the strategy sets out a comprehensive set of objectives in the areas of: pedagogy, curriculum design and development; learning resources and networked learning; student support, progression and collaboration; strategic management, human resources and capacity development; quality; research and evaluation, and infrastructure and technical standards. Monitoring and review of the strategy is undertaken by the e-learning Implementation Group (e-LIG) chaired by the Head of Information and Library Services. The University's e-Learning Strategy is implemented through individual strategies within each school. The active engagement with e-learning is a recurring theme within school ARPDs and many schools have identified blended and e-learning as priorities for continuing staff development.

97 The University offers a wide range of staff development opportunities in support of the development of e-learning, innovations in learning and teaching with technology. These include a seminar series on 'Getting to grips with e-learning' and a Certificate of Professional Development in e-Learning, Teaching and Training (CeLTT) delivered by the School of Education and Training, and on-line interactive materials and accredited workshops and courses managed by the EDT.

98 The University has provided funding to support e-learning innovation projects for a number of years. The value of these small-scale projects has been enhanced by the recent appointment of a learning technologist, who is providing support in the use of technological advances, such as webstreaming and podcasting. The annual e-learning@greenwich conference has grown in the seven years since its inception, from an internal event, to one which attracts international participants and high-profile keynote speakers and sponsors. This provides an excellent opportunity for staff carrying out University-funded e-learning projects to showcase their work.

99 An outcome of the HEA e-Benchmarking Exercise was a realisation by the University that although there was a widely held view among academic staff that e-learning enhanced the learning experience, there was no evidence base to substantiate this belief. A subsequent bid was successfully made for HEA funding to support a Pathfinder project, the Student Experience of E-Learning Laboratory (SEEL) to investigate the student experience of e-learning and e-support and further enable the University to review and develop its provision.

100 The audit team noted the strategic way in which the University and its schools were actively promoting and supporting the development of blended and e-learning through University and externally funded projects, a comprehensive range of staff development opportunities and the annual e-learning conference. The team also noted the University's activities in relation to flexible and part-time provision and WBL, and concluded that the University's management of 'other modes of study' is a strength and makes a positive contribution to the quality of its students' learning opportunities.

## **Resources for learning**

101 A key aim of the Learning and Teaching Strategy is the development of an appropriate infrastructure to support the learning of a diverse student body. The principal responsibility for the provision of these resources lies with the Office of Information and Library Services (ILS), which works to a three-year plan and produces its own ARPD. Three groups within the ILS each have responsibility for specific aspects of its work: Corporate Information Systems (CIS) manages the University's key business systems including Banner Student Support, the Greenwich Portal (the Portal) and support for WebCT; Information and Communications Technology provides the information technology infrastructure, and Learning Services (LS) are responsible for library and computer laboratory facilities across the University campuses.

102 Pursuing its emphasis on flexibility and widening opportunities, the University has established a specialist team within ILS to support off-campus users: Off-Campus Services Contact and Remote Support. This unit provides a range of services which guide remote users to appropriate resources provided by ILS, including 'self-help' materials, email and interactive help facilities, and support for the use of the Portal.

103 The University has responded to the challenges arising from the increased complexity and range of web-based services and the growing demands of users by developing the student and staff Portal, which features as a key target within the Corporate Plan. While offering a common interface with the user, the system has been developed to enable the developers of courseware and services to continue to provide a diverse range of creative and innovative teaching and learning material. Introduction of the system has seen improved access to systems such as Banner, WebCT, email and library and school-based information (see paragraphs 156 to 158).

104 It is a University requirement that the resource implications of new course proposals are identified on the new programme proposal forms, which are submitted to the Academic Planning Subcommittee. These are signed off by resource managers, including the Head of School and those responsible for computing, space and library resources, to ensure that the potential impact on University systems and any requirements for significant additional resources have been properly considered. A recent example of discussions arising from this process was between the School of Computing and Mathematical Sciences and ILS regarding the television studio and technician support requirements of a proposed new programme in television production. In exceptional cases additional resource requirements are referred to the Resources Subcommittee of the Executive Committee for consideration. In addition, details of any resource requirements critical to a school's contribution to key components of the University's Corporate Plan are identified in the schools' ARPDs. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Quality) provides Academic Council with a summary of ARPD portfolio planning sections which highlight any other strategic resource implications as necessary. Together, these processes constitute a robust approach to resource management and allocation.

