

University of Durham

May 2009

Annex to the report

Contents

Introduction	3
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	3
Recommendations for action	4
Section 1: Introduction and background	4
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	6
Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards	8
Approval, monitoring and review of award standards	8
External examiners	10
Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points	12
Assessment policies and regulations	13
Management information - statistics	14
Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities	14
Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points	14
Approval, monitoring and review of programmes	14
Management information - feedback from students	15
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	20
Staff support (including staff development)	21
Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement	23
Section 5: Collaborative arrangements	24
Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students	28
Section 7: Published information	32

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Durham (the University) from 27 April to 1 May 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit team found that the University's approach to quality enhancement was providing deliberate steps to enhance the quality of learning opportunities for all students in ways that are aligned with the overall University strategy. The approach is effectively integrated into the University's procedures.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for securing and enhancing the quality and standards of research degree programmes are sound and consistent with the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1; Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA.

Published information

The University has in place arrangements that ensure that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy of the information it publishes, describing the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the contribution of the Academic Support Office to the management of quality and standards (paragraph 21)
- the University's comprehensive approach to defining and developing research-led teaching (paragraphs 80 to 85)
- the deliberate coordination of academic and pastoral support for students (paragraphs 102 to 104, 106)
- the practice of annually reviewing research degree programmes (paragraph 156).

Recommendations for action

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

It would be desirable for the University to:

- exploit, to a greater extent, the professional expertise of learning support staff in the operation of periodic review (Enhancement-led Review) (paragraphs 34 and 79)
- investigate the exercise of discretion by Boards of Examiners in 2008-09, including the effectiveness of the training provided, making it the subject of a report by the University Chief Examiner, as soon as possible, following the current assessment round (paragraph 56)
- adopt a more systematic approach to the recording of annual staff review, to enable the University to maintain an oversight of the consistency of participation in the process (paragraph 110)
- make more effective use of the professional expertise of those responsible for learning resources and student support in the approval, and monitoring, of collaborative provision (paragraph 133).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 The University of Durham was founded in 1832 and operated at both Durham and Newcastle until 1963, when the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne became a separate university. Durham University is collegiate and is located in the city of Durham and the nearby town of Stockton. Queen's Campus, Stockton, opened in 1992 and now provides professional orientated programmes. The University is research-intensive and achieved high scores in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, in which 59 per cent of its research outputs were graded international or world-leading.

2 In the academic year 2008-09, there were a total of 11,106 undergraduate students, 2,757 taught postgraduate students and 1,496 research students. At undergraduate level, only a very small number of students are part-time (31 students), while 42 per cent of taught postgraduate and 27 per cent of research postgraduates were registered part-time. There has been a significant increase in the proportion of international students, excluding students from the EU, in the last four years and now representing 19.5 per cent of the student population. Other notable changes in student numbers have been the growth in both taught and research postgraduate students. The increase in postgraduate and international students reflects the strategic objectives of internationalisation and improving the research culture of the University.

3 At the time of the audit, the University had four validated partnerships, involving 517 students and a small amount of distance learning. The University also operates a small number of other types of collaborative partnership, for example, dual awards, as well as a small number of arrangements relating to research degree programmes. At the start of the 2008-09 academic year, a total of 284 students were registered for these other types of collaborative arrangements.

4 The University was structured into 24 academic departments and schools, at the time of the audit, and these were organised into three faculties: Arts and Humanities, Science, and Social Sciences and Health.

5 The University's values, aims and objectives are set out in the Strategic Plan to 2010. The Briefing Paper explained that the University's vision is 'to be recognised as a world class research university providing an internationally distinctive learning experience that is informed and enhanced by the University's status as a research-led learning institution'. The strategic aims of the University over this period are to:

- produce research of international excellence in all our subjects while building the strengths necessary to be recognised as world leaders in selected areas
- provide an internationally distinctive learning experience that combines academic excellence with the personal development that comes from college life
- further internationalise our staff and student communities, and enhance and promote our reputation internationally
- enhance our contribution to the economic, social, cultural and educational life of the North East through our position as an international research institution, and
- continue to be a sustainable institution, both as a well managed and governed organisation, and through our internationally excellent scholarship.

The University has set itself the target of being in the top 10 of UK higher education institutions, the top 30 of European universities and the top 100 of international universities all by 2010.

The information base for the audit

6 The University provided the audit team with an institutional briefing paper (the Briefing Paper) and supporting documentation, including material related to the sampling trails selected by the team. The Briefing Paper contained references to sources of evidence that illustrated the University's approach to managing the security of its awards and the quality of its educational provision. The team had access to both electronic and hard copies of all documents referenced in the Briefing Paper. The team was also provided access to the University's intranet site.

7 The Students' Union produced a student written submission (SWS) setting out the students' views on the accuracy of information provided to them, the experience of students as learners and their role in quality management. The audit team is grateful for the students' engagement with the audit process.

8 In addition, the audit team had access to the University's internal documents, the report of the previous QAA Institutional audit (2004) and the report on the Review of research degree programmes which reported in July 2006. The team met groups of staff and students, according to the programme agreed with the University.

Developments since the last audit

9 The previous QAA Institutional audit of the University in February 2004 resulted in a judgement of broad confidence in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes, and the academic standards of its awards. The report noted seven features of good practice and made two recommendations where action was considered advisable, and four where action was considered desirable.

10 The audit team noted that the University had established a working group to consider issues arising from the 2004 audit report and that a matrix had been used to allow the tracking of responses, not only to the specific recommendations, but also to comments in the body of the report.

11 The first advisable recommendation had asked the University to accelerate the introduction of a strategy for quality enhancement including the planned development of learning and teaching strategies at departmental level. This was fulfilled by 2006, as part of a broader approach to the integration of quality enhancement with quality management which is described in Section 4. At the time of the last audit, the University itself had recognized a need to develop an 'overarching provision for quality enhancement' and identified the proposed appointment of an Academic Staff Development Officer (ASDO), responsible for supporting departments implementing learning and teaching strategies, as crucial to meeting this need. In September 2004, the ASDO was appointed and by 2005-06 all departments had learning

and teaching strategies in place to support annual reviews. The University approved a new institutional learning and teaching strategy in May 2007 and, by the beginning of the academic year 2008-09, all departments had revised their learning and teaching strategies to be congruent. In October 2008, Senate approved a new University Quality Management Framework (further discussed in Section 4), that combines quality assurance and quality enhancement within a single framework.

12 The second advisable recommendation was that the University adopt a more systematic and visible form of annual review. The audit team had concluded that current practice was variable across the University; there was no provision for a formal annual report, and that student involvement was limited. The University's response was to introduce a revised process of annual review for 2005-06. A review of this process was conducted after two years of operation and noted continuing inconsistencies. Further revisions were introduced to take effect for the reviews of 2007-08, and these are discussed in Section 2.

13 The four desirable recommendations in the 2004 audit report asked the University to: monitor more carefully the learning experience of postgraduate students, particularly on taught programmes; disseminate good practice to provide more timely feedback to students on their evaluation of the learning experience; institute a more systematic approach to recording appraisal of staff and participation in it; and to recognise good practice in partner colleges from which the University might benefit. The audit team's scrutiny of documentation and meetings with staff demonstrated that the University has responded in all these areas. They are discussed in detail under the relevant headings in this annex below, which indicate that in the view of the audit team improvements had been made, except in the case of systematic recording at institutional level of participation in annual staff review, where there was scope for further improvement and is the subject of a further desirable recommendation in this report (paragraph 110).

Institutional framework for managing academic standards and learning opportunities

14 The University's framework for assuring academic quality and standards is published in the University Calendar and its Learning and Teaching Handbook. The Handbook covers all taught provision; for research degree programmes the University has a separate Institutional Code of Practice. The Briefing Paper stated that the Institutional Code of Practice 'addressed' the relevant section of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, but 'allowed sufficient flexibility to protect the diverse and innovative range of research degree programmes' that exist in the University. In furtherance of this aim, departments also have individual codes of practice, covering admissions, supervision, progress and review, and training. Collaborative provision is governed in part by the Learning and Teaching Handbook, but there is also a Validation Handbook, covering a small number of partners who are considered to have academic standards that are consistent with the University's.

15 The Learning and Teaching Handbook has a section giving a summary view of the University's Quality Management Framework, which provides definitions of its three aspects: assurance of standards, assurance of quality, and enhancement. The University takes the view that enhancement is integrated into its core processes for managing and supporting learning and teaching. The University's principle is that it builds reflection and action planning into such mechanisms as annual monitoring and periodic review, and thus requires departments to engage with ongoing refinement of the University's definition and implementation of 'research-led teaching'. A central aspect of this approach is the continuous development and refinement of learning and teaching strategies at the levels of university, faculty and department. The University's present learning and teaching strategy, approved in May 2007, was developed in light of the strategic plan for 2005-10. As a consequence of the approval of the new learning and teaching strategy, departmental strategies were revised and faculty strategies have been developed. A new University learning and teaching strategy will be developed during 2009-10.

16 Senate is the supreme governing body in all matters relating to the regulation of the teaching and research work of the University. Senate has a Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) responsible for advising and making recommendations to Senate on strategy and policy for learning and teaching, and the policies and procedures for the maintenance and enhancement of quality and standards. The work of LTC is supported by a Quality and Standards Subcommittee (QSSC); a Student Experience Subcommittee; an Undergraduate Admissions Subcommittee; and Faculty Learning and Teaching Subcommittees (FLTCs). Senate also has a Graduate School Committee (GSC), responsible for the oversight and regulation of research degree programmes. There are some matters of common interest that are considered jointly by LTC and GSC on behalf of Senate.

17 The three FLTCs are largely constituted of representatives from the departments in the faculties. Faculties have their own learning and teaching strategies, which set out the way in which each contributes towards the aims and aspirations of the University's strategy.

18 The Vice-Chancellor is the principal academic and administrative officer of the University, and is also formally the 'Warden' of the University's colleges. A Deputy Warden is responsible at executive level for the operation of the colleges. The University has three pro vice-chancellors (PVCs) with cross-cutting, strategic responsibilities, leading the University on learning and teaching; research, and for Queen's Campus and regional matters respectively. The PVC for learning and teaching chairs LTC. At the head of each Faculty is a Faculty PVC. For research degree programmes there is a Dean of the Graduate School, who chairs GSC. The Vice-Chancellor, PVCs, Deputy Warden, Registrar, Treasurer (Finance Director) and Director of Human Resources together constitute the University Executive Committee (UEC).

