University of Liverpool

March 2009

Annex to the report

Contents

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Liverpool (the University) from 16 to 20 March 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The institutional approach to quality enhancement is supporting the integration of enhancement into mainstream activities. The University is adopting an innovative approach to using its widening participation priority to drive enhancement, and enhancement to support widening participation.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The audit team found that the University has a sound organisation in place through its Graduate School to ensure satisfactory arrangements for postgraduate research students. The University has taken appropriate action following the report of the QAA Review of research degree programmes in 2006. It has in place thorough systems to support the development and monitoring of individual students and to review the activities of departments. The research environment and postgraduate experience meet in full the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes.*

Published information

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

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- in the context of a research-intensive institution, the strength of the University's commitment to a diverse and innovative suite of widening participation and equal opportunities activities which is sustaining a positive approach within the University and the region, and is also leading to enhancements in the University's educational provision (paragraph 123)

- the very detailed scrutiny of partner proposals currently undertaken by the University's Partnerships Scrutiny Group and its Collaborative Provision Quality and Standards Working Group and the detailed reports of approval and review partner visits (paragraph 143).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- to ensure, when developing its collaborative arrangements further, that its Collaborative Provision Quality and Standards Working Group is in a position to complete its review of School reports by the end of the following session following that to which they relate (paragraph 132)

- to introduce security measures to ensure the identity of contributors to the assessed group discussion elements of modules taken as part of the Laureate on-line programmes (paragraph 138).

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- to continue to give serious consideration to developing and supporting models of integration between research and teaching across the full range of its curricula, exploiting the results of good initiatives elsewhere and the considerable innovative practice within the University as demonstrated by some of its staff (paragraph 69)

- to ensure that, in determining the future forums for the consideration of collaborative provision matters, and in reflecting on the success of the current arrangements for the management of collaborative activities, the roles and responsibilities of the various deliberative bodies are clear and distinctive (paragraph 128)

- as the University develops similar arrangements to those it currently has with Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, to ensure that its senior staff can make available sufficient time to support similarly robust arrangements with these other international partners (paragraph 141)

- to find ways of working with the Liverpool Guild of Students to enhance and consolidate the Guild's provision for the University's considerable cohort of taught and research postgraduate students (paragraph 149).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1   The University was founded in 1881 as University College, Liverpool, a constituent college of the federal Victoria University. It was granted its own Royal Charter as a separate University in 1903. The main campus is located near to Liverpool city centre and covers approximately 35 hectares.

2   The University has currently 18,312 students including 2,169 international students from over 100 countries and 1,911 students registered on continuing education courses. In addition there are also over 3,020 students registered on distance-learning programmes in partnership with Laureate Online Education (a private sector, United States of America (USA) education company, formerly known as Sylvan). The University offers a range of programmes at undergraduate level (over 300 first degree programmes) across a wide range of academic disciplines.

3   The University is a research-led institution. The academic organisation of the University is based on a structure of faculties and departments. There are six faculties: Arts, Engineering, Medicine, Science, Social and Environmental Studies and Veterinary Science.

4   The representative body of the students at the University is known as the Guild of Students. Liverpool Guild of Students is led by a Trustee Board of eight elected students and four appointed non-students who set the strategic direction.

5   The University's Strategic Plan articulates its vision: 'As a distinguished 21st century university, we will have global reach and influence that reflects our academic heritage as a civic institution. A strong infrastructure will support academic endeavour and teaching prowess, while research excellence, focused on the advancement of human knowledge, will underpin all our activities. Our culture of support and collaboration will benefit the communities in which we operate, both at home and overseas. Our staff and students will be given the best intellectual, social and physical environment to research, teach, and learn in, at the cutting edge of their disciplines and with world-class facilities. The Liverpool graduate will be a global citizen, benefiting from an international curriculum and experience, and empowered to address global challenges. We will strive to ensure our students form a relationship with the University that they will want to continue throughout their lives'.

The information base for the audit

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

7   The Guild of Students 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.

8   In addition, the audit team had access to:

●   the report of the previous Institutional audit (2004)

●   reports of reviews by QAA at the subject level since the previous Institutional audit

●   reports produced by other relevant bodies (for example, the Office for Standards in Education and professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs))

●   the institution's internal documents

●   the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.

Developments since the last audit

9   A new Vice-Chancellor was appointed by the University in 2008, and a new Strategic Plan launched in autumn 2008 to cover the period 2009 to 2014. The plan has five key strands: improving our research performance; positioning ourselves as a global university; driving knowledge exchange and innovation; enhancing the student experience; and extending widening participation.

10   The development and launch of this new plan coincided with the period during which the Briefing Paper was being prepared. As discussed with the Senior Team, this inevitably led to complications for presentation and resulted in the Briefing Paper being drafted, to a considerable extent, with reference to the previous Academic Strategy, itself a development since the last audit. On the other hand, there is substantial overlap in terms of ambitions and objectives between the Academic Strategy 2006 to 2010 and the 2009 to 2014 Strategic Plan, so that activity in this area does not appear to have been disrupted.

11   In terms of developments since the 2004 Institutional audit, the Briefing Paper concentrates in the main on responses to the three recommendations. Two advisable recommendations concerned the executive functions of relevant committees and the scope and extent of their authority (see paragraph 16), and upward reporting by faculties of the outcomes of annual programme monitoring. A recommendation for action that was desirable concerned

implementing a coherent strategic framework for the delivery and management of e-learning (see paragraph 73). Overall, the audit team considered that the University had responded adequately to the recommendations from the last audit.

12   The Briefing Paper does not comment on the development of the three features of good practice which were identified, although the audit team heard how staff who had won teaching awards were contributing to continuing professional development programmes for colleagues and saw evidence for the continuous improvement and development of collaborative provision.

13   Representatives of the University referred very positively to 'constant ferment and change' as a characteristic of the institution. This is borne out by the numerous references in the Briefing Paper to recent developments which reflect the impact of the new Academic Strategy 2006 to 2010 (and the more recent Strategic Plan), as well as external developments.

14   Almost 50 developments are listed, ranging from broad university-wide initiatives to specific developments, indicating that the University has been pursuing a range of initiatives which can broadly be grouped under the themes of:

● enhancing the student experience through the development of new strategies and enrichment of opportunities for student development

● creation and exploitation of better management information

● closer monitoring of departmental activity in a number of areas

● opening up of new collaborative provision

● overhaul of arrangements for supporting and developing postgraduate research students.

15   However, the Briefing Paper did not take the opportunity to provide a reflective overview of these developments, not all of which were new at the time of the audit. Given the range of initiatives it appeared to the audit team that developments were significantly more substantial and interesting than had been directly presented in the University's documentation. The team felt that a more considered review of these developments might have reflected a broader perspective to the University's approach to enhancement.

Institutional framework for managing academic standards and learning opportunities

16   The University's committee structure is presented as overseeing the management of academic standards through a combination of processes, policies, regulations, and codes of practice. The audit team was provided with successive diagrams that were intended to clarify the inter-relationship of the different parts of the system. The Institutional audit of 2004 had recommended clarification of the functions of the various committees which contributed to the implementation and evaluation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy, and action had been taken in response. It is clear that thought is again being given to the operation of these arrangements.

17   The Policy on Standards and Quality in Learning and Teaching sets out the framework for managing teaching and learning issues, with a clear division of responsibilities between departments, faculties and the institution. All actions and policies are clarified and supported through web links which ensure that any user is promptly directed to the relevant material. Some of this material, however, is not up-to-date: thus one web page for the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) relates to session 2006-07.

18   Among its terms of reference, the (LTC) advises the Academic Committee (AC) on 'all matters relating to teaching (including academic standards, admissions and academic practice) with particular regard to issues concerning resource.' AC is 'responsible for the development of the academic sector plan within the overall guidance and resources provided by the Planning and Resource Committee.' Although AC also 'advise[s] the Planning and Resource Committee and the

Senate on academic developments/strategy', primary responsibility for managing academic standards and quality of learning opportunities rests at the level of AC. The key assurance processes which are monitored through this system are initial programme approval, annual programme monitoring and periodic review. Through the audit trails the audit team investigated evidence for these processes in action, and found them to be working effectively.

19 LTC is supported by various subcommittees and working groups, including Academic Practice and Academic Standards. Here, too, a web search for 'Academic Practice' and 'Academic Standards' directs users to more than one document relating to the composition of the committees in 2006-07. Again, in each case current material is also available through the calendar web page. Among the roles of the Academic Standards Sub-Committee is 'to provide the primary institutional focus for teaching Quality assurance issues (internal and external) and to report on such matters to the Learning and Teaching Committee'.

20 The Teaching Quality Support Division (TQSD), which is part of the Academic Secretary's office, provides the crucial underpinning for the work of the LTC and its infrastructure of subcommittees and working groups. TQSD manages programme approval, annual programme monitoring, periodic review, and the approval and monitoring of collaborative provision, for all of which processes relevant documentation is readily available. TQSD's roles also include supporting 'the development and implementation of the Learning and Teaching aspects of the University's Academic Strategy and related policies and procedures'.

21 Where the University's framework for the management of collaborative provision and postgraduate research provision differs from that for the rest of its provision, these differences are described in Sections 5 and 6, respectively.