105 Students have access to the University's library resources, which are located at each of the three campuses: Drill Hall-Medway, Avery Hill and Dreadnought-Maritime. These include in excess of 39,000 books and a large and expanding holding of electronic resources, in the form of both online journals and online books. An academic services librarian is allocated to each school to provide specialist advice via web pages, emails and meetings. In response to student feedback, the University has implemented longer library opening hours, with 0830 hours as a standard opening time across all campuses and the Sunday opening at the Medway campus being extended, as a pilot, to the Avery Hill and Greenwich campuses.

106 The ILS staff attend a range of committees and groups at school level, and participate in programme and school reviews. Feedback on academic and service matters from schools and students is considered particularly important in the context of the broad range of responsibilities held by ILS and the speed of technological change, with its resulting changes in user expectations. The ARPD provides the main formal vehicle for responding to these sources of feedback. Feedback from the NSS has identified an improvement in responses in relation to library resources, general information technology resources and access to specialised equipment facilities and rooms. However, the University acknowledges that there is further work to be done to bring these responses up to the level of the sector median.

107 The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for allocating and managing its learning resources made an effective contribution to the quality of its students' learning opportunities.

### **Admissions policy**

108 The University emphasises its commitment to access and widening participation. In this context, the Corporate Plan seeks to expand opportunities for students by continuing 'to recruit students with non A-level qualifications', while at the same time aspiring to increase average A-Level tariff scores for BA/BSc entrants. Through the work of Aimhigher, the Access and Widening Participation Unit (AWPU), the Education Liaison Team within the Recruitment and Admissions Office (RAO) and Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs), the University is involved in

developing partnerships with local schools and further education colleges, and working with employers, adult learners and other targeted groups to pursue its widening participation.

109 The University's RAO has responsibility for ensuring that central admissions policies and procedures are fairly and consistently implemented at school level. Oversight is achieved through discussion with schools and the operation of Banner Student Services which, the audit team considered, is comprehensive, and well-established administrative systems. Entry criteria, in the majority of cases, are in the form of a centrally held list of tariff points. Students commented positively on the clarity and promptness of the admissions process they had experienced.

110 Admissions procedures enable prior learning, such as relevant certificated learning or work-based experience, to contribute to study at Greenwich. The University considers this valuable in offering recognition for knowledge and skills gained outside formal university courses, or education and training programmes offered by external organisations. University regulations specify that credit for advanced standing should not normally exceed 50 per cent of the credit requirements of an award, but that in the case of specified feeder programmes where a close curricular match can be demonstrated, validated admissions criteria could extend this to up to 66 per cent. Any further exceptions beyond this require the agreement of Academic Council, for example in the case of the School of Health and Social Care in response to discussions with the National Health Service Workforce Development Corporation. In the two examples of periodic review of undergraduate courses provided, provision was made for direct entry to the third year of courses, but this was not always related to a specified feeder programme. However, the audit team noted that individual applications for accreditation of prior learning were received by the school learning and quality committee.

111 The audit team found that the University's arrangements for admissions made an effective contribution to the management of the quality of the students' learning opportunities.

## **Student support**

112 The University's Student Support Programme (SSP) is intended to provide a comprehensive framework for the provision of support, with a focus on delivering key objectives at each level of undergraduate study: Level 1, personal and pastoral support, Level 2, employability and Level 3, independent learning and autonomy. Schools identify the most appropriate ways in which to provide personal and pastoral support in accordance with the SSP framework. School ARPDs confirm that a variety of systems are in place, with common features referred to by some schools, including the use of diagnostic tools for literacy and numeracy and the inclusion of study skills in credit-bearing elements of the curriculum. The structured personal development planning (PDP) opportunities, which are expected to be provided to all students, are also offered at school level in a variety of ways. The variation in the systems adopted by different schools was reflected in the PDP audit carried out by the University in 2007 and the features chosen for discussion by schools in the section of their ARPDs reviewing their SSP-related activities. Although students and staff met by the audit team in many cases only referred to PDP and not the SSP, they were able to confirm that schools were effective in providing academic and pastoral support, and opportunities, for personal development.

113 Guidance in the QAH regarding the content of student handbooks requires information to be provided on the arrangements for pastoral and tutorial support. The audit team saw examples in ARPDs and course approval documentation which confirmed that students are allocated personal tutors who interact with students in a variety of ways, including group and individual tutorials. Students met by the audit team were positive about the tutorial support available, and confirmed that they knew who their tutors were and where to go for help. The existing Pastoral and Skills Handbook for Tutors is currently being replaced by a re-designed manual: 2T@UG (Teaching and Tutoring at the University of Greenwich), available electronically and in hard copy. This offers comprehensive guidance on the role of the tutor including a number of case studies.