19 All departments have boards of studies. The University's standing orders dictate that each board of studies shall have a departmental learning and teaching committee, and a staff-student consultative committee. Departments have individual learning and teaching strategies. Heads of department are responsible for a range of matters related to the quality assurance of learning and teaching. Each department also has a board of examiners, whose Chair is appointed by, and responsible to, the faculty.

20 Operational responsibility for maintaining the University's quality assurance processes and procedures, including service to the University's central committees with responsibilities in this area, lies with the Academic Office, which draws together central student support services (Careers Advisory Service, Counselling, the Durham University Service for Students with Disabilities and Student Financial Support), registry services (Student Recruitment and Admissions Office, Student Planning and Assessment), and support for the management and enhancement of learning and teaching (Academic Support Office and Academic Staff Development Office). The Academic Office is the responsibility of the Registrar, whose division also includes the University Library, and Information Technology Service. The Academic Office is responsible for a range of quality assurance functions, including, inter alia, the management of processes to ensure that University practices align with the *Code of practice* and *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), coordinating the procedures for approval, monitoring and review of programmes, liaison with external examiners, and the provision of information to facilitate the management of quality and standards at both departmental and institutional levels. The Academic Office is also responsible for the day-to-day management of admissions. The 'Academic Support Office', (ASO) a section within the Academic Office, has a particular role in supporting quality assurance committees and procedures, and compiles the University's key annual monitoring reports, for example, the overview of external examiners' reports.

21 The audit team found the descriptive and regulatory documents for the University's arrangements comprehensive, clear and accessible through the University's website. The Briefing Paper drew attention to the change wrought in the University's quality assurance arrangements by LTC's development of the May 2007 strategy for learning and teaching. The audit team was able to confirm the effects of this change, noting, for instance, the transformation in the quality

and effectiveness of annual monitoring since 2007, which is discussed below. The team saw much evidence of the effective coordination of academic and pastoral support for students between department, faculty and college officers (see paragraphs 100 to 106). In relation to enhancement, the team noted several instances where key aspects of the overall strategy, especially the University's determination to make the concept of 'research-led teaching' meaningful, were being developed effectively through the operation of routine process. The team took particular note of the contribution of the Academic Support Office, recognising their overall coordinating role, the quality of the documentation for university committees like LTC and QSSC, and the very high standard of reports arising from the operation of key processes, such as 'Enhancement-led Review'. The team considered the contribution of the Academic Support Office to the management of quality and standards to be a feature of good practice.

Effectiveness of the framework

22 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities enabled individuals, departments, faculties and the institution as a whole to discharge their various responsibilities as set out in the University's Calendar and Learning and Teaching Handbook. The team's scrutiny of various committee papers and minutes, and meetings with staff, confirmed that the framework was operating effectively.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

23 The University stated in its Briefing Paper that a 'key principle' in the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of its awards is that they should be at least as high as those in comparable institutions, and be consistent with the external reference points provided by QAA's Academic Infrastructure and by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). The University Calendar and the Learning and Teaching Handbook state University qualification descriptors, level descriptors and generic assessment criteria; University-wide core regulations governing each type of award (taught and research); and a credit framework within which all taught programmes operate. The Calendar and Handbook also regulate arrangements for boards of examiners and for external examining. Senate is responsible for any revisions to these documents that affect standards, and is advised in the discharge of these responsibilities by the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) and by the Graduate School Committee (GSC). The University aims to balance institutional oversight with the need to ensure local responsibility at departmental level.

24 The University's procedures are used in slightly adapted form for the approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision, which is considered in Section 5 below.

Programme approval

25 Procedures for the approval of new programmes and modules are described in the Learning and Teaching Handbook. Approval has two stages. Stage 1 considers both a business case and an outline academic case. This stage is approved by the faculty provice-chancellor (PVC). The business case is tested for alignment with the University's academic strategies, demand, and availability of resources. Stage 2 involves the establishment of a Programme Approval Panel (PAP) by the Quality Standards Subcommittee (QSSC), which is charged with ensuring that the proposed programme is academically sound and the resources to support the delivery of the proposed programme are sufficient. In addition to considering the specified documentation, including a programme specification, and structured discussions with the programme proposers, the PAP has written advice from an assessor with subject expertise, from another university, who is not compromised by recent close association with the University. This external subject specialist is nominated by the proposers, and approved by the chair of the faculty Learning and Teaching Subcommittee (FLTC). On the basis of its investigations, the PAP makes a recommendation to QSSC, which has delegated power of

approval. Its decisions are notified to LTC and to Senate. These procedures and personnel are slightly adapted in the case of professional or integrated doctoral programmes.

26 New modules, and changes to existing modules and programmes, are subject to scrutiny by FLTCs. Proposals for new modules must receive the support of the external examiner. The Learning and Teaching Handbook includes procedures for the withdrawal of programmes, which require the completion of formal proposal forms, and include consultation with key officers and committees, and arrangements to protect the interests of students currently registered.

27 The audit team considered documentation produced in the course of the approvals procedure and confirmed with staff from the library and the Information Technology Services (ITS) that they make an effective input into determining the availability of resources, and with the University's strategic planning and marketing support staff that they contribute to the development of the business case. The PAPs function effectively and make full use of external expertise. The procedure is well managed through the University's committees. The QSSC receives a very full range of documentary evidence, including a programme specification, the proposed programme regulations, various forms signalling due process, including consultation with learning support managers, the full business case, and a report from the PAP. The QSSC has delegated power of approval, which was properly exercised, with the required notification being made to its parent committees.

28 The audit team saw several examples of programme approvals, which demonstrated that the process operated in accordance with the University's published procedures, and fulfilled the University's intentions, of ensuring that the academic standards of proposed new programmes are consistent with the University's framework for academic standards and supported by the curriculum of the proposed programme.

Programme monitoring

29 All taught programmes are subject to annual monitoring (known as 'annual review') by the department responsible for their management. Annual review involves consideration by the department of a range of quantitative and qualitative information. Matters particularly relevant to standards include programme specification(s), external examiners' reports, admissions data, and a set of performance indicators relating to student achievement and student satisfaction. The review includes specific consideration of placement learning. The outcomes of the review are captured on a form, scrutinised at faculty level by the Chair of the FLTC, who prepares an overview of key issues arising from all the reports for the committee. For the first time in 2008-09, the process was augmented by meetings between the Chair and Secretary of FLTC and each department, intended to facilitate dialogue between department and faculty on learning and teaching matters; to enable prompt attention to matters of concern; and to inform faculty overviews of all reviews, which are discussed at FLTCs and subsequently at QSSC. Additionally, QSSC discusses an overview of all departmental review reports compiled by the Academic Support Office, an innovation in 2008-09. QSSC reports findings to LTC.

30 The audit team examined the outputs of annual reviews conducted in 2006-07 and 2007-08, relating to different programmes. Some of the latest reviews (for 2007-08, compiled in 2008-09) appeared to the team to be exemplary. The report for History, for instance, contained not only all the basic material necessary for QSSC to assure itself that the requirements of its procedures, such as assurance that the external examiner's recommendations had met with full response, but also a range of supplementary material. The contents of the report and its accompanying appendices were in the view of the team honest, open and analytical, and a clearly demonstrated engagement with the process by the department as a whole. It appeared to the team that the reviews fulfilled the University's aim of identifying strengths and weaknesses, in order to establish priorities for development. The team also followed up the way in which the reports were dealt with at the levels of FLTC and QSSC, and found that commentary on progress against the action plans is indeed a feature of overview reports at faculty level, as intended.

Periodic review

31 The University conflates periodic review, which it calls 'Enhancement-led review' (ELR), with re-approval of programmes. ELR is by department, and takes place in a four-year cycle. The purpose of ELR is to consider the alignment of the provision under review with the key reference points for academic standards, as shown by programme specifications, qualification and level descriptors, and related descriptive material required by the University Calendar and Learning and Teaching Handbook. Review teams are required to make judgements on the academic standards of the provision, and to make recommendations on re-approval on this basis. ELR teams include two senior academics from the faculty in which the department under review is based; a member of a department from another faculty; an external subject specialist; the Dean of the Graduate School or nominee; and a senior member of the Academic Office. A scheme for the inclusion of a student member of the panel, from a department other than the one under review, has been piloted, and a student member will be included routinely in ELR panels from the beginning of the next academic session. Review teams consider a range of departmental documentation and management information, including data on achievement and progression, external examiners' reports and follow up, and the most recent annual departmental review material. The University takes the view that self-evaluation is implicit in the regular review of a departmental learning and teaching strategy and, on these grounds, departments are not required to write discrete self-evaluations to inform their ELRs.

32 Departments are required to make written responses to the outcomes of ELR within 12 months to a University Review Panel (URP), appointed for the faculty to which the department belongs. The Chair and Secretary of the URP meet the department three months after the conclusion of the review to consider progress, and to offer any support needed in developing the department's response. When all recommendations have met with a proper response, the URP recommends the final sign-off to QSSC which, on behalf of the University, takes the decision whether to sign off a review as completed.

33 The University keeps these procedures under regular review. For example, response to ELR was formerly required within six months, but QSSC felt that this sometimes did not allow departments sufficient time to make their responses, and also did not provide sufficient support in their development. Consequently, the response time was extended to 12 months, and the three-month meeting between department and Chair and Secretary of the URP was introduced. In addition, further changes are planned, to consolidate review of research activity with review of teaching in a single process, which the University feels to be more in line with its 'research-led' mission.

34 The audit team saw two examples of periodic reviews as part of the audit sampling trails, both of which demonstrated that the process operated effectively and according to due process, as regards assurance of standards. There is effective contribution from subject expertise external to the University. However, the team believed that as regards the quality of provision, ELR would be improved by more effective use of learning support professionals, a matter considered in paragraph 69.

External examiners

35 The University's Code of Practice on External Examining and Moderating is made available via the web through the Learning and Teaching Handbook. It was developed in the light of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*, and accords with the precepts defined therein. From documents seen by the audit team, and in meetings with staff, it is clear that the University's Code of Practice and its relationship to the *Code* is understood by those responsible for its implementation. Evidence seen by the team in external examiners' reports and of subsequent actions by the University confirms this.

36 The authority to appoint external examiners is vested in Senate, which has delegated this power to LTC and GSC for undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes respectively. Examiners are initially nominated by the Head of the Department responsible for the programme. The nomination, including a curriculum vitae, is then considered by the faculty PVC or his/her nominee and following endorsement is sent to LTC for approval. In joint honours programmes, externality is provided by the external examiners for the department that provides the modules. For the Combined Honours and Natural Sciences programmes, there are external moderators, who are present at meetings of the Board of Examiners when degree classifications are being determined.