22 The audit team found that, perhaps in spite of the complexity of the committee structure, the institutional framework was making an effective contribution to the management of academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities. However, as described elsewhere in the Annex, the complexity of the committee structure has the potential to impact adversely on enhancement of quality.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

Programme approval

23 New programmes and major changes to existing programmes originating from departments are considered at faculty and university levels. New programme approval in particular is a thorough, detailed but complex process. Detailed guidance on the information required for submitting proposals is provided in the Policy on Standards and Quality in Learning and Teaching. The initial application for outline approval requires details of the academic rationale, market analysis, curriculum and programme structure, projected student numbers and required resources. The proposal must be signed off by the Director of Computing Services and the Librarian to ensure appropriate resources are available, and by the Director of Student Recruitment and Admissions to confirm that it accords with the University's recruitment strategies. The proposal is then assessed by the Board of Studies of the parent department or school and by any other departments contributing more than 10 per cent of modules. It is next considered by the faculty sub-group and Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee (FLTC), taking account of its strategic context, resource implications and student numbers, and is then reviewed by the University Academic Committee (AC), who may give approval in principle that is valid for one year.

24   Following this, the proposer liaises with Student Recruitment over the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service entry profiles, and prepares a new programme proposal with a detailed programme specification and module specifications using a University template requiring articulation with external referents such as *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), subject benchmark statements and, where appropriate, PSRB requirements. The proposal is referred to two external academic advisers who are required to comment on the appropriateness of the programme with reference to these elements of the Academic Infrastructure, as well as on its aims, learning outcomes and modes of assessment. External advisers are usually experienced UK academic subject specialists but, when appropriate, one may be from an overseas university or from commerce or industry. In the University's view, the inclusion of at least one UK subject peer in the approval process safeguards external scrutiny of academic standards for new programmes.

25   The proposal documentation is also considered in turn by the Board of Studies, Faculty Academic Standards Sub-committee, Faculty Board, University Academic Standards Sub-committee (UASSC), University LTC (ULTC), AC and Senate.

26   The University regards dual faculty and University scrutiny as an important safeguard for standards and for embedding quality assurance at faculty and institutional levels. Staff affirmed that the process is a robust and exacting one, but also expressed the view that it did not allow the University to respond as rapidly as it would wish to academic and educational developments, changing student preferences and recruiting opportunities. The audit team would encourage the University to review the programme approval process and consider whether it would benefit from simplification.

Annual programme monitoring

27   The annual programme monitoring (APM) process is intended to promote departmental reflection on its educational provision, taking account of external examiners' comments, the views of external accrediting bodies, student feedback, and data on admission, progression and academic performance. Departments provide separate reports on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, including any collaborative provision, and are encouraged to highlight good practice, with deans fulfilling a similar role in the case of 'Faculty owned' programmes such as combined honours.

28   Reports are considered by FLTC and provide the basis for faculty undergraduate and postgraduate reports, again highlighting good practice, which are submitted to UASSC. Faculties are responsible for monitoring action plans to address any issues, with outcomes reported in the following report, and also for identifying and disseminating good practice within the faculty. In a similar vein, UASSC has responsibility for identifying issues and instances of good practice with institutional implications.

29   The sample audit trails examined by the audit team indicated clear departmental engagement with the APM process and the identification of good practice. Overall, the team concluded that APM made an effective contribution to the management and enhancement of academic standards and quality.

Periodic review

30   Programmes are reviewed on a six-year cycle by a panel chaired by the faculty dean that includes at least one external UK subject specialist and a reviewer from another faculty as well as intra-faculty reviewers. External reviewers focus particularly on academic standards, the curricula and their articulation with QAA's Academic Infrastructure, but are also asked to evaluate the review process itself. Last year a student representative was included in the review panel for the first time, and both the Guild and University consider this to be a valuable development. For combined honours programmes the panel is chaired by the dean from a non-contributing

faculty, and the review incorporates a session led by the external member to consider the coherence, quality and standard of pathways within the programme. The review, covering a day and a half, is based upon a departmental self-evaluation with supporting documentation, and includes a private meeting with representative students.

31   The review report, including an action plan agreed with the department, is considered by UASSC, as are six-monthly up-dates on progress against the action plan. Progress on outstanding actions beyond six months are monitored by the annual programme monitoring process. The process is monitored by UASSC and the University considers it to be working well, although departments may sometimes have difficulty in meeting reporting deadlines. The University endeavours to be flexible and rearrange deadlines when appropriate, provided the quality of the process is not compromised.

32   The sample audit trails indicated periodic review to be a robust and effective process, with commendably wide coverage resulting, as appropriate, in a series of prioritised recommendations for the department and University. Importantly, the review also identifies aspects worthy of commendation and good practice. Overall, the audit team concluded that the periodic review process makes an effective contribution to the management and enhancement of academic standards. Further discussion may be found in paragraph 49.

External examiners

33   Following departmental nominations, external examiners are appointed by faculties on behalf of Senate. The criteria for appointment are set out in the University's Code of Practice on External Examining which also explicates external examiners' roles and responsibilities, and which can be accessed by students and staff via the University website. The University is currently reviewing aspects of the Code of Practice as a result of feedback from some externals on their roles in module review and final examining boards, following the introduction of a standard University-wide algorithm for classifying non-clinical undergraduate degrees.

34   External examiners receive comprehensive information, including handbooks, codes of practice, programme and module specifications from departments; and a letter of appointment; the Codes of Practice on External Examining and on Assessment, and Policies on Equal Opportunities and on Standards and Quality in Teaching and Learning from the University. External examiner reports are received centrally and copied to departments and deans of faculty. They would be considered by boards of studies where student members would be present. Departmental responses to externals' reports and any associated action plans are scrutinised by FLTC as part of the annual programme monitoring process. External examiners reports are also received by the Teaching Quality Support Division who identify any generic issues and compile an institutional overview report for UASSC. This is a comprehensive document, identifying both institution-wide and faculty themes for consideration.

35   Examples seen by the audit team indicate that departments typically respond promptly to points raised by external examiners who, besides commenting, for example on learning outcomes, standards, teaching and assessment methods, are also asked to identify aspects of good practice in assessment. In the reports seen by the team aspects instanced included clear and detailed guidance to students, including model examples on essay writing, citation, referencing and the avoidance of plagiarism; detailed and sensitive feedback to students on their work; innovative and varied assessment such as encouraging students to adopt a late nineteenth-century prose style for their review of Fin de Siècle literature and culture, and detailed comments on dissertations.

36   In the audit team's view the University makes appropriate and effective use of independent external examiners.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

37   University policies, regulations, codes of practice and academic standards are informed by the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points. For example, University practice reflects the precepts of the original and revised sections of the *Code of practice* as these have been published by QAA. Programme specifications must identify relevant subject benchmark statements, and external advisers on programme approval and periodic review panels are required to comment on their congruence and on the relationship of programmes to the FHEQ. When commenting on programme standards external examiners are also required to refer to subject benchmark statements and the FHEQ, and the latter's level and qualification descriptors and the Credit Framework inform calibration of the University's awards. It is currently reviewing the revised Qualifications Framework and new *Higher education credit framework for England*, and considering their implications for its provision.

38   In 2006 the University set up an informal Bologna Monitoring Group, chaired by the pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching), to keep abreast of developments within the Bologna Process. The Group has met with FLTCs, while the Centre for Lifelong Learning has held a workshop on Bologna and Teaching Quality Support Division maintains a webpage on the Bologna Process to inform staff and students generally. In response to the Process the University has introduced a Diploma Supplement, and revised the structure and credit ratings of integrated Masters degrees to align these with the requirements of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.

39   The University has a wide range of courses accredited by a variety of PSRBs. Interaction between departments and PSRBs is monitored by the University, and Registry as well as departmental staff are involved in accreditation visits. Accreditation reports are considered by UASSC, and departments must draw up action plans to respond to any recommendations in accreditation reports for approval by the subcommittee. The audit team saw reports from two recent PSRB visits (Institute of Physics regarding Physics Deptartment programmes and Institute of Materials Minerals and Mining regarding Engineering Deptartment programmes) and the University's response to these, and judged the arrangements to be effective.

Assessment policies and regulations

40   The University's Code of Practice on Assessment (CPA) provides '…an authoritative statement of the…principles underlying the University's assessment activities…and expectations in relation to design, implementation and review of assessment strategies for all taught programmes of study'. Together with associated documentation such as that on external examining, degree classification, and the Model for Non-Clinical First Degree Programmes, the CPA provides an institutional framework for consistency in approach and standards of assessment. It has been widely circulated and is intended to inform staff and students, external examiners and reviewers. The CPA also sets out in detail the information on examining and assessment to be provided to students by departments and faculties.

41   The student webpage on examinations maintained by the University's Examination Section includes links to 'plain English' guides, for example on examinations, plagiarism, regulations, timetables, progression, prepared jointly by the University and the Guild of Students. There is also a link to the CPA, but its relevance for students is not immediately apparent since it is listed under 'Information for Staff'. Given the CPA's centrality for assessment and its stated purpose in informing students on University policy in this area, it might be more prominently signposted for students here.

42   In 2004-05 the University introduced a single, institution-wide, framework for the classification of non-clinical undergraduate degrees. This is characterised by significant weighting of final year work, but with examiners' discretion, limited to consideration of mitigating circumstances and cases where condoning failed credit compromised the achievement of learning outcomes. LTC considers the distribution of degree classes annually as part of a wider

report on retention, progression and degree classification data (paragraph 44), and also monitors class distributions and trends in relation to Russell Group comparator institutions. Following comments from external examiners and revision of the *Higher education credit framework for England*, the University has decided to review its current credit framework and its degree classification scheme. This is being progressed as a Component of the Intellectual Environment within the Student Experience priority of the University's Strategic Plan.

