QAA

University of Wolverhampton

November 2008

Annex to the report

Contents

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Wolverhampton from 17 to 21 November 2008 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 Wolverhampton is that:

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

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit team found that the University's own assessment of its position in relation to quality enhancement as 'evolving' was accurate. The structured way in which the University uses information about practice elsewhere in the sector in the development of its policies and procedures is identified in the audit as a feature of good practice. Overall, the team concluded that the University had suitable systems for the identification of good practice but that there were weaknesses and inconsistencies in the mechanisms for the promulgation of that practice, across the University. The team therefore considers it desirable that the University develop a more strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities across the University, to include the development of a systematic means of dissemination of good practice across the University.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The audit found that the University's arrangements for its postgraduate research students met 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* and were operating as intended.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the active engagement by the Quality and Academic Standards Division in the academic work of the University, which contributes to the security of academic standards and to the assurance of academic quality across the University (paragraph 14)

- the establishment of a range of methodical initiatives, for example effective study-skills support, designed to improve student retention and progression (paragraphs 36, 99, 112)

- the effective support for student learning provided by Learning Information Services and Information Technology Services, which is assisted by both departments being integral to the academic planning and development processes (paragraphs 52, 86)

- the University's cooperative partnership with the Students' Union, exemplified by the work of the University Student Affairs Committee and the Dean of Students and the provision of pastoral support (paragraphs 63, 64, 102, 112)

- the systematic approach, led by the Dean of Students, to the collation of student views from a range of internal and external sources which demonstrates the University's regard for the student voice (paragraphs 64, 112)

- the clear commitment to and the fulfilment of the University's regional mission which enriches the student learning opportunities (paragraphs 91, 123, 128)

- the structured way in which the University uses information about practice elsewhere in the sector in the development of its policies and procedures, as in the review and revision of the approach to personal tutoring (paragraph 95).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- to provide student representatives with copies of external examiner reports in accordance with the HEFCE publication, *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework, Phase two outcomes*, October 2006/45 (paragraph 25)

- in the context of the refocusing of the academic portfolio, to review the institutional policies and procedures for the professional development of academic staff, with particular reference to the peer observation scheme (paragraph 109).

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- to secure consistency in the provision of assessment criteria at module level in the interests of equity of treatment of students across the provision (paragraph 41)

- to develop a more strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities across the University, to include the development of a systematic means of dissemination of good practice across the University (paragraph 122)

- to review the approach to research students who teach, including the identification of suitable opportunities for them to teach and the provision of effective training and support (paragraph 163)

- to give further consideration to the provision for research students, to provide feedback at local level within research centres and institutes (paragraph 166).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1   The Mission of the University is:

'The University of Wolverhampton is a learning community promoting excellence, innovation and creativity. It is committed to being:

- An agent for social inclusion and social change

- An arena for the development of ideas and critical thinking

- A strategic force driving educational and cultural strategy for the City and the region

- An educational hub supporting the economy through employment, entrepreneurship, creativity, knowledge transfer, research and development.'

2	The University traces its history to the foundation of the Working Men's College in 1835. With other institutions, this grew into the Wolverhampton and Staffordshire Technical College, which developed with the Wolverhampton College of Arts into Wolverhampton Polytechnic in 1969 and the University of Wolverhampton in 1992. The University has full degree awarding powers and operates modular schemes for its undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision. The University has a strong regional focus with 67 per cent of its students being drawn from Birmingham and the Black Country. The University states that widening participation is so integral to its work that it is not seen as a separate activity but is a 'theme in all student-facing work'. The University had 23,286 students studying at the University in July 2008.

3	The University offers a broad portfolio of degree programmes grouped into 10 academic schools. In addition, there is a Graduate School, an Institute for Learning Enhancement, Education Partnerships, an International Office, an Office of the Dean of Students and eight major central service departments. The University operates on four campuses: two in Wolverhampton, and one in each of Telford and Walsall.

4	The Briefing Paper prepared for the audit signalled that the University was 'preparing for the future by reviewing its academic business model' and 'refocusing its academic portfolio'. The University has identified four work streams that cover: the development of Foundation Degrees; redesigning the undergraduate and postgraduate portfolios; the continuing professional development and employer engagement strategy and, further internationalisation of the University

The information base for the audit

5	The University of Wolverhampton 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 access to all of the documents referenced in the Briefing Paper and to the institution's intranet.

6	The Students' Union produced a student written submission (SWS) setting out the students' views on the accuracy of information provided to them, the experience of students as learners and their role in quality management. The audit team is grateful to the students for the provision of this useful and informative document to assist in its enquiries.