37 Detailed briefing documents are made available to external examiners. In 2008-09, enhanced online support for external examiners was provided following the University's Review of Assessment (see paragraphs 54 and 55). Responsibility for the provision of centrally provided documentation lies with the Academic Office, but details about the structure, provision and assessment of programmes are provided by the relevant academic department. This is monitored in the consideration of external examiners' reports; the audit team saw evidence that any lapses are noted and remedied.

38 External examiners are required to submit an annual report on their work, and in their final, normally third, but sometimes fourth, year are invited to write an overview report dealing with broader issues of curriculum design, delivery methods and assessment tools, and matters concerning standards and comparability. A structured online report form is provided to guide external examiners with the intention of ensuring that they cover the whole range of topics on which the University is seeking their views. Examples of such reports were seen by the audit team; these reports typically covered the required ground.

39 Reports are initially considered by the faculty PVC or his/her nominee, who writes to the department to indicate any matters that need to be considered, or to confirm that there are no such matters. These issues are then addressed at department, faculty and university levels, as appropriate. The minutes from these meetings show that there is detailed consideration of issues specific to the department as well as more general issues. If there are matters that need further consideration, the Department is required to do so through its board of studies, LTC or board of examiners, and with the appropriate staff-student consultative committee. The audit team saw or heard evidence that every stage of this process was carried out appropriately and thoroughly. The whole process forms the basis for a written response, which, since 2008-09, has been considered at the November or February meeting between the faculty PVC (or deputy) and the department. These meetings are documented.

40 The faculty PVC (or deputy) prepares a faculty overview report of all external examiners' reports in the faculty. These are discussed by the FLTC and then by QSSC. All external examiners' reports are also sent to the Academic Support Office, where an institutional-level overview report is prepared for submission to QSSC at the same time as the faculty overview reports. The minutes show that discussion at QSSC is thorough and detailed. The outcome of this consideration is reported to LTC, which has the responsibility for acting on any institutional issues which have been raised. It reports to Senate on the whole process.

41 The formal response to the external examiner comes from the department, if the issues are at that level, or from the faculty PVC (or deputy) if more general or higher-level issues are raised.

42 The audit team noted that the University had implemented significant changes in its external examining system since its Review of Assessment in 2007-08. There are extensive and well-documented procedures for reporting by external examiners and for consideration of the reports. Recommendations, suggestions and observations or criticisms that arise from reports are carefully considered by the relevant officers and committees. There is clear evidence that a sound process is in place and that it is fully implemented across the University. The team concluded that the system makes a full contribution to the maintenance of quality and standards.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

43 The University developed its own standards framework in the context of the FHEQ and there are Core Regulations for all programmes that articulate with the FHEQ. There are similarly articulated University qualification and level descriptors and assessment criteria. These are reflected in departmental documentation and practice, expanded and explicated in the disciplinary context. The object is to ensure internal consistency across the University, while making full use of the FHEQ as a reference point and providing both staff and students with consistent interpretations of assessment criteria. The audit team was able to verify this consistency of the full use of the FHEQ by its examination of documents.

44 The University had made use of the *Code of practice* in developing its own regulations, practices and procedures. The University claimed that there has been a mapping process for each section of the *Code*, and that this is also the practice when revisions are published. As an example of this process, the audit team saw documentation from which it is clear that the Review of Assessment took the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students* as its starting-point. A detailed gap analysis was prepared, and this formed the basis for further work. Similarly, there are references in the External Examiners' Handbook to the relevant parts of the *Code*.

45 The University's academic framework encompasses all its taught programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and is used to test proposals for new and revised programmes. It is also used in the ELR process. External examiners are asked to confirm that the programmes for which they are responsible conform to the requirements of the framework.

46 To ensure currency, and in the light of recent developments in the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* and the revision of the FHEQ in 2008, the University conducted a review of its own qualification descriptors during 2008-09. The outcome of this review was that in March 2009, LTC made some recommendations for changes to the University's credit framework, to ensure that it remained in line with current best practice. These recommendations were awaiting the endorsement of Senate at the time of the audit visit.

47 The University places the responsibility for meeting the requirements of the subject benchmark statements at departmental level. For combined honours programmes, this work is undertaken by the Programme Management Committee. The Academic Office coordinates the distribution of new and revised statements to appropriate departments, and notifies the Chairs of FLTCs of this fact. Subject benchmark statements are routinely used as a reference point in developing new programmes; there are references to them in programme specifications. External subject specialists involved in programme approval and review are asked to confirm that subject benchmark statements have been used appropriately.

48 There are programme specifications in place for all taught programmes. The version published for external use contains core information on the programme. More detailed versions for internal use have extensive additional material, intended to facilitate student understanding and quality management.

49 The PSRB requirements are dealt with at department level. The University monitors this during the programme approval and review processes. Accreditation visits are similarly handled by departments, but with the involvement of the Academic Office in the preparation and final approval of any documentation required by the accrediting body. Accreditation reports are received first by QSSC to consider any issues arising from reports that have implications for University policies and procedures. Following this, detailed follow-up to these reports is carried out by URPs. Once the URP is satisfied that appropriate responses have been made by the department, the URP reports this to QSSC.

50 The audit team concluded that the University has responded appropriately to the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points to establish and maintain the academic standards of its awards.

Assessment policies and regulations

51 The University's Principles of Assessment are to be found in Section 6 of its Learning and Teaching Handbook, which is accessible to all staff and students, and to external examiners and placement providers. The Handbook is referenced and appropriately summarised in the Student Survival Guide. It is also referenced on the external examiners' pages on the University's virtual learning environment, duo, where specific sections are also referenced in the relevant paragraphs.

52 Generic assessment criteria applied to all undergraduate programmes, are found in the University Calendar, with a hyperlink through the Learning and Teaching Handbook, as are similar criteria for postgraduate taught programmes. The same criteria are applied to examinations and summative coursework.

53 Boards of examiners are empowered to exercise discretion, using 'the general University conventions as guidelines'.

54 The University's assessment policies and practices were the subject of an internal review in 2007-08, leading to the modification of some aspects of its regulations in Epiphany Term 2009 for immediate implementation. The audit team saw evidence that this review was thorough and comprehensive, and that it took account of the relevant sections of the *Code of practice* and other external documents. The review focused on three key areas: feedback to students, support for external examiners and the exercise of discretion by boards of examiners.

55 The exercise of discretion was considered in detail by the Review of Assessment. It concluded that there should not be specific guidelines or criteria, but that while no marks should be changed, discretion could be exercised in classifying degree results. The University believes that it can ensure that discretion is exercised equitably and consistently across the institution, while allowing the appropriate exercise of academic judgement in reaching decisions about classification through three mechanisms:

- the appointment of a University Chief Examiner
- the consistent use of its criteria for determining mitigating circumstances
- the training of Board chairs and secretaries.

56 The audit team heard that the role of the Chief Examiner would be to take an overview of the activities of all boards of examiners, including their use of the mitigating circumstances criteria and their exercise of discretion. The audit team agreed with the University's view that the roles of the chairs and secretaries of Boards will be critical in ensuring comparability of awards across the University and equity in use of discretion, and that the proposed training which is already in place, will be an essential element in achieving this. The team therefore recommends that it is desirable for the University to investigate the exercise of discretion by boards of examiners in 2008-09, including the effectiveness of the training provided, making it the subject of a report by the University Chief Examiner, as soon as possible following the current assessment round.

57 There are University-wide policies on the quality assurance of the examination and assessment procedures. Departments are required to have procedures for anonymous marking of scripts, anonymous classification of degree results and a standard pro forma for recording marks for examination scripts. The external examiner is required to comment on the whole procedure. Departments are also required to develop procedures appropriate to their own subject areas, which must be acceptable to LTC/GSC as appropriate.

58 The membership and powers of boards of examiners are determined by Senate and summarised in the Learning and Teaching Handbook. The power to appoint to the boards is delegated by Senate to LTC and GSC. There are comprehensive rules for membership and quoracy, and for recording and reporting procedures. There are university-wide regulations

on the physical arrangements for examinations, including arrangements for students with additional needs; for late submission of assessed work; for dealing with irregularities (including plagiarism), and for students who miss assessments for good cause.

59 The module descriptors, which are in a standard format, clearly describe the assessment required for each module. There are University-wide rules for progression, including resit rights, which are accessible through the Student Survival Guide.

60 The audit team considered that the University's arrangements for the assessment of students make a full contribution to the maintenance of academic standards.

Management information - statistics

61 The Academic Office has primary responsibility for statistical data relating to quality and standards. It collects and coordinates the University's data relating to entry qualifications and standards, progression rates, and degree classifications. This data is sent to departments for consideration. The University has recently adopted the basic principle that comments on such data should be cascaded upwards from department to University levels. This included provisions to ensure that Senate continued to be aware of the data when considering strategic key performance indicators for the next Strategic Plan.

62 The data is considered during the annual programme review process, by comparing data with data for the previous five years. From 2007-08, departments were also provided with aggregated data from their own faculty to serve as a benchmark. The audit team has seen evidence in annual review documentation, and in the minutes of LTC and Senate that there is analytical consideration of statistical data.

63 LTC and GSC both consider relevant data, especially in relation to student admissions, progression, concessions and appeals. In addition to analysing the data, the committees also consider how its presentation might be improved, and make recommendations for implementation in future years. These considerations have informed a number of its recent reviews of processes, including the Review of Admissions Working Group.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

64 The University has been through mapping exercises for each section of the *Code of practice* against its own regulations, practices and procedures. The audit team saw a number of examples of this work and how University documents were not only aligned to the expectations of the *Code* but contained specific references to relevant parts (paragraph 44).

65 The University has identified a group of 'comparator' institutions. It uses information from and about them to benchmark its own activities and outcomes. The audit team also heard that the University makes use of external reference points where these are available for its support services, for example, the library makes use of Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) data to benchmark itself against services in comparable universities.