Management information - statistics

43   Entry standards, progression and completion statistics on taught students are monitored annually by departments as part of annual programme monitoring and during the planning process, and are also considered within periodic review. The sampling trails seen by the audit team indicated that the student data provides an effective means of informing internal monitoring and review, resulting, for example, in the identification of possible progression difficulties for mature students and the introduction of revised tutorial arrangements to obviate these, the need to review the year two Pass threshold and to encourage BSc student transfers to an appropriate Integrated Master's programme where that option is available, and, for the University, the need to revise the format of its progression data.

44   Institutional review is undertaken by LTC and, for research students, by the Postgraduate Research Committee. LTC receives an analysis by department of retention and progression rates, tariff scores for students resitting or leaving year one and reasons for withdrawal, admissions scores and age on entry, and leavers by degree class. Comparator data for the previous two years are also provided so that possible trends can be identified at an early stage. The most recent report considered by ULTC, covering 2007-08, indicates that while most subjects have increased retention and progression rates a small number have not, and areas for further investigation are identified. Similarly, instances of good practice that may be more widely applicable are to be sought from those departments demonstrating sustained improvements in progression rates.

45   A comprehensive Monthly Management Information Report is produced for the Senior Management Team (SMT) by the Planning and Development Department. The information relates directly to Strategic Plan priorities and key ambitions and is available in tabular, graphic and narrative forms depending on the nature of the data set. Departments and Faculties are able to access these following SMT meetings, and the audit team learned of the high regard in which this information was held in relation to accuracy, comprehensiveness and accessibility.

46   The audit team considers that the University's engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points, its assessment policies and regulations, and its use of management information are all making an effective contribution to the management of its academic standards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

47   The University aims for excellence in research-led learning and teaching, so that staff research influences curriculum design and enriches students' learning environments, and the research ethos permeates all levels of the student experience. The University's Academic Strategy and its associated implementation plan guide developments in this area, which are overseen at institutional level by the Academic Practice Sub-Committee (APSC). APSC is also directly responsible for developing certain areas of the Strategy such as those for learning and study skills, and for enhancing student employability. University policies provide the strategic framework for developing learning opportunities, with quality assurance processes as supportive and monitoring tools.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

48   The University develops appropriate academic strategies and policies such as those for e-learning, work-based and placement learning and employability within the context of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, and checks that its practices accord with the relevant precepts. PSRB accreditation also allows an external perspective on learning opportunities, whilst programme approval may, where relevant, include input from employers. The University aims to strengthen its employer engagement more generally, and is exploring their contribution to curricula development as a particular area for collaboration (see also paragraphs 37-39).

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

49   Since the last audit the emphasis of many aspects of programme approval, monitoring and review has shifted from the assurance of academic standards to a focus on learning opportunities, the identification of good practice and areas for development and enhancement. For example, annual programme monitoring (APM) now incorporates staff consideration of employability and learning and study skills within the programme with a view to enhancing provision of these, whilst programme approval, monitoring and periodic review now require consideration of learning opportunities in the context of the University's widening participation activities and its Diversity and Equality of Opportunities Policy. These are recent innovations, and the University acknowledges that further progress is needed to develop learning opportunities that support its increasingly diverse student community. Other aspects of approval, monitoring and review of programmes are dealt with in paragraphs 23 to 32.

Management information - feedback from students

50   The University uses a variety of methods to elicit feedback from students at departmental, faculty and institutional levels. The University's Policy on Student Evaluation provides a minimal institution-wide framework for departmental collection and evaluation of student feedback via a variety of routes and formats, for reporting outcomes and action plans, and for communicating the results to students.

51   Feedback on new modules is sought after one year, and on others, and on programme levels at least biennially; these are carefully phased to avoid questionnaire fatigue. The APM report requires departments to comment on feedback from students and recent graduates and to indicate action points where appropriate.

52   The University also collects student feedback through the National Student Survey (NSS). It participated in the pilot of additional NSS questions in 2006 and in the HEFCE review of the impact of Teaching Quality Information. Much of the information from the NSS relates to the quality of learning opportunities, and the University has recently attempted to increase the usefulness of this evidence by launching its own student evaluation survey (SES) (see paragraphs 53 and 54).

53   NSS data is analysed by the Teaching Quality Support Division TQSD who prepare an initial report for APSC and distribute the results via the University intranet to faculties and departments for their consideration of learning opportunities as part of APM. Following publication, the full NSS data is disseminated internally and a more detailed analysis with an extended comparator base is also received by APSC, which may refer issues raised by the data to Faculty learning and teaching committees (FLTCs). Departments are required to consider NSS results in conjunction with staff/student liaison committees (SSLCs) and to contextualise these with other sources of feedback and report to the faculty, which produces an action plan that is monitored by APSC. The University considers that to date the value of NSS data as a source of student feedback has been limited by presentational changes from year-to-year and by the difficulties in mapping JACS (Joint Accademic Coding System) subject level data on to its departmental provision. For these reasons the University conducted its own institutional SES in 2007, and from next year will utilise the new NSS facility to receive results at departmental level which it considers will greatly enhance their value.

54   Faculty and departmental action plans based on the SES results were considered by a Liaison and Evaluation Group whose remit has now been subsumed by the Student Experience Committee (SEC), recently established in response to the need revealed by the SES for greater institutional focus on the student experience. The SEC considers NSS results and those of other surveys such as the SES and International Student Barometer, monitors responses to issues raised by the survey data and reports to the Student Affairs and Services Committee. Survey results are also considered by the Management Information and Benchmarking Group and by relevant central departments.

55   The University recognises the growing value of student survey data and acknowledges that it needs to undertake further work to refine information from these and other student sources, and to ensure that its responses to their outputs are timely, appropriate and effective. Students whom the Audit Team met expressed confidence that the University valued their input and that they had the ability to influence policies and decisions.

Role of students in quality assurance

56   Students contribute to the management of the quality of learning opportunities, in part through the presence of students on the various elements within the University's committee structure (usually a single student in each case: the Calendar for committee memberships gives details of participation), in part through the work of the SSLCs. Student representation at all levels within the University is the responsibility of the Student Representation Steering Group (SRSG), which reports to the Academic Practice Sub-Committee.

57   The University Code of Practice on Student Representation provides an institution-wide framework for student representation, and identifies the associated processes, frequency of meetings and dissemination of findings and outcomes. The Code requires each department to have at least one SSLC with minimally one student representative for each year or level as a member. Minutes of meetings are published on departmental websites and an annual report is presented both to the SRSG and, to ensure continuity of student perspective, to the next SSLC. Students are also represented on departmental LTCs, and boards of studies.

58   Training for Student Representatives is provided through the Guild. Student Representatives are provided with a Handbook containing information on the Student Representation System. Their Representation and Advice Co-ordinator also produces a summary of SSLC annual reports which informs their policy discussions with the University via the Guild Liaison Group and other channels. Guild officers, together with academic and administrative staff, sit on the SRSG which reviews student representation and reports to the APSC. There are student members on Periodic Review Panels, and their participation in faculty committees provides input into programme approval and annual monitoring, and institutional oversight through their membership of UASSC.

59   A member of staff, nominated by the Head of Department, acts as the contact person for all student representation activities. The SRSG provides information about the election process to the departmental contact. Information about the student representation system is provided by departments as part of their induction material and included in departmental student handbooks.

60   Each faculty has a member of staff responsible for faculty-level student representation known as the Faculty Representatives Administrator. At the beginning of each year, the departments' SSLCs nominate at least one Student Representative to join the Faculty Representatives Committee whose Chair is elected from within its members. The Chair acts as the faculty representative on the University Senate, and is supported in this role by the Faculty Representatives Administrator and the Representation and Advice Coordinator from the Guild of Students.

61   The Representation and Advice Coordinator from the Guild of Students is responsible for coordinating the work of student representatives and producing a summary of the annual reports from SSLCs that informs policy recommendations from the Guild to the University.

62   Students are also represented at key committees including the Academic Committee, LTC, Postgraduate Research Committee, Academic Practice Sub-committee and Students Affairs and Services Committee. Students are also represented at some working groups and have input to the annual programme monitoring reports and the periodic review process. The Chinese students from Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) have their own representatives.

63   As a result of its discussions and reading, the audit team formed the view that the University has an effective student representation system at departmental, faculty and university-wide committees and that student opinion forms an important element in maintaining and enhancing the students' learning opportunities.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

64   Research-led teaching is presented as a defining characteristic of the University's approach to education, a priority which permits it to harness the potentially divergent drivers of the research agenda of a research-intensive institution and a concern for the student experience. The University's former Academic Strategy noted as a priority that 'the research ethos is built into the [student] experience at all levels'. It is clear that new courses are often designed around the research strengths of current and new staff. A paper presented to APSC in November 2008 takes stock of research-teaching links in the University. It points to the various challenges in terms of staff time and development of moving beyond the model, traditional in research-intensive institutions, of delivering curricula focused around the research interests of the staff who present these and makes two recommendations relating to them.

65   It was clear from the material presented for the two audit trails that many courses are based on, or are focused around, the research interests of staff. A variety of evidence, for example the Research Resources section of the Postgraduate website, demonstrates that the University's considerable research income contributes to the quality of facilities in many areas, especially in Medicine and the Sciences, and hence to the quality of learning opportunities.