7	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, Ofsted 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

8   The University was last subject to QAA Institutional audit in 2004. The audit resulted in a judgement of broad confidence in the University's current and likely future management of academic standards and of the quality of learning opportunities. A feature of good practice identified in the previous audit was the emphasis on using technology to support learning and the present audit team found considerable evidence of ongoing good practice in relation to the use of technology to support learning. The report of the audit also noted the commitment of the University to its regional mission. Reading of the Strategic Plan and discussion with students and a range of staff from across the University established for the present team that this commitment continued, as did that to offering a wide range of support for the different communities of students within the student body. The present audit found that the clear commitment to, and the fulfilment of, the University's regional mission which enriched the student learning opportunities persisted and was a feature of good practice in the University's management of learning opportunities for its students (see paragraph 91).

9   In 2004, the audit team identified 'the interlinking of structures and processes that generally promote consistency of practice and facilitate enhancement' as an example of good practice. The present audit team is of the view that the University has not continued systematically to develop its structures for promoting consistency of practice where it is necessary and for facilitating enhancement; the University has acknowledged the need for further development, and has set in place strategies to support this aim. Further discussion is given in Section 4.

10   As a result of the previous audit, the University was advised to clarify its procedures for the validation and revalidation of programmes and to give due attention to the timescales for such processes and their relationship to the timetable for the recruitment of students. The previous audit report also suggested that the University consider improving the consistency and robustness of the personal tutoring system for undergraduates. The present audit team confirmed that the University had responded appropriately to these recommendations.

11   Since the previous institutional audit, the University has also participated in other audit and review processes including that of Foundation Degrees (2005), a review of healthcare programmes (2005), collaborative provision (2006), and a review of research degree programmes (2006). In each case, the University adopted a systematic approach to considering and responding fully and effectively to the recommendations.

12   Overall, the audit team found considerable evidence that the University took seriously the matters issues raised in audit and review and developed appropriate action plans, which were then implemented. Impacts are monitored and on occasion it has been necessary to set in place further strategies to tackle ongoing issues.

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

13   The Academic Board, chaired by the Vice Chancellor, has institutional responsibility for the oversight of academic standards and the assurance and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities which it discharges through five subcommittees: University Quality Enhancement Committee (UQEC), University Academic Strategy Committee, University Academic Governance and Audit Committee (UAGAC), University Student Affairs Committee (USAC) and the University Research Committee. Each committee is chaired by a senior member of the Strategic Management Group. A risk management approach to aspects of quality assurance was introduced in the academic year 2008-09. At the time of the audit, the University had recently reviewed its governance structures and ongoing academic governance reviews are held annually to confirm effectiveness. Following the most recent review, the UAGAC conducted a review of the principal academic governance committees of the Academic Board, the outcomes of which would be submitted to the Board in November 2008.

14   The Quality and Academic Standards Division (QASD) provides advice and guidance on matters related to academic quality and standards, academic strategy and course planning and development and supports the committees and their chairs at institutional level. Meetings with staff indicated that much of the effectiveness of the committee structure was attributable to the strong support from QASD. Each committee has an officer from QASD who, in consultation with the committee chair, identifies items which need to be discussed at other meetings across the University and facilitates that process. Following UQEC meetings QASD officers agree agenda items for school quality enhancement committees (SQEC). There are common processes, timelines for action and reports of SQECs to UQEC which are overseen by QASD officers. QASD officers also play a key role across a range of committees in the ongoing development of the University's quality and standards assurance systems and policies, academic strategy, course planning and development, and in ensuring that quality assurance procedures and policies are effective. They work closely with schools, academic and service departments, the Students' Union and increasingly with the Institute of Learning Enhancement. The audit identified as a feature of good practice the active engagement by QASD in the academic work of the University, which contributes to the security of academic standards and to the assurance of academic quality across the University.

15   School quality enhancement committees (SQECs) exercise authority devolved from UQEC for academic quality, standards and enhancement at school level. A summary of minutes of meetings of SQECs is submitted to each meeting of UQEC, which reports to the Academic Board biannually. The work of the QASD was viewed by the audit team as particularly important in ensuring the effective functioning of the school quality enhancement committees.

16   The Planning Approvals Sub-Committee exercises delegated authority from UASC for considering new course developments and deciding the locus for validation, either SQEC, the University Quality Panel or Overseas Standing Panel depending on the level of risk. The QASD website is the single accessible definitive reference point for all quality assurance documents.