66 The audit team considers that the University makes effective use of external reference points in managing learning opportunities for its students.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

67 The University stated in its Briefing Paper that responsibility for academic programmes of study rests with the University's academic departments, and this is carried out within a quality management framework approved by Senate and with clear lines of reporting. Approval, annual review and Enhancement-led Review (ELR) expect departments, and external experts where they are involved, to consider the availability of appropriate learning opportunities for students. Programme

approval involves the library and Information Technology Service (ITS) at an early stage, and requires specification of the learning and teaching strategy to enable the achievement of learning outcomes, and arrangements for student support and quality management. Annual review includes outcomes of reviews of individual modules based on questionnaires, matters raised in staff-student consultative committees, staff development, the operation of quality management and enhancement procedures at departmental level.

68 There is evidence from the examples of programme approval and annual review considered by the audit team that the processes are thorough and comprehensive in relation to both standards and quality of provision. Both address key elements of the Academic Infrastructure, published by QAA. Annual review in particular, seems to be an effective stimulus to developments in learning and teaching: for instance, good practice in relation to e-learning was identified in two annual reviews in 2007-08, and formed the basis of staff development workshops open to all university teaching staff.

69 The ELR also deals with the quality of learning opportunities, and review teams are assisted by a series of prompts in the guidance provided by the Learning and Teaching Handbook. The reports read by the audit team included clear and full analyses, and identification of consequent recommendations. Minutes of the Quality and Standards Subcommittee (QSSC) show that the procedures are completed in full, and that proper report is made at university level. However, the team noted that staff representing the learning support services played a limited part in the process. The Academic Support Office prepares the first draft of the ELR report, which are then circulated to ELR teams for comments and amendment; the Academic Staff Development Officer reads all the reports, and uses them as valuable input to staff development plans. However, learning support staff are not otherwise involved routinely: they are not used as panel members, and panels do not typically consult them in reviews. The role of professional learning support staff, especially in the library and ITS, is recognised by the University in the programme approval arrangements. The team noted that in both the review of internal and collaborative programmes, where problems emerged and had been noted in ELR reports, they often involved learning resources (see paragraph 133). This led the team to conclude that more direct involvement of relevant staff in periodic reviews might well help to deal with any difficulties earlier and more effectively. The team, therefore, considered it desirable that the University exploit to a greater extent the professional expertise of learning support staff in the operation of Enhancement-led review.

Management information - feedback from students

70 Student feedback is obtained through a range of questionnaires. All departments are required to administer a module evaluation questionnaire (MEQ) for every module. The University has not developed a standard questionnaire, but it has specified the topics to be included. The questionnaire includes the opportunity for students to comment on how the module fits into the programme as a whole in an effort to provide feedback on the coherence of programmes. Response rates are monitored through the annual review process with action plans provided if these are below 50 per cent. The results are considered by departmental learning and teaching committees and the relevant staff-student consultative committee (SSCC), with the data forming a part of annual review. Since 2007-08, departments have been required to provide consolidated feedback to all students, including indications of actions taken. This has taken the form of emails to all appropriate students. Students reported to the audit team that their experience of feedback from their evaluations is mixed. The team saw examples of results being distributed to students by email and with effective and thorough synthesis. By contrast, some SSCC representatives indicated that they had received no feedback.

71 Information from students also comes from a programme evaluation questionnaire completed by students, following postgraduate taught programmes, the National Student Survey (NSS) completed by final-year undergraduate students and the International Student Barometer Survey. In each case, arrangements are in place for considering, reporting on and responding to the results, and for providing consolidated feedback to students. For example, NSS data is

considered at department, faculty and university level, through SSCCs (including SSCCs for the combined programmes), departmental and faculty learning and teaching committees (FLTCs), the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) and Senate. The students met by the audit team were fully aware of this system and expressed satisfaction with it.

72 For the experience in the colleges, there is a College Student Experience Survey for all undergraduates, and a similar survey for the postgraduates in Ustinov College (a postgraduate-only college). Other postgraduates are not included. The results are considered by the colleges themselves with an annual report to the University Executive Committee (UEC) and, from 2007-08, a report is also made to the Student Experience Subcommittee, which in turn is reported to LTC.

73 The audit team concluded that the University makes effective use of information derived from student feedback in managing the quality of learning opportunities.

Role of students in quality assurance

74 Students are represented at all levels of the University's committee structure. There are three student representatives on Senate (the President of the Durham Students' Union (DSU), a Junior Common Room (JCR) president and a postgraduate). A DSU representative is on the Learning and Teaching Committee and students are represented on the Student Experience Subcommittee, the Graduate School Committee and other bodies such as the IT Steering Group. Students are also invited to join many of the fixed-term working groups, although they are not routinely included on all. The representation at university-level comes from the DSU, as well as from Junior, Middle and Graduate Common Rooms and from the Graduate School Committee as appropriate and, in the case of the Student Experience Subcommittee, from Queen's Campus. Although students are not included in the membership of some deliberative committees, this is being reviewed. For example, the audit team learned that there will now be a student member of the Quality and Standards Subcommittee.

75 At faculty level, two students, one postgraduate and one undergraduate are included in the membership of the learning and teaching committees. There is also comprehensive provision for student representation within departments, with at least two student representatives on all boards of studies, as well as departmental staff-student consultative committees (SSCCs). The arrangements for SSCCs varies between departments, with some departments reported as being very proactive in the recruitment of representatives, while others are less so. The work of SSCCs is monitored at annual review and at ELR. From the review reports included as a part of the audit, the audit team saw examples of effective monitoring. Arrangements for student representation and sharing good practice are considered at faculty level. Within the colleges the JCR and Middle Common Room (MCR) presidents sit on college councils.

76 In terms of the contribution of postgraduate students to quality assurance through the membership of committees, there are two postgraduate student members of the Graduate School Committee (GSC), one of whom is also a member of Senate. Postgraduate students sit on the Faculty Graduate Advisory Groups. All departments either include research students in general SSCCs, or hold specific meetings to consider postgraduate issues. In addition to SSCCs, departments include research student members on research committees, boards of studies or subgroups thereof. The MCR Representatives is a committee formed of the senior postgraduate representatives of each of the colleges. The DSU-run Postgraduate Academic Senate provides a forum for all departmental postgraduate student representatives to meet and discuss common issues, which may then be pursued by the DSU in its meetings with University management.

77 The DSU has responsibility for training student members of SSCCs; this is now in place for all three faculties. The training is supported by a training booklet, one for each faculty. The training is not yet being taken up by all student representatives and the audit team learned that in its first year of operation, 2008-09, it focused more on gaining responses to the outcomes of

the National Student Survey than on broader training for the range of duties expected of a student representative.

78 Student representatives are involved in four of the University's quality management processes. Consultation with students forms a part of the programme approval process. Evidence of this consultation is a required part of the documentation. Departments are required to include students in annual reviews and SSCCs receive the review submission before it is sent to the FLTC. External examiner reports, as well as draft departmental responses to these reports are shared with students, although some of the student representatives met by the audit team were not fully aware of this process. Students are also involved in ELR, both through meetings with representative groups of students and, during 2008-09, on a pilot basis, a student has been included as a member of the review teams. This has now been extended and, from 2009-10, a student will routinely be included as a panel member. This membership is by a current student or DSU/JCR sabbatical officer, from a department other than the one under review and training is provided by the Academic Office. Students will be included in the general training for all staff members from 2009-10. The students were positive about their involvement in the review processes.

79 The audit team concluded that the arrangements and the support for students to be involved in quality management processes were effective.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

80 The University Strategy and its learning and teaching strategy place an emphasis on the institution being research-led and on providing 'research-led learning and teaching'. This is explained as introducing students to the latest findings in their disciplines, and developing their powers of critical insight and intellectual synthesis. This commitment to research-led teaching is also prominent in the faculty learning and teaching strategies. At departmental level, the revision of learning and teaching strategies in 2008 placed particular emphasis on the need for these to articulate a clear departmental view on the relationship between research and teaching within their taught provision. This issue is, in turn, being considered at faculty level. From this, in March 2009, the University Learning and Teaching Committee received a report on the University approach to research and teaching links. This emphasised the importance of research as a part of the education provided by the University; identified further ways in which the University might strengthen its strategic objectives in relation to research-led teaching, including amending module and programme approval processes and ensuring the links are fully communicated to the students; and noted the activities that had been taking place in the faculties in this regard including faculty forums devoted to research-led teaching. Furthermore it received a report that included an 'in principle' decision to move to an integrated periodic review process, encompassing both teaching and research with effect from 2010-11, to allow the holistic review of the full range of a department's activities. The LTC also noted that more needed to be done to ensure that these links were clearly communicated to students.

81 The University considers its Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education as an important mechanism for promoting the integration of research-based pedagogy. This is taken by new full-time academic staff and teaching fellows. The audit team learned from staff that this was proving to be effective in establishing research-led teaching. There is also a policy to appoint only research-active staff to lecturer positions and to encourage them to develop the curriculum to reflect their research interests and expertise.

82 While the commitment to research-led teaching is clearly articulated in the University's strategies, and generally the students met by the audit team were aware of, and welcomed, this approach, the team also learned that this commitment is not always fully explained to students. As a result, while they fully appreciate the opportunities to be exposed to cutting-edge research, to work with the research leaders in their field, particularly in the later parts of their programmes, and to develop their own research skills and knowledge, there is some frustration in the conflicts

between research and teaching when, for example, modules are not available, because academic staff are on research leave.

83 Links between research and teaching are a particular focus of ELR. The ways in which staff have included current research was evident to review teams. The review teams have also identified ways in which research-oriented approaches have been brought into the curriculum, mainly through research-methods modules and dissertations, and have challenged departments, where this is not occurring, leading to a recommendation that the University should consider whether all undergraduate programmes should include a significant piece of research. External examiners have also commended the success of research-led teaching.

84 A consideration of the links between research and teaching has been the focus of a number of faculty and cross-university staff development initiatives. A workshop on supervising undergraduate dissertations has regularly been included in the academic staff development programme, and many other programmes provided by the Academic Staff Development Office relate to research-led teaching. At faculty and departmental levels, the learning and teaching forums and departmental staff developments sessions have focused on research-led teaching, and two faculties have supported other work.

85 In summary, the University has gone a long way in defining and developing its approach to research-led teaching, in incorporating this into its learning and teaching strategies and including it in its processes. As a result, there is a widespread and common awareness and understanding among the academic staff of the nature of research-led teaching. Since 2008, new and increased practical emphasis has been given to the University's long tradition of research-led teaching, and this already figures prominently in the University's processes and activities. In the view of the audit team, this approach has the potential significantly to enhance the students' learning opportunities. The team considered the University's comprehensive approach to defining and developing research-led teaching to be a feature of good practice.