66   The SWS refers to 'some confusion as to what the University means by "research-led teaching"', and notes the difficulty of ensuring that this can be defined and that the benefits of this approach are consistently delivered to undergraduates. The quotations which accompany this section of the SWS suggest that the main area of concern is lectures, of which the perceptions inevitably range from lively to boring. These comments are consistent with the references in the Briefing Paper and the presentation in the APSC paper, which both suggest that the University currently tends to pursue a more passive 'research-led' approach through curriculum content conveyed by experts. The benefits of this approach are apparent to students, who refer to the experience of receiving as undergraduates cutting-edge material from current world experts; so too are the possible disadvantages, with staff not necessarily being available to students because of research commitments. The University's considerable research income undoubtedly contributes to the excellence of facilities in many area, especially in Medicine and the Sciences, and hence to the quality of learning opportunities.

67   Discussions with students during both briefing and audit visits, however, did suggest that certain areas of the University, at least, were concerned to promote a more engaged approach with students as researchers: students, even first-years, might contribute to activities which resulted in publications, or to projects whose outcomes were visible in the city of Liverpool. Staff, too, recognised the benefits of engaging and developing students as active researchers, a process which extends far beyond the traditional research-based dissertation in the final year.

68   The importance of promoting active, research-based learning, is underlined by fears that changes to the National Curriculum, especially at A-Level, are leading students to adopt more passive approaches to learning. It is also relevant to the University's conception of the Liverpool Graduate. The audit team's view, based on the evidence of discussions with staff and students, was that some departments were more advanced in embracing the University's thinking in respect to active, research-based learning than others. It was also not apparent to the team that the considerable activity in the UK recently, generated by some of the Higher Education Academy's (HEA) Subject Centres and centres for excellence in teaching and learning, had been fully brought into the University's deliberations.

69   While noting that there are examples of considerable innovative practice across the University the audit team feels that these could be exploited further, and that the University could make further use of initiatives elsewhere in the sector. The team, therefore, recommends that it would be desirable for the University to continue to give serious consideration to developing and supporting models of integration between research and teaching across the full range of its curricula.

70   The audit team found that the University had sound arrangements for using its considerable research activity as a research intensive institution to underpin its teaching and the students' learning opportunities. Staff within the University were alert to initiatives which should strengthen the effectiveness of these links through developing the students as active participants.

Other modes of study

71   The University has a partnership with Laureate Online Education (a private sector US education company) to deliver a number of master's programmes by distance learning entirely online. Further details of this partnership are given in paragraphs 136-138.

72   The University uses the Virtual Interactive Teaching at Liverpool [VITAL] to support all aspects of learning and teaching including E-assessment and E-feedback and the Liverpool University Student Interactive Database (LUSID) for personal development planning (PDP).

73   Following a recommendation from the last audit, the University, through its e-learning Strategy Working Group has developed a policy on e-learning in line with the QAA code of practice. It aims that by 2010, e-learning will be embedded in all parts of the University and both academic staff and students will be competent to select and use a range of e-learning facilities, techniques and tools to enhance the quality and efficiency of their teaching and learning.

74   The development of E-learning is supported by the Learning Technologies Team in the Centre of Lifelong Learning (CLL). Advice and guidance on non-technical distance learning issues is contained in the Distance Learning Support Pack which is provided by the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Unit.

75   The University has, as part of its e-learning strategy, appointed an e-learning sub-dean in each faculty which is supported by and works with an e-learning advocate from each academic department. These groups are in turn supported by learning technologists from the Educational Development Division.

76   The audit team formed the view that the University now has a sound framework for supporting the effective development of e-learning opportunities.

Resources for learning

77   The University's main resources for learning are the Library and the Computing Services which offer 24-hour opening and access to PCs and many software packages. The two departments are both represented on University committees and carry out periodic satisfaction surveys to enhance their provision. The University Academic Strategy (2006-2010) states that the University will continue its significant investment in library, information technology provision and teaching accommodation.

78   The programme approval process ensures that there is a clear link between new programme development and central resource planning. The outline proposal approval form must be signed by the Director of Computing Services and the Librarian to confirm the resource implications in relation to their areas of responsibility have been considered.

79   The University has recently introduced, in consultation with users, an integrated timetabling and room booking system to increase the efficiency of using teaching space.

80   The results of the NSS 2008 show that the students were very satisfied with the learning resources provided by the University and students who met the audit team. during briefing and audit visits expressed very positive views about the learning resources

81   As a result of its discussions and reading, the audit team concluded that the University has an effective system for allocating and managing the learning resources to maintain the quality of students' learning opportunities.

Admissions policy

82   The University has a common admission policy complemented by departmental admission policies. The selection of students is undertaken by departments and supported by the Student Recruitment and Admission Office (SRAO). The University has processes for the accreditation of prior (experiential) learning and credit transfer.

83   Responsibility for institutional policy in relation to admissions at undergraduate level resides with the University Admissions Sub-Committee which reports via the Learning and Teaching Committee and Academic Committee to the University Senate.

84   The Head of Department is responsible for the departmental Admissions Policy and determining the academic standard of entry for degree programmes in the department. The Head is also responsible for monitoring engagement with the *Code of practice, Section 10; Admissions to higher education* published by QAA, and providing an annual update on the operation of the policy to Admissions Sub-Committee via the APM statement.

85   Admissions tutors are responsible for ensuring that the departmental selection and admissions policies and procedures are consistently applied, providing advice and guidance to potential applicants and providing information on content and design of curricula. Admission staff receives training organised by SRAO and the Centre of Lifelong Learning.

86   The international team is responsible for promoting awareness of the programmes of study to prospective students from outside the UK and providing advice to departments on the equivalence of non-UK qualifications.

87   As a result of its discussions and reading, the audit team concluded that the University has an effective system for ensuring the consistent implementation of its admission policy.

Student support

88   All students are allocated a personal tutor at the beginning of their course. They are also entitled to personal development planning (PDP) opportunities. However, there is great variety across departments in terms of the effective and consistent implementation of these supports.

89   The PDP is underpinned by a web-based Liverpool University interaction database (LUSID) system which allows students to assess their own skills needs and record their development. However, this system is student-driven and its effective use varies between departments. Periodic review reports and the SWS indicated that students' engagement in PDP is variable across the University. Also, the University has identified the need to clarify the role of personal tutor and the role of PDP tutor. The CLL will conduct a review of the PDP in autumn 2009 after proposed changes to LUSID have been completed.

90   The University has introduced the personal development tutorial system which is based on one-to-one meetings at which the personal development tutor principally facilitates the student's own reflection on their progress and provides advice.

91   The University's Code of Practice on Assessment, feedback on assessment policy and the Academic Strategy state that timely and formative feedback should be given to students on the outcome of assessment tasks which they have undertaken, to evaluate their progress and improve on their performance. However, variability in the provision of feedback across campus still exists. This was evidenced through the NSS results.

92   The University has a network of advice, guidance, support and welfare services for students. These include support for students with disabilities, support for international students, support for European Union students, Mental Health Advisory Service, support for care leavers, careers and employability services, Counselling Service, childcare, financial support and welfare. Information about these services is easily accessible from the University website and included in the joining pack and students' handbook.

93   The audit team noted that the representative students from XJTLU felt positively supported in their transition from XJTLU to the University of Liverpool.

94   Students who met the audit team during briefing and audit visits expressed positive comments about the academic and personal support services available to them and the confidence that they would be received well when seeking to make use of them.

95   The audit team found that the University's student support mechanisms were effective in maintaining the quality of the student's learning opportunities.

Staff support (including staff development)

96   The induction of new staff takes place on three levels: institutional, departmental and job. Institutional induction gives new starters an institutional overview relevant to their particular staffing group. Staff are also required to attend sessions on health and safety as well as diversity and equality. Departmental induction typically includes introductions to all staff within the department, information about the departmental structure, departmental aims and objectives and local information regarding security, time and attendance, sickness, holidays, and so on.

97   New academic staff with limited experience are appointed on probationary contracts and are required to take the Certificate in Professional Studies in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, which has full HEA accreditation, and be assigned a mentor. The mentor supports the integration of new staff into the department and provides support for CPD studies. Training for mentors is provided by the Educational Development Division within the Centre of Lifelong Learning. They are also entitled to an award of £1,500 to be used for staff development.

98   The University has negotiated a framework for managing performance and setting standards linked to roles. A core part of this framework is engagement in development activities and it seeks to continually enhance staff members' contribution in their role. It is supported by comprehensive learning and staff development opportunities, some of which are mandatory.

99   The Professional Development and Review process is used annually for all staff to discuss their roles and responsibilities and to set individual development plans. Organisational development advisors provide guidance to managers and individuals on matters related to skills analysis and filling skills gaps.

100   The University has developed the 'University of Liverpool Professional Development Toolkit' as an online resource for staff development. The Educational Development Division of the Centre for Lifelong Learning offers a range of workshops and the Professional Development and Review Process is used to identify the workshops that are relevant to the staff role.

101   Graduate teaching assistants are required to be trained before practising teaching. The depth and nature of this training varies between departments. For example, in Engineering, graduate teaching advisers have to successfully complete a health and safety course before they are allowed to practice teaching or laboratory demonstration. Research skills training is available for research staff.

102   The University has a peer review process. The policy is supported by the Centre for Lifelong Learning which provides training for reviewers.