114 The Student Retention Policy is central in identifying the importance that the University places on providing student support prior to entry, at induction and on-programme. One established initiative that has been successful in supporting prospective students and those progressing between different levels of study, is the Summer University, which consists of a suite of short, stand-alone, credit-bearing courses that are also intended to enhance employability skills. The University also recognises the importance of study-skills support in improving retention and enabling students to reach their full potential, and has put in place drop-in study-skills centres on each campus. These offer support throughout the year, with particular emphasis on helping new students to develop their academic skills.

115 The University has made significant efforts in recent years to enhance the students experience at induction. The three OSA campus heads have worked with schools for the past two years on improving the welcome to, and support of, new students. Induction activities have been the subject of review by students and staff including the shadowing of students during induction by the EDT. Arising from this, a valuable publication, *The Student Induction at the University of Greenwich 2008-09: Guidelines for Academic Staff*, has been produced to encourage the implementation of enhancements throughout the University as a whole. Students met by the audit team confirmed that induction was a useful and positive experience and that the improvements made by the University had been successful.

116 The OSA also provides a wide range of support for students, through 'one-stop shop' campus student centres and the work of the Welfare and Student Support section, and the Student Finance and Financial Support Team. This includes pastoral support and counselling, welfare and medical care, screening for dyslexia and other factors that might hinder learning and the provision of resources for students with disabilities. A comprehensive report, produced by the Welfare and Students Support section as part of the University's annual return to HEFCE, explains clearly how the University is meeting its Equality and Diversity responsibilities through the support provided.

117 The OSA's Guidance and Employability Team (GET) also provides student support in four key areas; careers, volunteering, mentoring and the Jobshop. The latter provides students with advice on part-time and vacation work, and issues such as tax and employment rights. In 2007, the GET services achieved the Matrix Quality Kite Mark for the provision of information, advice and guidance, with the external assessor noting the strong focus on using client feedback to help develop services. Examples of improvements in the service include extended opening hours, e-guidance, employability-skills development workshops and the accreditation of a postgraduate course for unemployed or under-employed graduates. The OSA's ARPD noted that NSS scores for careers and welfare were below the national average. However, in view of the positive responses received from users during the Matrix accreditation exercise and the responsiveness of the service to users' needs, they concluded that the reason for scores which are lower than it would wish, is a lack of awareness of the services on offer, rather than dissatisfaction with the services themselves. The ARPD provides evidence of the efforts being made to promote the services available and the resultant increase in the numbers of clients.

118 The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for the management of student support made an effective contribution to the quality of the students' learning opportunities.

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

119 Schools and offices are required to report in their ARPDs regarding staff support. This includes a summary and evaluation of staff development activity, plans for future staff development priorities and a review of appraisal activity. The Staff and Educational Development Working Group (SED), a subcommittee of the Executive Committee, receives an Institutional ARPD summary report on staff development. This identified a number of points of information from the ARPDs but in 2008, the minutes of SED did not identify any institutional-level action

arising from it. Individual ARPDs identify priorities ranging from a strong school-based emphasis on the development of the use of WebCT, through to an example in which it was the intention to identify more individual teaching and research development needs through appraisal, in the context of the school objectives.

120 In response to its previous Institutional audit, the University has strengthened its staff appraisal programme which is monitored through the ARPDs. Although not all of the staff met by the audit team were familiar with the process, the ARPDs confirmed that, in the majority of cases the schools and offices were on-target to complete their biennial appraisals. However, in the case of one office, 48 per cent of staff had not been appraised during the previous two years.

121 New appointees to the University are subject to a probationary period, which for academic staff includes teaching observation and support for any immediate staff development activities. Academic staff are also provided with induction on assessment and teaching. Those who have fewer than three years' teaching experience and who are not already qualified are required to gain a teaching qualification, offered by the University, within three years of appointment.

122 In the past the University operated a system for the recognition of teaching excellence through the designation of staff as PLTs (Principal Lecturer promoted for excellence in teaching). Since 2007, there has been a greater emphasis on the potential of this group of staff in the wider enhancement of learning and teaching. This has resulted in the replacement of PLTs by University Teaching Fellows (TFs) with a more focused enhancement remit. At the same time, a role of Associate Teaching Fellow was introduced for those in the process of developing a TF profile. Both roles are intended to be stepping stones for staff aspiring to National TF recognition. The SED has further encouraged and sought to coordinate the work of the TFs by arranging for their participation in a Teaching Fellows Network meeting.