Other modes of study

86 The University offers distance learning through the Durham Business School in the form of MBA and MA programmes using e-learning. The School also offers programmes by distance teaching, involving members of University staff teaching in blocks in distant locations. In addition most programmes include the use of e-learning, most prominently through the University's virtual learning environment, duo. The audit team learned that there is no distinction in learning outcomes as a result of place and mode of study, and that common external examination teams and examination boards and other quality processes are used irrespective of location.

87 The development of e-learning is clearly identified in the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy and by the distinct e-Learning Strategy, both of which set out a clear direction for development, including an aim to support staff and to enhance the student experience. There is also a recognition of the support that e-learning can provide for students in the colleges.

88 The use of duo in teaching and learning is led by staff and informed by student reviews and evaluation. The postgraduate programme questionnaire, for example includes a specific question on duo. Furthermore, the Learning Technologies Team is informed by two annual surveys, for students and staff, the results of which are fed back to faculties and departments. The University provides support in the infrastructure and staff training, including workshops and sessions in the programme for newly appointed staff. The approval, review and monitoring of distance-learning programmes as well as programmes involving e-learning, takes place through the normal processes. The Learning and Teaching Handbook makes specific reference, in relation to curriculum development, to distance and e-learning and to the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, and recommends a number of sources of information about good practice.

89 The view of the audit team is that the University's arrangements for other modes of learning are effective in maintaining the quality of the students' learning opportunities. Students are very positive about duo, which is very well used by them, although they are aware of the variability in the ways in which it is used across the University.

Resources for learning

90 Responsibility for the learning resources strategy and for coordinating the development of learning resources rests with the LTC. The resources themselves are managed by the Durham University Library, ITS and Estates and Buildings with strategy for each area resting respectively with the Library Steering Group, the IT Steering Group and the Space Management Group. Each group is chaired by a member of the UEC and strategic coordination between them and with the LTC is provided by cross-committee membership. The link between the annual planning round for learning resources and learning and teaching issues raised by departments is provided through the departmental annual review process. Subsequently, meetings between the academic departments and the faculty PVC lead to the identification of key priorities, which are submitted in the plans to UEC. The process is informed by management information provided by the Strategic Planning and Change Unit.

91 The University library operates on four sites. Management policies for discipline-specific provision are agreed with each department. The library provides induction for new students, as well as further development support and it works with the Students Union; most recently this has led to the further extension of opening hours. Feedback comes from the library's own User Satisfaction Survey, as well as the NSS, and the library benchmarks its provision against national data. A Library Users' Group provides representation for all departments and a Student Users' Forum is attended by undergraduate and postgraduate students. These report to the Library Steering Group. The audit team heard from students that they are satisfied with the support provided by the library provision both on the Durham and Queen's campuses, although some inadequacies in the numbers of recommended texts and limited working space were reported. The audit team learned that work is underway on a library extension that will overcome the problems with the availability of working space. The library provision in the colleges supplements that of the central library services.

92 The University's Information Technology Service (ITS) is responsible for the operation and development of the University voice and data network. In addition to the comprehensive provision, with a minimum set of audiovisual equipment in all centrally bookable teaching rooms, ITS also runs a regular training programme designed to support students in developing their IT skills and also provides training for staff. The latter includes training for duo, as well as for e-learning more generally, as a part of the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (CLTHE). This is required for all newly appointed members of academic staff. ITS training is also available for other staff members but it is not compulsory even though academic staff are responsible for introducing their students to duo.

93 An IT Users' Group, with student representation, and an IT Managers' Group for those responsible for staff in central services, departments and colleges, provides feedback and guidance. These report to the IT Steering Group, which is responsible to UEC. Feedback from the Users' Group is supplemented by user surveys, the results of which are provided on the University website. Information on the use of IT, including the ways in which duo is being used, is collected for annual reviews to inform developments. Following the approval of the University IT Vision in November 2007, an IT Strategy and Plan was approved in October 2008, with additional funding designed to enhance the IT support provided to students. The audit team found that students are strongly supportive of the extent to which IT resources are readily available to support their academic learning.

94 The arrangements for developing and coordinating strategy, for allocating resources and for the review of provision, in the view of the audit team, all contribute to the effective provision of learning resources in the University.

Admissions policy

95 Students applying to the University of Durham complete a two-stage process. First they apply for a programme of study. This is considered by academic selectors in the academic departments. At this point the University decides whether to offer a place of study. Secondly, they may apply to nominate a College of preference. The College senior tutors allocate students to colleges.

96 The admissions process itself is decentralised, with responsibility shared between the Academic Office, the academic departments and the colleges. The respective responsibilities are clearly set out in the Policy for Admission. Within this, decisions on admission rest entirely with the academic departments. In comparison with the Regulations for admission for undergraduate students, those for postgraduate admission are much less full. The audit team learned that these regulations are being reviewed and that they will be more fully documented.

97 All staff involved in making admissions decisions are required to complete a compulsory training programme and yearly refresher training, and require yearly approval from the Learning and Teaching Committee. The completion of training is monitored by the Student Recruitment and Admissions Office. There is also an annual review meeting of all admissions staff, which provides an opportunity to share good practice. Admissions methods are developed and approved by the LTC and any change in method requires approval of LTC.

98 Departments are required to report on admissions issues as a part of annual review, and LTC monitors the effectiveness through management information and reports. The admissions process is also included in the ELR process and the audit team studied an ELR report which demonstrated that students found the admissions process to be informative and effective.

99 In the view of the audit team, the arrangements ensure consistent implementation of the University's admissions policies, which reflect the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education*.

Student support

100 Students are provided with a wide range of information from the time before they arrive and throughout their time as students. This is provided through department and college-based inductions and handbooks. The written material is provided in hard copy and increasingly via duo. The quality of this information is considered as a part of ELR. The ELR reports indicate that the students are very positive about the usefulness of their module handbooks. Up to now the programme handbooks have not been standardised. However, as an outcome of the ELRs conducted in 2006-07 and 2007-08, which had identified good practice, the LTC has agreed to support departments with a form of central guidance, and standardised text for inclusion in all handbooks from 2010-11.

101 Academic departments take the lead for academic support, with colleges taking the lead in pastoral support. Within the overall support, the students are aware of some variability, but the combination of departmental and college support is viewed very favourably by students as having a very positive effect on their learning and pastoral experience. To ensure and strengthen coordination between departments and colleges, chairs of FLTCs and the Dean of the Graduate School meet college senior tutors each term. These are informal unminuted meetings, although the audit team learned that the issues are reported to the Student Experience Subcommittee.

102 While all departments must ensure that appropriate academic support is available, the precise arrangement varies between departments. Monitoring takes place through SSCCs, student feedback and ELR. The students are aware of the variability in approaches to providing support across the University. Some departments do not have personal tutors but provide support in other ways, through, for example, level tutors. In some cases, the personal tutors provide personal as well as academic support, and the audit team found from their meeting with

students that those on joint programmes were not always clear about the locus for their support within the departments. Notwithstanding this variability, the students generally are well satisfied with the academic support that they receive.

103 Within the colleges, the Senior Tutors are responsible for pastoral care, supported by college tutors. Pastoral and welfare support, as well as the tutorial system and resources are included in the periodic reviews of the colleges with the report and responses considered by the Student Experience Subcommittee. The students were very positive about the role of the colleges in their personal development, but they also reported that there is variability in the level of pastoral support across the colleges; postgraduate students were notably unaware of the support available. The University has recognised this variability and a review of the tutorial provision has been taking place with a view to developing a clear statement of core pastoral support to be offered. Similarly, variability has been noted in the take-up of personal development planning (PDP). An enhanced PDP is being developed for introduction in 2009-10.

104 In addition to support through the departmental and college structures, support is also available through central specialist services. In the case of international students, this comes through the International Office, including an advice service, induction activities as well as workshops for staff from the departments and colleges. Students confirmed that the experience of international students was good, including English-language support. The Academic Office houses the specialist support services of Counselling, the Durham University Service for Students with Disabilities (DUSSD) and the Careers Advisory Service. Counselling and DUSSD can be accessed directly by students, or they may be referred by their college or department. Both also provide training for departmental and college staff. Each department has a member of staff responsible for students with disabilities and for careers. The students reported ease of access to these if required. The evaluation of these specialist services is provided through questionnaires and/or focus groups as well as through usage statistics. This information forms the basis of annual reports to the Student Experience Subcommittee. According to the student written submission students rate highly the support provided.

105 Details about student complaints and appeals are given in University handbooks and via the website. The procedures were reviewed in 2007-08 informed by the revised *Code of practice, Section 5: Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters*. As a result, arrangements for informal resolution have been introduced. The LTC and GSC monitor complaints and appeals through annual overview reports from faculties and from the Senate Academic Appeals Committee. These include analysis, as well as statistical information. Training and feedback sessions have been established for faculty staff involved in appeals and complaints.

106 The audit team found that the University's arrangements for supporting students were very effective, with good coordination between academic and pastoral support, and considered this area a feature of good practice.

Staff support (including staff development)

107 The University's Learning and Teaching Strategy includes an aim to recognise and reward staff who teach or support learning, and to enhance their professional skills. Staff support is provided centrally by the Academic Staff Development Office (ASDO), with support for specific activities provided by the Learning Technologies Team (LTT) in relation to e-learning, and for newly appointed academic staff by the University's Centre for Learning, Teaching and Research in Higher Education (CLTRHE). The Academic Staff Development Officer is in attendance as required at LTC.

108 The ASDO programme is informed by the learning and teaching strategy, by departmental training plans, by ELR reports and by internal and external developments, including the growth in the numbers of international students. The provision involves external facilitators, as well as internal administrative staff. Alongside this central provision, faculty learning and teaching forums meet three times each year, organised by the ASDO. The topics for coverage at

the forums are agreed with the relevant faculty. Recent forums have reflected faculty learning and teaching strategies including, for example, research-led teaching, e-learning and peer review. The audit team noted that attendance at faculty forums is mixed, with some sessions attracting very few staff. The ASDO also provides specific development for departments and supports individuals, including funding to attend conferences. A system of peer observation of teaching is in operation. Outcomes are reported to heads of department, and departments are required to report on the process through the annual review report and to have means in place to disseminate good practice. The team learned that in one department this is linked with student module evaluation, so that teachers with strong and weak evaluations work together.