103   The University has a procedure (annual review procedure) by which good performance of academic and academic-related staff is rewarded through promotion and the award of additional increments and recognition payments. Outstanding teaching is also celebrated by the University through the Sir Alistair Pilkington Awards in Teaching Excellence, which are to be awarded at Congregations from the coming year. There is also support for projects to enhance learning and teaching, provided as part of the funding through the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund.

104   New staff interviewed during audit expressed very positive comments regarding the induction, mentoring and staff development schemes.

105   It was clear to the audit team that the University's arrangements for the support and development of academic staff in relation to their teaching duties were effective in meeting the needs of its different groups of teaching staff.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

106   The University upholds the integral linkage between quality assurance and quality enhancement. As a result it is natural that the committee structure which underpins the University's quality assurance processes should also be a key strand in quality enhancement activity. It is possible that this reliance on an intricate committee structure could encourage a fragmented approach and so make it harder for the University to maintain a strategic overview of its considerable enhancement activities. This might be relevant to the lack of a comprehensive assessment of recent developments noted in paragraph 12.

107   Examples of good practice which may arise from the annual programme monitoring and periodic review processes are collated and posted on a good practice page in the Teaching Quality Support Division (TQSD) website. Established in January 2008, this is a valuable source of information, organised both by faculty and department, and by theme. This makes it relatively easy for browsers to identify items of interest, and in each case contact details are provided to permit follow-up. The site currently covers: good practice from annual programme monitoring (APM) faculty reports; good practice from Periodic Review reports; and good practice from the Sir Alistair Pilkington Award winners.

108   However, the currency of the information displayed could be improved: for example, the latest examples of good practice identified through APM that are accessible on the website date from 2006-07, and, while instances elicited through periodic review extend to 2007-08, not all faculties are represented in that year.

109   A similar issue of timeliness affects the latest Report on Good Practice prepared by TQSD. This is a comprehensive document with a shrewd commentary which again includes instances identified through periodic review from 2005-06, 2006-07 and 2007-08, but for annual monitoring only from 2005-06 and 2006-07. It was considered by the University Academic Standards Sub-Committee in November 2008 and by the University Academic Practice Sub-Committee in January 2009, and then sent to faculties '…to consider the report and aim to identify areas which might be explored further and facilitate wider dissemination to departments of the…good practices noted therein'. The process therefore involves collecting examples of good practice from departments through the faculties, collating and commenting upon them centrally,

and then returning them via faculties to departments for further exploration and possible adoption. This process demands a necessarily extended timescale.

110   The November 2008 Report illustrates the point that it is unclear how easily many of the specific examples of good practice could be translated from one context to another; the TQSD Report commented that in some cases there was insufficient detail for others to understand the practices being commended or why they were good, and observed that some of the examples of good practice being cited merely satisfied institutional requirements. The audit team recognises that the University is currently attempting to accelerate the process but encourages the University to explore ways of identifying, collecting, publicising and disseminating good practice more rapidly across faculties and departments.

111   The University is monitoring visits to the TQSD good practice web pages and now that 12 months data is available, these will be analysed and reported to ASSC during the current year. The University recognises that more work is needed to disseminate good practice institutionally and to further its application in enhancing learning opportunities so that, for example, local instances of good practice in e-learning can contribute to the work of the E-Learning Sub-Committee in developing and enhancing the University's virtual learning environment [VITAL]. Recommendations in the Report on Good Practice noted above will serve to provide a sharper focus for information on good practice provided by departments and accord a more central role for the Centre for Lifelong Learning in the consideration of generic good practice.

112   The Educational Development Division within the Centre for Lifelong Learning hosts an Annual Learning and Teaching Conference. The theme for the event in June 2009 is Enhancing the Student Experience through Learning and Teaching. The Eddev website hosts materials relating to the conferences from 2003 to 2008, although between 2003 and 2007 this consists of a bare statement of the topic of the conference and brief reflections on the event. The 2008 conference, however, is presented in detail through 15 presentations, and includes a number of interesting resources with potential for wider impact, especially the Camtasia broadcasts by some of the speakers. These are a useful and potentially important resource. The audit team met staff who confirmed the value of the 2008 conference as well as of some of the external speakers invited to make presentations; they also referred to the successful dissemination of good practice, for example on e-learning developments, through the conference and its website.

113   The Academic Strategy has been another driver for enhancement, and progress against its objectives led to the development, following consultation through faculties with individual departments, of strategies on skills for learning and on employability. These strategies are intended to have an impact on academic curricula; examples of the start of this process are cited from the School of Law and the Faculty of Veterinary Science. A new Employability and Skills Committee has been established to oversee implementation of University Strategy.

114   Development of the University's postgraduate taught provision is presented within the context of its Enhancement activity. The University currently has over 1,300 registered postgraduate taught (PGT) students (almost 1,200 full-time equivalents). At the start of the 2007-08 academic year, the University restructured its Graduate School as a School of Graduate Studies, primarily to ensure that full attention was allocated to the interests of taught postgraduate students. The School is led by a Dean of Graduate Studies, appointed in October 2007, to whom three directors report on postgraduate research (PGR), PGT and CPD activity. These changes are still working through the system, with many staff and University documents showing no awareness of the new name. Discussion with University staff confirmed that there is currently no website for the School of Graduate Studies. The general website for postgraduates points enquirers interested in research degrees to the extensive Graduate School site, whereas for PGTs there is just a list of available courses. The audit team was told that there would soon be an overarching School of Graduate Studies website which should clarify the purpose of this new unit. Clarity is also required on the purpose of the Postgraduate Handbook, whose title might suggest that it covered PGT

provision; while PGT students said that they had been provided with a copy of the Handbook, this is, in fact, a Handbook for PGR students. PGTs currently rely heavily on departmental websites; PGT students to whom the team spoke confirmed that these were often extremely useful.

115   In January 2005, the School of Medical Education was awarded funding for five years to develop a centre for excellence in teaching and learning (CETL) in undergraduate medical education in the broad area of professionalism in medical education for the twenty-first century. The website lists seven current projects, although only one of these provides further information on the project's findings (a study during 2008 into peer and self-assessment of professionalism). Under current resources the site lists four presentations given by the Centre Director during 2006-07, plus various external resources. The section on current fellows presents details of eight staff who come both from the broad medical area and from the Schools of Population, Community and Behavioural Sciences, and of Archaeology, Classics, Egyptology, representing an extension of the impact of the Centre. In 2008-09 the CETL Research Seminar Programme provided a diverse monthly diet of 11 presentations.

116   The University is also a partner in the LearnHigher CETL based at Liverpool Hope University, whose web site presents an extensive and absolutely up-to-date account of activities (for example, with a Learning Area of the Month). The University hosts two HEA Subject Centres, for Materials Education and History, Classics and Archaeology. Local benefit is captured in part through the contribution which staff from the Subject Centres make to academic staff training events at Liverpool, and in part through the creation of the LANTERN website which provides links to a range of materials generated by some of the other Subject Centres. Staff who met the audit team referred to benefits from their constructive engagement with the Centres.

117   Widening Participation (WP), one of the five strands within the University's new Strategic Plan 2009-14, is a significant element within the Enhancement section. The University explained that it regarded WP as an activity which had the capacity to enhance the student experience and should affect the content and delivery of all curricula. This view was supported by a substantial dossier prepared for the audit visit.

118   The University is concerned to ensure that WP is embedded across all departments which are responsible for admissions decisions within the context of University policies; even in those areas where the nature of the subject and/or the level of provision in secondary schools means that WP was more challenging, the University regards it as important to attempt to raise aspirations. As a consequence, WP issues are built into the provision of staff development and constitute a compulsory element within the Certificate in Professional Studies in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, where staff are required to consider different approaches to enabling learning by a diverse range of students.

119   Oversight of the University's WP activities is provided by the WP Policy Group, which is drawn from academics, administrators and the Guild of Students and is led by an Educational Opportunities Team (previously the WP Team). The concept of an Extended Learning Journey, from primary school level where the cuddly purple Professor Fluffy has now been active for nine years (and is about to be presented in Westminster by the Vice Chancellor) through to post-graduation employment or further study, underpins the University's approach. The Educational Opportunities Team, now based in the Victoria Gallery and Museum, co-ordinates outreach activities to local schools; it has dedicated facilities to work with groups of pupils on campus, and its own science laboratory is complemented by a school science laboratory in the Department of Chemistry. The University's Scholars scheme directly links outreach activities with entry to academic departments through supporting learning activities connected to GCE AS/A2 level study in years 12 and 13, successful completion of which leads to an adjusted entry offer. The Guild of Students collaborates fully with this policy, through supporting the activities of student advocates on outreach activities and mentoring for existing students, which includes successful mentoring by students who have joined the University through a WP route.

120   The University collaborates closely with AimHigher Greater Merseyside, and is currently the lead institution for this partnership. With local colleges it has collaborated in the creation of a year 0 Foundation programme, targeted at potential students with considerable workplace experience or vocational qualifications; this leads into dentistry, medicine and a range of medical-related programmes.

121   The University recognises that WP engagement has not developed uniformly across all its operations, but has, appropriately, prioritized more vulnerable groups and is aware of the need to extend further. Identification of the WP cohort takes cognizance of the significant differences in individual circumstances and academic disciplines, with support being directed accordingly. It has established that some categories of WP students are performing less well, and the Intellectual Environment Project team is investigating how evidence-informed curriculum review can tackle the issues. Problem-based learning, whose development the University has supported in Medicine, dentistry, health, and in the 'Conceive Design Implement Operate' initiative in Engineering, offers an approach in which the diversity of the student body can be taken into account. Its benefits were enthusiastically endorsed in the audit team's meetings with students. The WP dimensions of work placements have also been considered in partnership with local employers.