123 The University's aim has been to provide a coherent programme of professional development activities for academic and support staff. This has been facilitated by linking the work being carried out by the EDT with other staff development work traditionally located in the Personnel Office. The resultant Educational and Professional Development Programme provides academic and support staff with an integrated, University-wide listing of staff development opportunities, which is published in hard copy and online. The audit team noted the growing list of activities and events with a strong learning and teaching emphasis, being informed by the work of the learning enhancement coordinators, and the effective way in which this provision was being brought to the attention of staff.

124 The audit team concluded that the arrangements for staff support make an effective contribution to the quality of the students' learning opportunities.

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

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

126 The University of Greenwich has traditionally adopted a relatively 'light touch' for centralised enhancement initiatives, but is seeking to increase the momentum for enhancement, while maintaining its balance between devolution and centralisation.

127 Since 2006, the process of enhancement has been managed by the Learning Enhancement and Student Support Working Group and by its successor, the Staff and Educational Development Working Group, headed by the PVC Learning and Quality, which have sought to introduce a more corporate enhancement agenda and a greater impetus to central enhancement initiatives. There is now a more clearly defined position on enhancement as a strategy and the University's enhancement agenda has been moving towards embedding of corporate agenda in the local school setting and a growth in cross-institutional collaboration.

128 Following the Change Academy, the University developed an Action Plan which, while not designated an enhancement strategy, serves as such. For 2008-09, drawing on this and other interrelated action plans, four key themes have been highlighted: employability; student retention; assessment and feedback, and internationalisation. Work has begun on these themes, and there is evidence of widespread and effective induction procedures and employability initiatives being developed in schools. In addition a wider range of activities to support employability is being provided by the Guidance and Employability Team.

### **Enhancement initiatives**

129 Building upon the role played by Principal Lecturers in demonstrating good educational practice, the University has established a system of University Teaching Fellows and Associate Teaching Fellows whose role is more explicitly directed to working on enhancement. In addition, the newly formed Educational Development Team (EDT), which encompasses both central staff and also school learning enhancement coordinators (LECs), undertakes both professional development for staff and helps manage a policy of enhancement. The Educational Development Team comprises staff who are partially seconded to the EDT, but who retain a base in their academic school in addition to their cross-university role, and the LECs are academic staff who, because of their existing contribution to enhancement in the School, are appointed to spend some of their time developing its enhancement agenda and activities.

130 The EDT-LEC structure is designed to create a direct enhancement link between the centre and schools, in order to grow enhancement from the 'grass-roots' up, but to do so in line with corporate objectives; funding for LECs is, however, currently of limited duration, which may limit the scope of this initiative.

131 The audit team viewed evidence that LECs, who meet regularly as a group, in addition to meetings with the EDT, can enable local-level innovation to feed into the central agenda, while acting as a conduit for ideas and themes, from within the broader educational development team to flow into schools. Their remit is not solely focused on academic practice, but extends to anything that affects student learning. The relationship between the LECs and Principal Lecturers, Teaching Fellows and School Directors of Learning and Quality, (who are primarily concerned with quality assurance), is still developing and may vary from school to school, to reflect local agenda.

132 In 2007-08, the University commenced a specialised consultation on assessment and feedback prompted by the National Student Survey. This continuing project has sought to identify current and effective practices, and is now moving towards the dissemination of good practice through staff development activities and the revision and enhancement of support materials.

### **Enhancement dissemination**

133 The Annual Reporting and Planning Document (ARPD) is a well-established reporting and planning mechanism which, in addition to allowing schools to reflect on the quality and standards mechanisms in use, also allows a school to review its strategic aims and provide an insight into the ways in which it has addressed the University's enhancement agenda.

134 The University recognises that while the ARPD is an excellent reflective document, it needs to strengthen feedback loops further and encourage the dissemination of good practice which may be found in an APRD. Schools and Offices receive direct feedback from the member of senior management responsible for their line management and are party to the strategic discussions about sections of the ARPD that take place in the central committees, and there appears to be dissemination of good practice between schools by means of membership of these committees.