109 All academic staff are required to complete a three-year period of probation on taking up their appointment. During this period, they are expected to have a lighter workload, to be supported by a mentor, to provide regular reports on progress and complete the first two modules (30 credits) of the 60-credit Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (CLTHE) accredited by the Higher Education Academy (HEA). From October 2009, newly appointed part-time staff will be required to complete a 20-credit Durham Award in Learning and Teaching, or the first module of the CLTHE. The audit team learned that newly appointed staff were benefiting from the programme in developing and reflecting on their teaching, supported by mentorship from a colleague who had already completed the programme; this is in addition to the formal mentor. However, they also learned that the programme placed considerable demands on their time and that, as a result, the compulsory programme has been revised and from 2009-10 it will move to 40 credits. This will still enable new staff to attain HEA status.

110 Under the Annual Staff Review (ASR) scheme, staff meet a reviewer once a year to review progress, set objectives and identify staff development needs. According to the Briefing Paper, the main purpose of the Annual Staff Review scheme is 'to help staff develop to their full potential, and to understand how the work they do can contribute to Durham's future success'. Heads of department are required to provide departmental training plans to the ASDO, and to the Training Team in Human Resources, from individual staff development needs identified in the reviews. These then inform the academic staff development programme submitted to the LTC. While Heads of Department are aware of those who have taken part in the review process, there is no central University record of participation rates that would provide a basis for maintaining an oversight of the consistency of participation in the process. Staff are asked in the biennial staff survey whether they have participated in Annual Staff Review. In the most recent survey, of those staff participating, 84 per cent indicated they had been involved in Staff Review. The audit team therefore recommends that it is desirable to adopt a more systematic approach to the recording of participation in Annual Staff Review.

111 The University has recently approved a rationale, arrangements, job-description and career pathway for teaching-only staff, known as teaching fellows. As a part of this, their responsibilities in relation to scholarship and ensuring that their teaching is 'research informed', is clarified, in an appropriate fashion for a research-led University. The new arrangements for teaching-only staff include opportunities for promotion to professorial level.

112 Excellence in learning and teaching is a requirement for all academic promotions, with the exception of those to readership. Contributions to learning and teaching can also be rewarded through discretionary awards and exceptional payments.

113 The audit team considered that the arrangements for supporting staff were effective in equipping them to provide appropriate learning opportunities for the students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

114 The University's Strategic Plan to 2010 includes, as a key priority, strengthening academic excellence, with a focus on improvements to the quality of learning and teaching. This is reflected in the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy 2007-2010, which places responsibility for quality enhancement and assurance and the dissemination of good practice with the University Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC). The University Learning and Teaching Strategy is supported by faculty learning and teaching strategies, approved by LTC in 2008, departmental strategies as well as other University strategies. The LTC is supported by three subcommittees: Quality and Standards; Student Experience; and Undergraduate Admissions, as well as by the faculty learning and teaching committees (FLTC) which in turn oversee the departmental committees. The minutes of the LTC indicate that it is able to take a strategic approach to quality enhancement. Recent strategic changes have included, for example, revisions to module structures and the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGCLTHE), recommendations to introduce peer observation of teaching to support quality enhancement and the introduction of Thematic Reviews.

115 In this context of strategic and organisational support, the overall University approach to enhancement is to place it within the broader framework that supports the strategic objectives in relation to learning and teaching, rather than to have a separate quality enhancement strategy. The University Quality Management Framework approved by Senate in October 2008 brings together issues of academic standards, quality assurance and quality enhancement into a single framework. This provides a clear definition of quality enhancement, with a focus on using systems and information to enhance the quality of the student learning experience, and sets out the institutional framework to achieve this. The Framework focuses on staff support and reward; the development and review of learning and teaching strategies and monitoring their effectiveness; the identification and dissemination of good practice; responding to the outcomes of external and internal reviews, and considering management information. The framework also sets out the responsibilities of individual staff, departments, faculties and University committees for academic standards, quality assurance and quality enhancement.

116 The University's approach to enhancement and its link with academic standards and quality assurance is reflected in its inclusion in the annual and periodic review processes. Notably, the annual review documentation examined by the audit team indicates that departments identify and reflect on areas for improvement, staff development in relation to quality enhancement and on dissemination of good practice. Quality enhancement activities are also included in the reporting from the Enhancement-led Reviews (ELRs). One of the specific aims of ELR is to enhance provision, both of taught programmes and the supervision of research students, by identifying and disseminating good practice, and identifying areas for improvement. The ELR reports identify in the view of the audit team very full good practice and action points to enhance quality. These reports are considered at the Quality and Standards Subcommittee (QSSC) and the University Review Panel (URP). The LTC and FLTCs receive the annual overview reports in order to disseminate good practice. The documentation relating to the follow-up to the review reports indicate that actions are followed through and include external comment. Two annual overview reports are produced from the ELRs undertaken each year, one for taught programmes and one for research degrees. These identify good practice for dissemination and inform University policy.

117 As set out in the Framework, quality enhancement is encouraged and supported in a number of other ways. These include engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points. For example, feedback from external members of review teams and external examiners are intended to provide views and examples of good practice. External examiners are asked how Departments might consider developing teaching, learning and assessment policies and procedures. Where such issues are raised, they are considered as part of the analysis and overview of external examiner reports.

118 Encouragement, support and reward for staff to contribute to quality enhancement is provided through staff development opportunities (see paragraphs 107 and 108). The audit team learned, for example, of the positive influence of the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. In addition, the University recognises staff contributions through two award schemes: Excellence in Learning and Teaching Awards and University Awards for Excellence in Doctoral Supervision. The University's Enhancing the Student Learning Experience Scheme aims to help support departments and faculties to develop innovative provision aligned to their learning and teaching strategies, and it is expected that the outcomes will include a report for wider dissemination, as well as presentations.

119 Dissemination of good practice takes place at a number of levels, for example, through annual reviews of learning and teaching, which may include an away-day, and through peer observation schemes. Above departmental level, ELR reports are discussed at QSSC and URPs, and all FLTCs receive the ELR overview reports. At university level, the ASDO produces each year two editions of the magazine Quality Enhancement at Durham. This provides information on good practice as well as pieces on particular themes and information about staff development events. A good practice website on duo also provides a single reference point and the work of the University's three Centres of Excellence for Teaching and Learning has been analysed on two occasions, to ensure that the University as a whole benefits from the expertise and investment.

120 Operational support by the University for quality enhancement is provided by a number of separate units including the Academic Staff Development Office (ASDO), Academic Support Office, Centre for Learning, Teaching and Research in Higher Education (CLTRHE), Human Resources, the Learning Technologies Team (LTT) and the Postgraduate Training Team. These provide a wide range of development opportunities. They meet together informally once per term together with the University's Centres for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELTs) and its National Teaching Fellows. Formally they report annually to the University LTC, which is responsible for their overall strategy and coordination. The audit team was of the view that this provided wide-ranging and appropriately coordinated support.

121 The audit team recognised this approach to quality enhancement as providing deliberate steps to enhance the quality of learning opportunities that are aligned with the overall University strategy. Furthermore it is effectively integrated into the University's procedures, and there are monitoring arrangements to assess its effectiveness. However, while many of the processes have been in place for some time and will have contributed to the good-quality learning opportunities provided by the University, the overall framework is only in its first year of operation. As such its full effect is yet to be achieved.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

122 At the time of the audit, the University operated two main types of collaborative provision, and had in place a framework of policies and procedures to support them. Validated partnerships were those where the programme taught was not necessarily one that was also provided by Durham University and where the partner was responsible for recruitment, registration, teaching and examination of the validated programme. Collaborative partnerships were those that provided programmes also taught by departments of the University, and where the relevant departments were directly involved in the management of quality and standards through distance teaching, articulation agreements, accreditation agreements, or joint and dual awards.

123 Four validated partnerships were in operation, providing for 517 students in the academic year 2008-09. All were situated in the north-east region. Two of the partners were consortia of colleges validated to provide programmes and make various awards in Theology and Ministry, in support of the Church of England's framework for ministerial education. At the time of the audit, the two consortia proposed to merge and the University was in the process of completing a joint review of both, on the basis of which, a proposal for revalidation could be presented to Senate

during 2009. For the two other validated partnerships one leads to a postgraduate diploma and the other to an undergraduate diploma of higher education. One of the programmes, revalidated in 2008, was due to end in 2011 after which the partner would seek validation from a higher education institution other than Durham.

124 At the time of the audit, there were 284 students involved in collaborative partnerships. Six partnerships involved overseas distance teaching of University programmes by University staff. The University also provided dual awards in an Executive MBA in partnership with the European Business School in Oestrich-Winkel, Germany, and co-tutelle doctorates with three French universities. A joint programme leading to an MSc in Arab World Studies was provided with the University of Edinburgh. In addition, an articulation agreement had been established with the Harbin Engineering University in China, to provide a BEng in General Engineering, but no students had yet been recruited.

125 The University reviewed its current collaborative provision policies and procedures following the publication of the second edition of the *Code of practice, Section 2; Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. Revised policies and procedures came into effect for taught programmes in 2005 and for research programmes in 2006. In 2007, a special working group reviewed the operation of the management of partnerships and recommended that the policies and procedures for taught and research degrees were brought together into a single set of documents and these were adopted in November 2007. Where there was some risk that existing partnerships may not have been approved in a manner compliant with the revised arrangements, the Academic Support Office conducted risk assessments. A number of partners were visited by teams independent of the departments that originally proposed the partnership. In all cases, the appropriateness of the partnerships were confirmed.

126 In October 2008, Senate approved a formal University strategy for collaborative partnerships. The chief objectives of the strategy are that collaborations should take place where they will help achieve a number of the following objectives: raise the University's international reputation; provide wider access to higher education in the north-east region, and help to internationalise the student community. All collaborations are required to comply with the standards and quality of the University's awards. From 2008-09, in addition to the normal process of annual review and periodic review applied to all collaborative programmes, faculty collaborative provision panels also considered and commented on the alignment of existing partnerships with the University strategy (see paragraph 130).

The framework for the management of collaborative provision

127 The University operates distinct procedures for the management of the academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities of its collaborative provision. These are described in the Validation Handbook and Section 3 of the Learning and Teaching Handbook. While these set out a separate framework for the management of collaborative provision, it is one that is consistent with the arrangements for the management of internal programmes described in Section 2 of this annex. Where possible procedures are identical and where differences occur they exist to take account of the greater complexity and variety of partnership arrangements. All programmes offered through collaborative partnerships are compatible with the University's qualification descriptors, level descriptors, credit framework, generic assessment criteria and with external reference points including the FHEQ and other aspects of the Academic Infrastructure.