122   The University also recognises that WP activity must not be restricted to undergraduate study, the natural focus in many institutions, and offers specific support for WP students progressing to postgraduate study.

123   The audit team considers that, in the context of a research-intensive institution, the strength of the University's commitment to a diverse and innovative suite of widening participation and equal opportunities activities is sustaining a positive approach within the University and the region, and is also leading to enhancements in the University's educational provision. Support for the Extended Learning Journey, for example through Professor Fluffy or the dedicated laboratories for visiting pupils, particular provision to adjust entry offers to reflect extra work undertaken, CPD activity to help staff respond to WP/Educational Opportunities issues in educational provision, and the extension of WP support to postgraduate study are all commendable.

124   It is also recognised that the University's other collaborative initiatives may have consequences for staff and programmes. Thus the Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University initiative (paragraph 139) is creating major challenges to the departments involved, through the input to modules delivered in China, the preparation of, and support for, students who transfer from China into programmes at Liverpool after their second year, and the need for greater intercultural awareness.

125   The audit team found that the institutional approach to quality enhancement is supporting the integration of enhancement into mainstream activities. The University is adopting an innovative approach to using its WP priority to drive enhancement, and enhancement to support WP, and it is beginning to construct a useful web resource for staff.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

Strategic approach

126   According to the Briefing Paper the University is currently developing a new strategy for university partnerships in the light of its uptake of a number of recent significant large scale ventures, and particularly within the context of the new strategic plan. The Briefing Paper also reported that the University had introduced revised arrangements for the oversight of partnership activity. During the audit, however, the audit team learned that the new strategy was more comprehensive than implied in the Briefing Paper and that the revised arrangements were themselves subject to review.

127   The University had recognised that its hitherto relatively modest collaborative activity had been largely reactive, and that two of its main UK partners, the University of Chester and Liverpool Hope University, having relatively recently obtained degree awarding powers, would increasingly be disengaging from their partnerships with the University. The University had begun to review its rationale and approach to partnerships, and had determined to focus on the building of a limited number of prestigious partnerships with overseas institutions, based in part on the development of the successful links with its partner, Laureate (see paragraph 71). The development of the new Strategic Plan, in 2009, reinforced this direction through the University's heightened attention to selective partnerships as being a driver in the strategy of positioning itself as a global university. This more ambitious approach to international partnerships is an element in developing a distinctive international role for the University within the Russell Group of universities. At the same time, the University has been developing its regional approach to collaborative activity which had been established initially through the provision of Accredited Institution status for Chester and Liverpool Hope Universities and their predecessor bodies, and more recently through links with further education and other providers to underpin the University's widening participation commitment. The University is thus in the process of reviewing and re-articulating a strategy for collaborative activity of a variety of kinds, recognising the global and regional elements of its former partnership operations.

128   At the time of the previous audit, a Partnership Sub-Committee, reporting to the Academic Committee, was responsible for establishing and approving all partnerships. This was replaced by a Strategic Partnerships Committee (SPC), reporting to Senate and Council which maintains an overview of all the University's collaborative activities but 'involves itself' with the management only of those relationships deemed to have an institutional-wide impact. It has been, in turn, advised by a University Partnerships Scrutiny Group (UPSG) which has assumed some of the functions of the University Partnerships Sub-Committee. To support these arrangements, and to reflect the university commitment to partnership working, the University recently established the posts of Director of Strategic Partnerships and Development, who is a member of the University's Senior Management Team; Strategic Partnerships Co-ordinator, and a Strategic Partnerships Officer. The Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) has responsibility, reporting to Academic Committee, for 'learning and teaching partnerships' and for the 'learning and teaching element' of the high level strategic collaborations. LTC in practice devolves the detail of this work to the newly established Collaborative Provision Quality and Standards Group (CPQSG) which reports to LTC via the Academic Standards Sub-Committee. As part of the ongoing review of collaborative activity and in recognition of the variety of forms this can take, the University is also reflecting on the most appropriate forums in which to consider collaborative activity, and is likely to establish an International Committee as an element of the new arrangements. The audit team was conscious that these arrangements represented significant additional quality assurance processes for collaborative provision over and above those departmental/school and faculty scrutiny activities to which all Liverpool and collaborative programmes are subject. The establishment of the current committee arrangements were intended to enhance the 'university's management of its collaborative provision', particularly with regard to risk assessment. These are 'in accordance with' the relevant section of the Code, a view confirmed by the team. However, in determining the future forums for the consideration of collaborative matters, and in reflecting on the success of the current arrangements for the management of collaborative activities, the University will wish to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of the various deliberative bodies are clear and distinctive.

129   TQSD publishes and maintains a Directory of Current Partnerships, which is a comprehensive listing of Teaching Links, (listed by country), International Exchange Agreements, Erasmus and Socrates Exchange Agreements and a 'Miscellaneous' section. In session 2007-08, the University registered approximately 4,500 students via partnership agreements, a figure expected to reduce to nearer 3,700 in 2008-09, consequent primarily on a decline of some 1,700 Liverpool registered students following the conferment of degree awarding powers to the

University of Chester and Liverpool Hope University. During the same period, however, student numbers resulting from the Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University in China (XJTLU) were expected to grow from about 730 to 1,500. In 2007-08, students associated with overseas partnerships counted for some 19 per cent of the University's total 'partnership' students, rising to about 44 per cent in 2007-08.

Partnership approval, reapproval and monitoring

130   According to the Briefing Paper, the University deploys a variety of ways to monitor its collaborative provision, based on the nature of the particular relationship. The University distinguishes six types of collaborative arrangement, namely, Articulations; Collaborative provision (modules only); collaborative provision (level 0); Full Collaborations; Accreditation; and Consortium arrangements. Accreditation arrangements are described as 'institutional', with the other relationships, once approved at institutional level, being managed primarily within the faculty. It is likely that the University's development of a revised strategy for collaborative activity will revisit this typology. In general terms, the arrangements for the approval, reapproval/review and monitoring of programmes run in partnership with other institutions reflect those procedures in place for on-campus provision. Additionally, however, UPSG scrutinises proposals, and it may invite CPQSG to investigate these in greater detail, while CPQSG itself monitors and reviews faculty reports on collaborative provision.

131   Oversight of the arrangements for partnerships that involve learning and teaching lies within the TQSD. TQSD has prepared a series of helpful flowcharts outlining the various stages in partnership approval, recognising that initiatives may be proposed by an individual, through a department/school, by the institution corporately, or by an external agency. Responsibility for the consideration of new strategic partnership proposals involving new or existing partner institutions rests with SPC. Following SPC approval of a learning and teaching collaboration at institutional level, TQSD takes responsibility for the quality assurance of the partner and the programme. Partnership agreements are initially for a maximum of five years, with the renewal of learning and teaching partnerships subject to re-approval and usually a review visit. The audit team saw a number of examples of partnership approval and re-approval arrangements whereby presenters are required to prepare a detailed proposal pro forma for consideration by the UPSG. UPSG considers information on the partner (including information on current links with the university and other UK institutions, experience in delivering comparable programmes and the levels of delivery), the programme, the locus of management responsibility within the University, resource issues, and the extent to which the proposal meets the University's broad criteria for partnership working (in relation to mission and strategic plan).

132   Annual monitoring of collaborative arrangements is undertaken as part of the normal school programme monitoring activities. From 2005-06, schools were provided with lists of their collaborations and prompts highlighting those collaborative matters on which reports were required. The recently established CPQSG is currently considering the reports for 2006-07. In this way schools and departments incorporate their collaborative monitoring as part of their annual review work, although the University notes that departments require support to ensure that all provision is reviewed adequately. However, the audit team felt that the review of reports would provide better assurance of quality and standards of collaborative provision were it to be completed more quickly. The team accordingly recommends that it is advisable that in developing its arrangements further the university will wish to ensure that CPQSG is in a position to complete its review of school reports earlier, preferably by the end of the following session to which they relate.

UK Partnerships

133   UK institutional (accreditation) partnerships with the University of Chester and Liverpool Hope University are managed through bi-annual meetings of the University Accredited Institutions Liaison Committee. This reports to LTC and Research Committee, and receives an annual report from each of the accredited institutions. Further oversight is secured through university representation on the relevant committees of the accredited institutions.

134   The University has developed a number of associate college relationships, mainly to promote and quality assure a range of programmes supporting the University's widening participation initiatives. The Level 0 Foundation to Health Studies Programme has been developed as part of the Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire Lifelong Learning Network. This arrangement permits students at three colleges in the area to gain admission to first-year programmes in dentistry, medicine or health sciences. The School of Health has quality assurance responsibilities for this partnership and has recently incorporated the management of the programmes, including programme changes and taking action on the views of the staff/student liaison groups. Progression is determined at a Module Review Board of Examiners, meeting twice a year, and covering candidates from all three colleges. The School coordinates the programmes through its Senior Tutor, who works closely with the Programme leaders in each of the colleges. Individual colleges prepare detailed annual reports for scrutiny for UPSG.