17   The University retains full responsibility for maintaining the academic standards of its awards and assuring the quality of students' learning experiences in all collaborative provision. Further detail of the University's management of its collaborative provision may be found at Section 5.

18   The senior staff of the University considered the new committee system to be working well overall; it was recognised that there was some overlap in the work of the committees but it was also argued that issues tended to be approached by each committee from a different perspective. The audit team concluded that the University's deliberative and executive structures provided an effective and suitable framework for the institutional management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. Decision making within the structure is transparent and school-level committees have clearly defined reporting lines, terms of reference and membership. The alignment of University and school committees was clear in the new structures.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

19   The Academic Board delegates functional authority for the management of academic standards to the University Quality Enhancement Committee (UQEC).

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

20   The institution manages its academic standards principally through the external examiner system, pathway validation (programme approval), review and revalidation (periodic review) and annual monitoring. External reference points (the *Code of practice,* subject benchmark statements, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements where applicable) are all taken into account. Pathway validation, review and revalidation, and annual monitoring are discussed further in Section 3.

External examiners

21   The roles and responsibilities of external examiners are set out in the External Examiner Handbook which is available on the website to staff and sent to external examiners, who are also required to attend an induction session. Course handbooks explain the role of external examiners briefly and simply for students.

22   There is a clear procedure for the nomination of external examiners originating in the relevant school, but subject to approval by the External Examining Sub-Committee (EESC) on behalf of the University Quality Enhancement Committee (UQEC). The Quality and Academic Standards Division (QASD) services this Sub-Committee and liaises with schools to ensure timely appointment of external examiners. The EESC's minutes are reported to UQEC, and UQEC receives an annual overview report, which provides a summary of good practice identified, as well as identifying areas for action and provides an effective institutional overview of the operation of the external examiner system in the University.

23   There are standard report templates for external examiners' reports at both subject and award level. These reports provide confirmation of the compatibility of standards with the FHEQ and of comparability with the standards of cognate provision in the sector, as well as information about procedural issues. Collaborative provision is covered by the same external examiners that cover related University-based awards and the procedures are essentially the same, except that separate comment is required for any collaborative provision.

24   External examiner reports are submitted to the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic) on behalf of the Vice Chancellor. The Head of QASD reads all reports on receipt and takes action as a matter of urgency if there is serious concern. The reports are sent to deans and nominated school staff. A senior member of staff in each school is responsible for reading the reports, drawing subject and pathway leaders' attention to key issues and organising a written response to each external examiner. Documentation reviewed by the audit team confirmed that such response was made. Each school quality enhancement committee receives an analytical report summarising the main issues of concern and any good practice identified, which will be presented to EESC. The summary reports viewed by the team were brief but effective documents, which highlighted issues raised for the school and the University, noted any required action and identified good practice across the school. The summary reports are then used to compile the University-wide report to UQEC and Academic Board.

25   Since 2006 it has been a HEFCE requirement that institutions 'share external examiners' reports as a matter of course with the institution's student representatives, for example through staff-student committees'. Discussions with staff and students established that, while student representatives had access to the summary reports, they did not see the full reports. Accordingly, the audit team considers it advisable that the University provide student representatives with external examiner reports in accordance with the HEFCE publication, *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework, Phase two outcomes*, October 2006/45.

26   The audit confirmed that the University made strong and scrupulous use of external examiners in summative assessment.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

27   The University takes systematic account of the FHEQ in its quality assurance processes, and aligns the levels of its own qualifications and credit framework with the FHEQ. External examiners are required to report that academic standards are in line with the FHEQ, relevant benchmark statements and PSRB requirements. The annual monitoring and review process also requires a review of how effectively the programme reflects the subject benchmark statements and PSRB requirements, as well as consideration of external examiners' reports.

28   External advisers for the approval of programmes are not asked to comment explicitly upon academic standards; the audit team viewed a range of samples of validation reports and found that, in practice, the panel did explore the alignment of the provision with the FHEQ. External advisers are asked to appraise the suitability of assessment in relation to learning outcomes and assessment design, the appropriateness of aims and outcomes to employment, and programme design in relation to learning outcomes. The team acknowledges that these matters are related to academic standards, but would suggest that the University consider whether a formal requirement for external advisers to confirm at validation the alignment of the proposed award with the FHEQ might provide for additional security of standards.