128 Following the abolition of the Graduate School Committee, the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) will be responsible for the management of both types of partnership, including both undergraduate and postgraduate provision, and will report on these to Senate. Detailed oversight is maintained by the Quality and Standards Subcommittee (QSSC), to which the various bodies managing the quality and standards of collaborative programmes report.

The approval of collaborative provision arrangements

129 The approval procedures for establishing new partnerships include mechanisms to test the legal, financial and academic status of proposed partners, and to assess their capacity to provide appropriate academic and student support. Initial proposals usually come from departments and outline approval is required from either the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching), for taught programmes, or the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research), for research programmes, before a detailed case and supporting documentation is prepared. These are considered by specially appointed approval panels whose recommendations and minutes are received by either LTC, taught programmes, or the Graduate School Committee (GSC), research programmes, and a decision is taken whether to recommend a proposed partnership to Senate for approval. Once approved, memoranda of association are signed specifying the management arrangements for the partnership, including the precise requirements for the annual and periodic review of programmes and the procedures for partnership renewal. All validated partnerships require a Partnership Management Committee. The Committee is supported by the University's Academic Office. Partnerships providing taught programmes require a Programme Management Committee, supported by the Durham department involved, and include relevant academic or administrative staff from both partners. Partnership management committees report termly to QSSC on the management of validated provision and also submit an annual review report. Programme Management Committees report annually to QSSC as part of the annual review process.

The monitoring and review of collaborative provision

130 All programmes delivered collaboratively are subject to annual and periodic review. Annual review procedures are aligned with the processes for annual review carried out within the University and described in Section 2 but, additionally, include a report on the operation of the partnership. Each faculty has in place a faculty collaborative provision panel, consisting of both academic and senior administrative staff, and these receive annual reports on the programmes delivered by all forms of collaborative arrangement, together with the reports on the operation of the partnerships themselves. The collaborative provision panels then report to either LTC (via QSSC) or GSC, in the case of research programmes. As described in Section 6, at the time of the audit, a proposal had been prepared for Senate that would, if approved, transfer all quality management procedures currently managed by GSC to LTC from the beginning of the academic year 2009-10.

131 Validated partnerships are subject to detailed, six-yearly, review modelled on the University Review Process in place before 2006 and revalidation is dependent on a satisfactory outcome. Other partnerships providing Durham programmes are reviewed every four years within the Universities standard Enhancement-led Review (ELR) process described in paragraphs 31 to 34.

132 The audit team was able to examine examples of the documentation supporting all the forms of annual and periodic review and revalidation, and also the minutes of partnership management committees, for validated provision, and programme management committees, for other forms of collaborative provision. It was apparent to the team that these procedures had been thoroughly carried out and that, where necessary, appropriate recommendations made and action plans put in place. The team considered in detail the minutes of the Social Sciences and Health Faculty's Partnership Monitoring Panel, since departments in that faculty managed much of the University's overseas collaborative provision, and, in meetings with staff, discussed some of the matters raised. As a result the team is confident that while the teaching arrangements and academic support for students on programmes in other countries cannot be identical, care is taken to ensure they provide learning opportunities and experiences equivalent to those for the awards delivered and supported at the University. The team noted, in particular, that recommendations made to departments by the faculty collaborative provision panels reviewing reports of partnership and programme management committees had led to further action and subsequent report-backs on progress.

133 The audit team noted that while problems arising from provision by validated partners and in collaborative programmes were systematically followed up, many of the difficulties considered in annual review or mentioned in the reports of the partnership and programme management committees were to do with students' access to learning resources, such as IT support, books and periodicals, and with the accommodation in which teaching took place. In their meetings with representatives of the various student support services, such the Learning Technologies Team, the library and the International Office, the team learnt that these staff were not normally involved in either initial visits to potential partners, or in subsequent review visits. The Registrar and Secretary indicated that it was the view of the University that panels visiting partners were comprised of academic staff with sufficient knowledge to judge whether facilities were adequate for the programmes involved. The audit team recommends it would be desirable for the University to make more effective use of the professional expertise of those responsible for learning resources and student support in the approval and monitoring of collaborative provision.

134 The audit team concluded that the arrangements for the management and review of collaborative provision provided robust mechanisms for the oversight of programmes provided in partner institutions.

Assessment and the use of external examiners

135 The principles governing the assessment of students in partner institutions and the role of external examiners match those for internal students described in Section 2. Wherever possible, the procedures are identical too. In the case of collaborative arrangements where the programmes are similar to those taught at the University, the examinations, and arrangements, for the appointment of external examiners and the consideration of their reports, matched those used internally. In most cases, the same external examiner had considered both the home and the partnership programmes.

136 In the case of programmes delivered by validated partners, where the programmes are not also delivered within the University of Durham, external examiners are appointed according to the University's standard criteria. The procedure is slightly different, as nominations by the partner institution are signed off by the chairs of the relevant partnership management committees, who are all deputy heads of faculties, and considered by QSSC before approval by LTC. External examiners of programmes delivered under validation agreements use the same report forms as in the University, and the reports are then considered both by the partner and by the relevant Partnership Management Committee. An annual overview of all examiners' reports in partner institutions is prepared by the Academic Office for consideration by QSSC.

Management of learning opportunities

137 Both Section 3 of the Learning and Teaching Handbook and the Validation Handbook indicate that quality of student learning opportunities and experiences on collaborative programmes should be equivalent to those of comparable awards delivered and supported solely by the University, and be adequate to enable students to achieve appropriate academic standards. While responsibilities for learning and staff support rest with the partner organisations these are assessed as part of initial approval of validated institutions and collaborative programmes and reviewed as part of the processes of annual and periodic review, and before revalidation. The audit team was able to note that the minutes and reports of the partnership and programme management committees frequently addressed questions to do with student access to appropriate information and guidance, facilities and learning materials, and took into account the results of student feedback and their representation on local committees. These matters were also monitored by the faculty collaborative provision panels. Validated partners were required to maintain appropriate management information relating to programmes and student progress. In the case of collaborative programmes, this information was maintained both by the local partner, and by the University, and informs the annual review processes in the normal way.

138 The audit team was able to conclude that the available evidence demonstrated that the University had in place mechanisms that allowed it either to manage directly the quality and standards of provision in collaborating institutions, or to confirm they were appropriately managed by the partner.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The Institutions processes for managing postgraduate research

139 The University Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degree Programmes (the Institutional Code) sets out in detail the procedures for the management of research degrees and the academic support of research students. The Postgraduate Student Guide, updated annually, provides students with comprehensive and detailed guidance on academic regulations, procedures and on all forms of support that are available.

140 At the time of the audit, primary responsibility for the management of research degree programmes lay with Senate and was delegated through the Research Committee to the Graduate School Committee (GSC). The GSC was chaired by the Dean of the Graduate School and included in its membership the pro-vice-chancellor (PVCs) for Learning and Teaching, and for Research; the faculty PVCs and/or deputy heads of faculty responsible for postgraduate matters; and one member of academic staff from each faculty. GSC was responsible for the application of the University's procedures for monitoring and reviewing the performance and progress of research students, and reported on these to Senate through the Research Committee. GSC was supported by a number of advisory groups: one Graduate Advisory Group in each faculty; an advisory group on Research Training; an advisory group on Postgraduate Awards and Scholarship.

141 A review of the deliberative and representative structures for postgraduate education within the University had recently been conducted jointly by the PVCs for Learning and Teaching, and Research. The review had concluded, amongst other matters, that the Research Committee's focus on the delivery of the University's Research Strategy, together with the reality that issues relating to research degree programmes were normally concerned with matters of quality assurance, quality enhancement and regulation, had led to insufficient visibility of research student issues within the deliberative processes of the University. The review had therefore recommended that the GSC should be discontinued. The responsibility for managing the quality and standards of research degree programmes would be transferred to the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC), which would report on these matters to Senate, and a new Graduate School Advisory Board would be created to advise the University on the strategic development of postgraduate provision. These recommendations had been widely discussed within the University and received broad approval. Senate was due to consider the proposals immediately after the audit and appeared likely to agree to the new arrangements for the management of research degrees. However, the detail of the procedures for the management of quality and standards at faculty and departmental level would remain fundamentally the same.

The research environment

142 The University's Graduate School Strategy describes the University's commitment to support a large and vibrant community of postgraduate research students as an important feature of a research-led university, and a fundamental aspect of a stimulating and successful research environment.

143 The University accepts research students into academic departments where it is confident that students can be trained within an environment that is supportive of research. Until 2008-09, this was defined as departments that had a performance in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise at least of national standing, normally indicated by an overall rating of 4 or above;

where staff, including postdoctoral researchers and research students provided a robust, invigorating and sustainable research community; had suitable academic staff to act as supervisors, and had acceptable submission and completion rates in line with Research Council guidelines.

144 The academic department is the primary provider of supervision, academic and practical support and training, working space and other facilities. The Graduate School includes administrative offices that supports postgraduate students, supervisors, examiners and directors of postgraduate research, and which has responsibility for some elements of induction and for the provision of generic training for research students. Research students are also members of a college. While all colleges accept graduate students, since 2007, recruitment has been focused on five 'mixed-colleges', which provide particular support for graduate students, including College Middle Common Rooms, and on Ustinov College which is entirely a graduate college. Admissions information describes what each college has to offer graduate students.

Selection, admission and induction of students

145 The decision to admit a research student is a departmental one and the processes of selection, admission and induction are governed by the Institutional Code. Departments have their own specific requirements, in addition to the University's admissions criteria set out in the regulations. The Graduate School monitors the timeliness of departmental responses and publishes weekly Application Turnaround Reports on its website. All departmental postgraduate admissions advisers receive training in the admissions process. Once a decision on admission has been made, a formal letter is sent by the Graduate School, which contains a full range of relevant information. The research students met by the team confirmed that the selection and admission processes were clear and worked as they expected.

146 The Graduate School provides an institutional-level induction event in October, attendance at which is required of all new research students. The effectiveness of this event was reviewed in 2007-08 and a changed format introduced in October 2008. Information is also provided in the induction packs, which include the Postgraduate Student Guide and the Training Handbook. The Graduate School provides induction workshops including an induction session specifically for international students. Induction events are also run by departments and the colleges.