135   The University collaborates with the Universities of Central Lancashire, Lancaster and Cumbria and the National Health Service to enable students to undertake Liverpool MBChB/MBChB (Honours) and BDS/BDS (Honours) awards. The audit team noted the care with which the University exercised oversight of these arrangements through the School, and the detailed monitoring report of the operation of the link that was presented and considered by CPQSG.

International partnerships

136   The University works with Laureate, to deliver a number of master's programmes via distance learning entirely online. These are Liverpool degrees, for which the University takes full responsibility but delegates day-to-day operations to Laureate. The University has put into place processes to ensure that the rules and guidelines that apply to these off-campus programmes, in relation to programme approval, monitoring and review, mirror as far as possible those that apply to normal on campus delivery. The audit team noted, for example, that the approval processes required to launch separate MSc online programmes in Computer Security, Internet Systems and Software Engineering, even though these had been offered through Laureate as individual specialisms in the IT online programme, involved consideration by the appropriate Faculty Academic Standards subcommittee. This considered new degree proposal forms, draft programme specifications, external examiner nomination forms, reports from, and responses to, External Advisers and the minutes of the Board of Studies in Computing. The subcommittee recommended the proposal to the Faculty LTC prior to consideration by the University Academic Standards Subcommittee (UASSC) and then formal approval by Senate via LTC and the Academic Committee. At departmental level, the Laureate programmes are managed in the same way as on-campus provision with a Board of Studies and a Director of Studies whose role is complemented in Laureate by a Director of Online Studies who liaises with the University Director of Studies on academic issues with final decisions, where necessary, being made by the (University) Director of Studies. The (University) Directors of Study for Laureate programmes are members of the Laureate Programmes Co-ordinators Group that reports to the UASSC.

137   While the 'instructors' are appointed, and trained, by Laureate, and have no direct contractual relationship with the University, the Director of Studies is responsible for their approval, and re-approval, as recognised teachers of the University. Details of module assessments are contained in the module descriptors and are carried out by the module instructor working to

University prescribed criteria. A monitor, appointed by the Programme Director from the relevant University school is responsible for sampling a proportion of the assessed work to check that these criteria are being appropriately applied and standards maintained. While responsibility for dissertation supervision lies exclusively with a designated instructor, a second instructor is appointed to assess the dissertation, independently of the instructor's own assessment; the relevant Board of Studies is responsible for reconciling any difference in the light of normal University practices.

138   The summative assessment of some modules includes group discussion prompted by the instructor and forms a significant part of the final mark of the module. The contribution to the discussion is carried out online with no security measures to ensure the identity of the contributors. This raised some concerns among the audit team regarding the security and the validity of the assessment. The team therefore recommends that it is advisable to introduce security measures to ensure the identity of contributors to the assessed group discussion elements of modules taken as part of the Laureate online programmes.

Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

139   The University had been considering for some time opportunities to work with institutions in China and, in 2003-04, commissioned an options report from a senior University professor. Following a detailed due diligence investigation, the recommendations led to the creation in 2006 of a joint venture between the University, Laureate and Xi'an Jiaotong University in China to establish Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU), a brand new institution still awaiting the conferment of degree awarding powers by the Chinese authorities. While at the time of the audit the relationship is mainly a learning and teaching partnership, research links are being promoted through research champions at both institutions. XJTLU, which currently has six Departments - Biological Sciences, Computer Science and Software Engineering, Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Business, Economics and Management, Mathematical Sciences and Languages and Culture - operates through a series of arrangements, including articulation into second year Liverpool programmes currently in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Electronics, the Department of Computer Science and the Department of Mathematical Sciences. The relationship was established formally following an accreditation visit in 2007, and confirmed via the first annual monitoring visit in November 2008. Accreditation had been granted for three years but in the meantime the University required a series of annual monitoring visits to review progress and to report on the outcome of action plans. Each of these reports was comprehensive and, in the opinion of the audit team, provided the University with appropriate assurance on the standards and quality of the courses and the suitability of student support. The team noted that University staff sit on XJTLU boards of studies and boards of examiners.

140   The University has extensive committee arrangements in addition to such quality assurance arrangements as operate within the participating University schools. The XJTLU Academic Sub group, which discusses academic planning and learning and resource issues, and the XJTLU Support Services Subgroup which considers the non-academic articulation issues, report into the XJTLU Steering Group which itself has oversight of the overall Liverpool/XJTLU arrangement. In addition, there are an XJTLU Student Experience group, which considered support arrangements for students joining Liverpool in 2008, and an XJTLU Joint Liaison group, the latter incorporating senior staff from both institutions, and reporting comprehensively to the Steering group. The students whom the audit team met who had progressed from XJTLU to Liverpool expressed their satisfaction with the arrangements made by the University to integrate them into the academic programme and Liverpool life, and confirmed their understanding when in China of the relationship between the XJTLU and University programmes.

141   Following the success of this venture, the University intends to proceed to similar relationships with other international institutions with whom Laureate is involved. The audit team understood that negotiations were at an advanced stage with other selected institutions. The team felt that the additional committee structure for XJTLU was appropriate and proportional to the risks involved with this relatively new venture. However, as the institution develops not dissimilar arrangements with other international partners, it will need to ensure that its senior staff can make available sufficient time to support similarly robust arrangements with these other partners.

Liverpool International College

142   As part of its arrangements for preparing international students for its programmes, the University established on-campus, in 2007, the Liverpool International College (LIC) through collaboration with Kaplan UK Ltd, a private educational and careers service. LIC's programmes, currently Foundation Certificates and Graduate Diplomas in Science and Engineering, and in Business, Law and Social Sciences, are not University awards although the University maintains an oversight of their standards and quality through its membership of the Joint Academic Advisory Board (JAAB). The JAAB, which is chaired by the University's Pro-Vice Chancellor for Learning and Teaching and has membership from both Kaplan and the University, including representatives of the appropriate academic areas, and the Director of LIC will report in future to the CPQSG rather than to the LTC. At a managerial level, the Co-operation Agreement between the University and Kaplan is subject to annual review, and operational issues are handled through monthly meetings between the Academic Secretary of the University and the Director of LIC. An Annual Programme review is produced by the programme leaders and course team, and includes statistical data on the student intake and progression, student evaluation of programme and modules, staff feedback and feedback from progression boards and external examiners. It appeared to the audit team that the University had in place appropriate arrangements via the College Annual Report which is itself informed by the programme review, and which is considered by JAAB, to satisfy itself that the LIC was effectively delivering its remit and that the University had adequate controls to assure the continuing appropriateness of the certificates and diplomas.

143   The audit team considers that the very detailed scrutiny of partner proposals currently undertaken by the University's Partnerships Scrutiny Group and its Collaborative Provision Quality and Standards Working Group, and the detailed reports of approval and review partner visits represent a feature of good practice. However, in commending the University on this good practice, the team encourages the university to ensure that any new collaborative and review procedures it develops as a consequence of its on-going review of collaborative activities retain the security provided by such careful consideration.

144   In considering the overall arrangements for the quality assurance of collaborative activities, the audit team noted the considerable care taken by the University to ensure as far as possible arrangements were the same or directly comparable with the procedures in place for Liverpool-based courses, and concluded that the University's oversight of standards and quality is fully consistent with the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

145   The University offers a range of MPhil and doctoral degrees by research (PhD and MD); it currently has almost 1,500 students (over 1,200 full-time equivalents) registered on research programmes. The University has recently considered a proposed framework for professional doctorates; there is currently one professional Doctorate programme, the D Clinical Psychology.

146   In 2005-06 QAA conducted a Review of research degree programmes at the University. The report, dated July 2006, found that the University's provision was appropriate and satisfactory. Areas of good practice were identified in the requirement for all supervisors to attend a Good Practice Workshop before taking on new students; the induction of inexperienced staff into examining duties through partnership with a senior colleague; and in the integrated personal development record system. The University was invited to consider reviewing the organisation of postgraduate matters, and to review student representation, in particular the lack of dedicated postgraduate research committees at departmental level (see paragraph 157).

147   The reconfiguration of postgraduate arrangements in 2007-08 does not seem to have a significant impact on postgraduate research programmes. Postgraduate research students (PGR) are still located in the Graduate School (now the PGR sub-section of the School of Graduate Studies), which is led by a Director of Postgraduate Research. This is supported by a dedicated website with links to a register of research expertise, the Postgraduate Students Association (PGSA), the skills programme and support for teaching.

148   There is some confusion over the existence of the PGSA. Apart from its web presence, the PGSA is featured in the Postgraduate Prospectus 2008 as a body which covers 'all programmes, taught and research' to provide 'support, assistance, advice and also enjoyment to our postgraduate students'; it is a body 'dedicated to improving the student experience for all postgraduates at the University of Liverpool'. Discussions with students as well as staff elicited no awareness of the existence of this Association. It was suggested that the PGSA was perhaps a failed initiative a couple of years ago, which had survived as a 'zombie' on the website, although this does not explain its presentation in the Prospectus.

149   The student written submission from the Guild of Students does not explicitly cover PGR matters, and on the Guild website there is no obvious section for postgraduate students, nor dedicated support. In discussion with students some commented that PG students were too focused on their studies to engage with activities in the Guild, or that the Guild gave the impression of being for a younger contingent with more time for diversions. The Briefing Paper, however, refers to a decision by the Guild in 2007-08 to integrate all postgraduate taught (PGT) and PGR students more fully into its activities, and the Postgraduate Prospectus presents the Guild as a resource relevant to prospective PGs. The audit team, therefore, considers it desirable for the University to find ways of working with the Guild of Students to reflect on ways to enhance and consolidate the Guild's provision for the considerable cohort of postgraduate students at the University.