## **Role of students in quality enhancement**

135 Students evaluate and provide feedback on their experience through such mechanisms as course evaluations; feedback from programme representatives; the NSS; the University Student Survey, and the Postgraduate Research Student Satisfaction Survey.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

136 It was agreed prior to the visit that the University's collaborative provision should be the subject of a separate audit.

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

### **The research environment**

137 The framework of the research environment described in the QAA Review of research degree programmes in 2006 (RDP 119/2006) remains in place, but significant evolutionary change has occurred since that date.

138 Research activities in the University are overseen by the Research and Enterprise Committee (R&EC), which deliberates on policy, promotes the research and enterprise culture in the University, and receives regular reports on research activity in the schools. Ethical standards in research are overseen by the University's Research Ethics Committee (REC). Both the R&EC and the REC report to Academic Council.

139 The University established that the devolved arrangements for the management of research degrees that operated from 2005 to 2008 had given rise to variations in some areas of practice, although it considered that this was not in relation to the maintenance of standards. Consequently, following an internal review, it was recommended that, in order to ensure greater commonality and consistency of practice, there should be a return to a central, University-wide Research Degrees Committee (RDC). These recommendations were implemented for the 2008-09 session. The RDC, which reports to the R&EC, includes representation external to the University.

140 The RDC has quickly developed a series of mechanisms to ensure regular and thorough review of all aspects of provision in connection with research degrees, which should further enhance support for students, and for the continued maintenance of standards. Students met by the audit team confirmed that, in schools where there are very few postgraduate research students, the research environment does not present any problems of isolation.

141 There have been other incremental changes since 2006, some in response to the 2006 Review, including the exclusion of members of the candidate's supervisory team from appointment as an examiner; improved training on the selection of research students; improved training for supervisors, and the exclusion of a student's supervisors from any formal University appeals procedure.

142 The University's Academic Regulations for Research Awards and the Research Students Handbook are both reviewed annually, with the current versions posted on the web.

### **Selection, admission and induction of students**

143 The admission of students to research degrees is overseen by the RDC, which ensures both consistent and robust application of the designated admissions criteria that the University has adopted.

144 A new research student is required to attend a University-wide induction day at the first available opportunity, following registration with the University, and to confirm attendance on the annual progress report (APR); this is monitored by the RDC. The induction session includes an introduction to the roles and responsibilities of a research student, including the importance of completing the APR and the requirement for ethical approval in relevant cases. Failure to attend induction will normally result in a student not being permitted to progress to the second year of the programme. For students whose main place of study is at a distance, there is a WebCT version of the induction programme available.

### **Supervision**

145 The University provides training for new supervisors and workshops are also held for experienced supervisors. The Research Students Administration Office (RSAO) monitors allocations on a periodic basis, to ensure no supervisor has an excessive student load and reports to the RDC, which will intervene to rebalance supervisory loads where necessary.

### **Progress and review arrangements**

146 The RDC provides oversight of the monitoring of the progress of research students. A key document is the APR, which is submitted to the RDC. The APR allows progress to be monitored and issues to be identified, with corrective action implemented where necessary. The University also collects student feedback on an annual basis through the student's APR. In completing the APR, students are encouraged to be reflective and critical, and the report includes the opportunity to comment on any obstacles they may perceive to be inhibiting the progress of their research. The APR also includes comments from supervisors on the student's progress. At the University's induction day, it is made very clear to research students that it is their responsibility to initiate submission of these reports, and this is also reiterated in the Research Students Handbook. Failure to return an APR may result in a student not being permitted to continue on the programme.

147 The University has identified the fact the return rate of APRs has been less than optimal, and the new University-wide RDC is seeking to raise this rate of return to over 90 per cent. There is evidence that the new centralised RDC is seeking to ensure all students return their APRs, and is enforcing the requirement to return the APR in order to progress with greater consistency than the four previous research degree committees.

148 The RSAO also maintains a spreadsheet indicating key points of progress throughout the duration of each student's research degree programme. The process of transferring from MPhil to PhD registration is a major review point and the outcome of the transfer process, involving an oral examination with assessors who are not part of the supervisory team, is presented to the RDC, which makes the decision about whether to support the request for transfer.

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

149 The feedback from the QAA Review considered '...the Postgraduate Research Student Log and the way in which this is used to record the student's Skills Audit and Skills Development activities...' to be an example of good practice. An enhancement since the 2006 Review has been the provision of an online suite of modules, (Research Skills online), covering such topics as intellectual property, ethics, project management, working with a supervisor, getting published and career planning.