Supervision

147 The arrangements for supervision are governed by the Institutional Code and guidance is provided by the Graduate School, set out on its web pages and in the Postgraduate Student Guide. All research students are supervised by a supervisory team consisting of at least two supervisors. One supervisor is designated as the Principal Supervisor and must have previous experience of at least one successful supervision and be research-active. All supervisors are formally appointed by the Graduate School Committee and are required to undertake initial training and continuing development. Probationary staff are required to undertake the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, which includes sections on the supervision of research students.

148 Departments are required by the Institutional Code to have formal policies on the management of supervision, and these are approved by the Deputy Heads of Faculties (Postgraduate) on behalf of the Graduate School Committee. The departmental policies describe the responsibilities of supervisors and of the department. They also deal with such matters as: the maximum number of research students supervised by a member of staff; the frequency of meetings between supervisors and students; cover for supervisors who are absent for more than three months; the responsibilities of the student, and who they can approach should they have concerns about their supervision. Guidance on the roles of supervisory teams and research students is published by the Graduate School on its web pages and in the Postgraduate Student Guide.

149 Supervision arrangements are considered in both the annual review of research degree programmes and as part of the Enhancement-led Review (ELR) process. The overviews of ELR presented annually to the Graduate School Committee provided evidence that concerns about supervision were likely to be addressed by the review processes and, if necessary, lead to recommendations and changes. For example, revised training was developed for new supervisors from October 2008 and departments were asked to make clearer their policies for the recording of supervision, dual supervision and the continuity of supervision. The research students met by the audit team confirmed that arrangements for supervision were clear to them, and that they had ready access to their supervisors.

Progress and review

150 The progress of full-time research students is monitored in a range of ways, which together ensure that they are considered every six months, and at equivalent intervals for part-time students, until they are due to complete their supervised research after 36 months. The University requires departments to have a policy on the structure and format of the reviews that is approved by the Deputy Head of Faculty (Postgraduate) on behalf of the Graduate School Committee.

151 Students who are registered on programmes lasting more than one full-time year take part in a Departmental Review 12 months, or the part-time equivalent, after the beginning of the research programme or 12 months, or the part-time equivalent, from the beginning of the period of independent research in the case of students registered for professional doctorates or doctorates with integrated studies. This 12-month review will normally involve the submission of a written piece of work of at least 5,000 words, or an equivalent output, considered by a panel of two independent members of academic staff, appointed by the Head of Department, and, if appropriate, the student's main supervisor. The student will normally be required to make an oral presentation of his/her work, with questions put by panel members.

152 All research students and their supervisors complete an annual report on progress each summer. The annual reports are completed online via duo and are reviewed by the departmental Director of Postgraduate Research, and then by the Deputy Head of Faculty (Postgraduate). The deputy heads of faculty (Postgraduate) also write overviews of the annual reports and these are considered by GSC each year. The documentation seen by the team, and its meetings with supervisors and students, indicated that these arrangements for progress review and annual reporting were likely to ensure that any difficulties encountered by research students would be discovered and addressed.

153 The 2006 QAA Review of research degree programmes recommended that the University gave consideration to the composition of the panel reviewing student progress at the 12-month point. The University has now incorporated into the Institutional Code a requirement that the reviewing panel include two members of staff independent of the supervisory team.

Monitoring and review of research degree programmes

154 Research degree programmes are subject to annual review and are included in the four-yearly ELRs of departments (see Section 2).

155 Annual departmental reviews of research degree provision were introduced by the Graduate School and first took place for the year 2005-06. A revised approach, taking account of departments' experiences of the first reviews, was used for 2006-07. In order to encourage the development of opportunities for reflection, academic departments are not restricted to having a single meeting or day devoted to the annual review, and the form used is designed to capture outputs from appropriate meetings that may occur at different times, depending upon the needs of individual departments. Departments are asked to address in the reviews the operation of such areas as the availability of space and other facilities, supervision and the monitoring of students'

progress, and the provision of research and other training. The Deputy Head of Faculty (Postgraduate) produces an overview of the departmental reviews, which is discussed at the faculty graduate advisory groups. A University overview of all the departmental reviews is subsequently prepared for consideration by GSC. The results of the annual reviews also provide a resource for consideration during the departmental ELRs. There is significant student involvement in the processes used by departments in their annual review processes.

156 The inclusion of research degree programmes in an annual review process was considered by the audit team to be novel. Since research students follow more individualised patterns of study and are generally assessed only after a number of years, the process requires a different approach to the annual monitoring of taught programmes. However, it was clear to the team from the documents produced at departmental, faculty and university level in support of this process that it was providing a framework for the more systematic consideration of many of the issues which concern research students and their supervisors: the relevance and suitability of research and skills training; the availability of appropriate space and resources; the availability and distribution of studentships, and the criteria for selecting supervisors. The overview reports were able to highlight key and recurring problems for consideration by GSC and also point to examples of effective solutions. The practice of annually reviewing research degree programmes was considered by the team to be a feature of good practice.

Development of research and other skills

157 The Graduate School Postgraduate Training Team, which also involves staff from the library, Information Technology Services and the Careers Advisory Service, provides a substantial range of generic and transferable skills training, known as the Postgraduate Research Training Programme; it offered over 200 workshops in 2008-09.

158 All new research students are required to complete a training needs analysis. Students are expected to repeat the needs analysis at least once a year, and the annual report forms that students and supervisors return to the Graduate School ask them to list training courses attended, comment on the benefits and indicate any unmet training needs. There is provision for research students to use an online personal development planning facility. Faculty-based induction workshops are also available to help students choose from the generic training available.

159 The number and range of courses listed in the Training Handbook are considerable. Students met by the panel reported they had used the Postgraduate Research Training Programme in a variety of ways, that the induction workshops were very well attended, and that they had been able to choose training and workshops appropriate to their needs. However, the 2007-08 Overview of Departmental Reviews of Research Degree Provision reported that some departments had difficulty in engaging all staff and students in the training needs analysis.

160 Departments are responsible for subject-specific training in research skills and are required to have written policies on training, which are lodged with the Graduate School. Departments are also required to provide students involved in teaching with appropriate induction, training and monitoring. In addition, the Postgraduate Research Training Programme 2008-09 included eight workshops on teaching skills for postgraduates. The Graduate School has worked with the faculties to develop workshops that link subject specific and more general training.

161 The audit team considered the opportunities available to research students to develop both subject-specific and more generic academic and personal skills to be substantial and comprehensive.

Feedback mechanisms

162 Research students met by the audit team indicated that they regarded their supervisory team as the main route available for feedback on their programmes. The University also has in place a range of ways of collecting students' views: an online survey conducted following induction; an exit survey covering the whole period of study and the viva voce examination; and the annual online reports of progress completed by students. The University also participates in the HEA Postgraduate Research Experience Survey. The processes used by departments for the annual review of research programmes also involve student participation and report student views.

Assessment

163 The assessment of research students is governed by the Institutional Code and the research degree regulations. The audit team found these to be consistent with the FHEQ. The Graduate School had established university-wide criteria for the appointment of external examiners and procedures for the conduct of examinations. It provides a Guide for Examiners and a Guide on the Conduct of the Oral Exam. The Graduate School Postgraduate Training Team provides a course on preparing for the viva voce examination.

164 All examiners' reports are reviewed and approved by the deputy heads of faculty (Postgraduate). The deputy heads are responsible for following up any concerns or recommendations made by examiners. The form used for annual review of research programmes includes a section on assessment, and the reports had led to follow-up activity in a number of areas, such as the monitoring of the submission status of students.

Representations, complaints and appeals

165 The University Regulations set out the routes available to students who wish to appeal on academic or examination matters and these are detailed in the Institutional Code, the Postgraduate Student Guide and the University Calendar. The Graduate School web pages explain how students may make both informal and formal complaints. Statistics are collected on formal complaints. The procedure indicates that students should, where possible, complain first to those directly responsible for providing a service or support. Research students met by the panel indicated they would be most likely to discuss any difficulties with their supervisors, but they were aware that more formal routes for appeals and complaints were available.

Conclusion

166 The audit team concluded that the University's management of its research degree programmes met the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, and that the practice of annually reviewing research degree programmes was a feature of good practice.

Section 7: Published information

167 The accuracy of the information contained within the undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses is the responsibility of the Communication Office's Marketing Team, which considers all text for factual accuracy. The accuracy of programme and module entries is checked by the Academic Support Office, and that for entry requirements by the Student Recruitment and Admissions Office. Oversight of the whole production of the prospectuses is monitored by a project group drawn from the wide variety of academic and support services that provide content. Final approval is provided by a senior group: the Vice-Chancellor, the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching), the Deputy Warden, and the Academic Registrar. Once published, the hard copy prospectuses are circulated to all academic departments and other stakeholders, inviting feedback that is subsequently considered by the project group at the start

of the process the following year. Where changes to programmes or modules that may affect particular groups of students occur between publications, they are notified of the changes.

168 The students' written submission prepared for the audit team by the Durham Students' Union was generally positive about the range and accuracy of information available to prospective and current students. However, it did contain reports of survey data indicating some degree of dissatisfaction with the completeness of information about the Queen's Campus and with that contained in the postgraduate prospectus. The team discussed these matters with representatives of the Durham Students' Union and with the students it met, but was not able to identify any widespread problems.

169 Key publications for students are the Student Survival Guide, the Postgraduate Student Guide, and the International Student Handbook. These contain comprehensive information on services and facilities, guidance on study, on sources of academic and pastoral support, and on the policies and regulations likely to affect, or be used by, students. Both guides are updated annually and signed-off by the Academic Office, which at the time of the audit was conducting a review of their content, and expected to introduce enhancements to those published for 2009-10. Much of the information of relevance to current students is provided in the departmental handbooks, and these are reviewed as part of the Enhancement-led review.

170 Students met by the audit team indicated that information sent to them before coming to the University, and on arrival, had been accurate and useful. Students were particularly positive in their views of the online system, duo, which most students indicated they used on a daily basis for finding both course-specific information and more general information about the University and its services.

171 Since 2004, the University had developed a single content management system that is the source of much information on the University website and prevents multiple versions of the same information. Online module catalogues, the Faculty Handbook Online and the Postgraduate Module Catalogue, draw on detailed module outlines that are managed using web-based module pages. Programme specifications for all undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes are available on the University's website and are linked to module outlines.

172 The audit team examined the information available for the University on the Unistats website and this was complete and up to date. In the view of the team, the University is making publicly available the information detailed in Annex F of HEFCE 06/45, *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes*. The team was impressed by the range, quality and accessibility of information provided by the University, and in the case of information on the management of quality and standards, noted the quality of information provided by all sections of the Academic Office.

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