150   In many areas responsibility for PGR activity is appropriately located at departmental or faculty level, but the Postgraduate Research Sub-committee, chaired by the Director of PGR, aims to unify the system and monitor provision across the University. In this respect an important development has been the introduction of departmental Postgraduate Research Reviews, which assess the quality of the PGR student experience. These were piloted in the Schools of Chemistry and of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology in 2006-07. It was possible to follow the recommendations of the Chemistry pilot reviews through the departmental response and action plan, and the subsequent scrutiny of these by the Graduate School Sub-committee, Research Committee, and Academic Committee. In the light of the pilot, limited changes to the process were approved by the Graduate School Sub-committee at its meeting on 20th April 2007 (endorsed by Research Committee, Academic Committee, and finally Senate on 6th June); the scheme was rolled out in 2007-08.

151   The PGR review process is conducted on a six-year cycle, according to a schedule agreed two years in advance, and is backed up by clear documentation that sets out expectations, supports departments in the preparation of materials, and prepares reviewers for the engagement. It covers all aspects of the PGR experience as defined in the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*. Documentation relating to a review of the Faculty of Veterinary Science in 2008 revealed the system to be operating in a thorough and timely manner,

with a six-month follow up to confirm progress against actions. Annual PG programme monitoring reports are considered through the same process as that for the undergraduate reports described above. The examples provided in the audit trails indicated that this was an effective process for the regular monitoring of activities.

Research environment

152   The University is committed to providing an institutional research environment of the highest quality, commensurate with its status as, as it expresses it, a Russell Group institution. Within the University, departments take responsibility for ensuring that their local research environment is of the appropriate standard, and there is an annual opportunity for heads of department to bid for extra resource to meet identified needs. Heads of department regarded this system as appropriate to their needs. The Register of Research Expertise highlights the University's distinctive research areas and new interdisciplinary research centres, while providing links to further information on the physical and intellectual infrastructure, to the quarterly bulletin Research Intelligence that presents recent research, and to events and job opportunities.

Selection, admission and induction of students

153   The Admissions process is set out in the Postgraduate Handbook. Although this is coordinated by a central PG Recruitment Team, the decision to admit rests with academic departments which operate in accordance with a common minimum standard. Thereafter, an offer letter is dispatched by the Head of Postgraduate Admissions. For non-Anglophone applicants the Senate has stipulated a minimum score of 6.5 in the International English Language Testing System; this information is not immediately obvious in the Postgraduate Handbook, which lacks material specifically directed towards international students. Departments are required to hold induction sessions for new students, in many cases twice a year, while the Graduate School provides a generic element. An important aspect of the induction process is introducing students to, the student records system, [SPIDER] which will then help students and departments to monitor their progress.

Supervision, progress and review arrangements

154   In September 2004, the University established the policy that all students should have at least two supervisors, and there is evidence for an attempt to ensure that duties are shared reasonably equally, closer to 50:50 than the 90:10 split which is permitted. Individual supervisors may be responsible for up to eight PGR students, and there is a requirement for all supervisors to have attended a good practice workshop on supervision before taking on new students; this is now delivered as part of the postgraduate certificate for new staff. Consideration is being given to how staff can be kept up-to-date in this respect. Students have a minimum of eight formal and recorded meetings a year with their primary supervisor and one with their supervisory team; these are logged by the supervisor in the TULIP [The University of Liverpool Information Portal] account, and are entered on LUSID. The students whom the audit team met confirmed that they were being supervised by teams and that they were clear about how to take forward any issues which might arise with particular supervisors.

155   Annual progress reports are required for all PGRs, and the operation of the electronic system, whose stages are set out in the Postgraduate Handbook, was demonstrated to the auditors. This brings together information from SPIDER on skills training and LUSID on recorded meetings with the supervisor(s), as well as giving the student and supervisors space to record their assessments of progress and any problems. The forms have to be signed off by the Departmental Director of Postgraduate Research, as well as by the Faculty Office, with issues being referred to the Faculty Director of Postgraduate Research.

Development of research and other skills

156   The Graduate School Skills Programme is prominent both in the Postgraduate Handbook and on the Graduate School website. The Skills website has a dedicated page for non-resident part-timers who are required to complete the programme in accordance with their own time-line. The University demonstrates its commitment to skills development by requiring successful completion of at least 180 training credits before submission of a thesis, with each credit representing approximately one hour of work. Exemptions are available for those with relevant prior experience. The programme covers first-year and careers skills, subject specific training, annual completion of the personal development record (PDR), and a presentation at a University Poster Day. The Briefing Paper acknowledges that the system has not been universally welcomed, and some of the students met by the audit team alluded to the excessively laborious nature of some provision. The PDR is being relaunched in March 2009 after a consultation exercise, with a reduction in the time requirements for some of the elements, for example from five to three days for an introductory course. It is not clear if these changes will be accompanied by a reduction in the credit tariff for the elements in question.

Feedback mechanisms

157   The Annual progress reports provide a clear framework for individual feedback on postgraduate issues, with concerns being picked up in the Faculty Office and/or the Graduate School. The 2006 QAA Review invited the University to consider the issue of departmental PGR committees, and a PGR staff-student liaison committee is now a requirement in all departments. Students and staff whom the audit team met confirmed the existence of dedicated PG student-staff committees in their departments.

Assessment

158   Theses are assessed in terms of the criteria in the University's various Ordinances and Regulations, which are included in the PG Handbook. Arrangements for appointing and providing information to examiners are spelled out. Ultimately, as is appropriate, decisions depend on the academic judgment of the examiners.

159   The audit team found that the University has a sound organisation in place through its Graduate School to ensure satisfactory arrangements for postgraduate research students. The University has taken appropriate action following the report of the QAA special Review of research degree programmes in 2006. It has in place thorough systems to support the development and monitoring of individual students and to review the activities of departments. The research environment and postgraduate experience meet in full the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Section 7: Published information

160   The audit team viewed a wide range of publicity materials relating to individual courses, support service for students and the University more generally. The SWS noted that in the view of the Guild of Students the information published was accurate. Students whom the team met reported that they found the materials informative and reflected an accurate picture of their course, the University and the city. The Student Recruitment and Admission Office is responsible for producing University-wide publicity materials, and is available to offer advice to departments on the production of departmental/course specific information.

161   An increasing amount of information to the public, applicants, educational partners and students is available in web-based form and, on the whole, students considered the website to be the most usual and useful source of pre-entry information. In the Briefing Paper, the University explained that each faculty is responsible for its own website and thereby the accuracy and currency of the information published thereon. Staff whom the audit team met confirmed the responsibility

of departments/schools to check the accuracy and currency of course information, a role which appeared to be taken seriously. The quality assurance processes generally and the committee structure, along with annual monitoring and periodic review, check the accuracy and completeness of the content of future published information relating to proposed and existing courses.

162   Programme and module specifications are available electronically and in hard copy. Both undergraduate and taught postgraduate students were aware of these and knew how they could be accessed. Additionally, departments provided much additional information about the department, staff, courses and research. This was clear, comprehensive and easily accessible. Students commented that this supplementary information was useful and clearly produced. Still further information was available to students at an individual module level via the LUSID resource (see paragraph 89) although the audit team noted variability among modules in the frequency and scope of the postings on the system.

163   The SWS reported concerns over an apparent lack of information for postgraduate students, particularly those on taught courses. Postgraduate taught students reported that the University's website provided a comprehensive and detailed listing of the wide range of postgraduate courses, but, that they were unable to locate the website for the School of Graduate Studies. The audit team understood that this had been established relatively recently and incorporated the Graduate School, which focused largely on postgraduate research matters. The University will wish to ensure that the work of the School of Graduate Studies is appropriately promoted as a source of support for postgraduate taught students.

164   The Student Matters web page provided a useful signpost to a comprehensive set of policies and guidance on admissions, registration, assessments, examinations, graduations, appeals and complaints. Students whom the audit team met indicated either that they knew where to find such information or who could direct them to the right person or place. The information on the website for international students referred to the Liverpool International College preparatory programmes (see paragraph 142) as well as the University's undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. There was a comprehensive section on entrance qualifications for international students, arranged by country of origin, as well as detailed guidance on fees, living expenses, scholarships, welfare and living in the city.

165   The audit team learned that departments/schools were responsible for checking the accuracy of published information provided by partner institutions, particularly in relation to UK regional relationships. It seemed to the team that these arrangements were working effectively, and were a product of the close working relationship that had developed between the University and partner institution colleagues. Information on XJTLU was currently being expanded via a new website which provided information on the institution, services to students as well as the courses, and was accessible in Chinese and English. The website made clear the status of the partner as an autonomous institution offering programmes leading to Liverpool awards.

166   The Teaching Quality Support Division (TQSD) is responsible for downloading data from the Unistats website ahead of publication, and passing the information to the Planning and Development Division to check for consistency with the HESA returns. Following publication, TQSD offers departmental heads the opportunity to provide commentary, a process confirmed by the staff whom the audit team met.

167   The audit team was able to access information about academic and support departments via the University website. Whilst this was relatively straightforward to navigate, the team encountered examples were the information listed was not always up to date. Given the importance of the University's collaborative activities, the University will wish to ensure that the development of the Strategic Partnerships Office website proceeds to early completion.

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