150 In response to recommendations at the previous Institutional audit, the University has developed a Teaching Skills course for research students and schools may also provide particular training, for example in the use of specialist laboratory equipment. However, contrary to the recommendations of the 2004 Institutional audit, which advised that the University establish a training requirement for those students involved in teaching or demonstrating activities, it is not yet mandatory for students undertaking teaching or demonstrating to undertake any prior

training. Although the University's response to the 2004 audit stated that mechanisms were in place to provide a teaching skills course, it had not taken the further step of instituting a mandatory requirement for this to be undertaken. In discussion with the audit team, senior staff clearly indicated that the programme was not mandatory. There is evidence however, that, in many cases, there is mentoring by schools of research students undertaking teaching or demonstrating for the first time. Schools are asked to report to the RDC on their monitoring and support processes for research students undertaking teaching and demonstrating and the majority of schools are complying by means of reports to the RDC. However, the audit team concludes that the University should ensure that all research students undertake training before embarking on teaching, and that both this and the requirement for schools to provide feedback on any teaching or demonstrating are monitored centrally. It is advisable that, in line with the recommendations of the 2004 audit, the University make training compulsory for all postgraduate research students who teach, and ensure institutional consistency in monitoring their teaching.

### **Feedback and representation**

151 The University collects student feedback on an annual basis through the student's APR. In addition, the RSAO conducts a Postgraduate Research Student Survey every two years; the 2006-07 survey contributed to the agenda for improvements in training for supervisors and regular review of facilities for postgraduates. Students met by the audit team expressed satisfaction with both the opportunities afforded to them to raise issues and concerns, and with the responsiveness of schools when issues were raised with them.

### **Assessment**

152 In response to the QAA's feedback in 2006, the University has revised its Regulations for Research Awards to exclude a member of a candidate's supervisory team from acting as an internal examiner; it has also introduced independent chairs to manage the examination process. Appointment of examiners is monitored by the RDC. The University has recently introduced a pro forma requesting feedback from external examiners on the conduct of the oral examination. This feedback will be considered by the RDC at the same time as it reviews the recommendations of examiners in relation to the awards under consideration.

153 The University conducts regular reviews of completion rates and success rates and also considers carefully comments by both internal and external examiners. The reviews have not raised any issues and the University has a high rate of completion.

154 The audit team confirms that the University's arrangements for postgraduate research programmes meet the expectations of the precepts of the *Code of practice*, Section 1 and concludes that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of academic standards of the postgraduate research awards that it offers.

## **Section 7: Published information**

155 The Marketing and the Planning and Statistics Offices (PAS) are the two key organisations responsible for managing the accuracy of published information. PAS manages the Universities HESA return incorporating the University Teaching Quality Information/University statistical data. Marketing retains responsibility for all the core formal University publications. Each member of the marketing staff, working with specific allocated schools, ensures that the process of assuring accurate public material is two-way and focused. The audit team noted that each school liaises directly with the Marketing Office, normally through the Head of School to ensure accuracy of student information.

156 The University-wide Portal has become a key internal mechanism for ensuring that all students have accurate, regular and consistent information about the essential components of their learning such as the examination timetable, course timetable, marks for courses, submission of coursework, University email, and access to, and updating of, teaching/course learning materials. The use of the Portal project, as mentioned earlier in paragraph 103, has clearly identified the importance of this learning resource, and the audit team received highly favourable reports from both students and staff at all levels about the critical value of having such an effective educational tool for communication.

157 An evaluation of the Portal Project received by Academic Council in December 2007 concluded that the objectives of the project had been met, providing a sound basis for future developments. Throughout its development, student feedback and evaluation has been an important feature in identifying potential changes and enhancements to the system. Continuing evaluation and refinement are considered by the University to be essential for maintaining the currency of information and relevance of communication.

158 It is the view of the audit team that the Greenwich Portal is working exceptionally well and is acclaimed by both students and staff alike, leading to a position where the team agree that the Greenwich Portal it is an example of good practice.

159 During the audit team's various meetings with students, it became clear that they were satisfied with the accuracy and completeness of information provided to them both before their arrival at the University and also during their time at the Institution.

**RG 541a 09/09**

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2009

ISBN 978 1 84979 028 4

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

Tel 01425 557000

Fax 01452 557070

Email [comms@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:comms@qaa.ac.uk)

All QAA's publications are available on our website [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786