29   For validation, proposers complete a pathway specification which indicates which subject benchmark statements and PSRB requirements apply to the provision. The audit found that alignment with relevant subject benchmark statements was systematic, with QASD being charged with notifying schools of any amendments to relevant subject benchmark statements. Annual monitoring takes place at module and programme level and is delegated to schools which produce a summary report for UQEC. A recently introduced risk assessment tool has been designed to support this process.

30   The University has a specific committee, the Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body Sub-Committee (PSRBSC), to maintain an overview of PSRB activity in the University and to ensure that PSRB reports are centrally monitored on receipt and that any necessary follow-up action takes place. PSRB issues are referred to in external examiners' reports, validation and revalidation and annual monitoring.

31   The institution stated in the Briefing Paper that it relied on its alignment with the Academic Infrastructure to manage its response to the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, published by the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

32   The audit found that the University took systematic account of all of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its calibration and maintenance of academic standards.

Assessment policies and regulations

33   Assessment policies and regulations are to be found principally in the external examiner handbook, in University and school assessment handbooks and in the Academic Regulations. School assessment handbooks are written to meet local requirements, but there is University guidance on content. At the time of the audit, discussions were taking place as to whether it was necessary to have school assessment handbooks in addition to the University assessment handbook. These discussions, led by UQEC, were prompted by a concern that the current approach led to duplication of effort. The audit team would support the University in this intention to streamline some of its procedures.

34   It is a University requirement that students be provided with or be informed about University academic regulations and the examination regulations. Samples of course documentation reviewed by the audit team confirmed that web links to the relevant regulations were provided. The procedures for approval of new programmes require that module guides, which should include information about individual assessment tasks, be provided, at the least in draft form, as part of the documentation for the panel to consider. The team viewed a range of documentation from approval events and found that for the most part such information was provided so that the panel could fulfil the requirement that it confirm that the assessment regime was appropriate. In some instances, it was noted that such information would be supplied later.

35   Moderation is a University requirement, except for student projects which must be double-marked. The audit team reviewed the guidance on moderation which it found to be sound. Schools also have arrangements in place to standardise marking across large cohorts with several assessors and with colleges involved in collaborative provision.

36   The University has separate assessment boards for subjects and for awards, and there are clear rules covering membership, chairing and servicing the meetings. There are also regulations on the marking scales, which differ between undergraduate and postgraduate provision, and on how these convert into awards. Undergraduates are marked on a 16 point scale, except at Level 1 where a simplified A-F scale used. This recent change was designed to shift the emphasis onto the quality of feedback as opposed to the precise mark awarded and is part of the measures being taken to improve the first-year experience. The change arose from the First Year Experience Project, which included a review of first-year assessment. The audit team noted this change as illustrative of the University's considered approach to student retention and progression. Course and module documentation viewed by the team confirmed that students were provided with adequate information about the marking scales used in assessment.

37   Students confirmed that deadlines were clear and published in advance, but also indicated that there was some coincidence of deadlines and that on occasion the scheduling was such that students did not receive feedback before submitting the next assignment. In meetings with the audit team, students reported that the University's target for the return of assessed work within three weeks was generally met. The students also reported variability in the usefulness of the feedback provided.

38   Non-submission without due cause is treated as a failure and late submission without an agreed extension also results in a Fail grade, with the mark capped at bare Pass level at resit. The external examiner handbook contains extensive guidance on what is acceptable and reasonable. Students whom the audit team met were familiar with the rules about extenuating circumstances. The University also has a procedure under which students can request a re-mark without making a formal appeal. Staff whom the team met expressed the view that the system worked well in practice and that most students did not pursue matters after discussing their feedback with members of staff. Staff and students did suggest that the procedures could be better publicised.

39   Special needs arrangements are covered in the external examiner handbook and, to ensure equity and consistency of practice, the Student Enabling Centre must be involved in agreeing alternative assessments, which are required not to reduce the reliability, viability or integrity of the assessment.

40   There are common institutional rules for student progression and for the classification of awards in the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Regulations, which are included as appendices to the external examiner handbook. Degree classifications are based primarily on a grade point average, but there is also a requirement to take account of spread of marks based on clear algorithms. These are consistent across awards, except where PSRB requirements may override normal University rules. The SWS suggested that the institution should create an online honours degree class calculator; the University has agreed to implement this proposal for the academic year 2009-10, a further indication of the University's regard for the student voice.

41   The University requires that all students be provided with assessment criteria at module level and module guides must include either the criteria or information about where they may be found. Assessment criteria were included in some module guides seen by the audit team and where the criteria were not present the guides did indicate how they would be provided to students. The SWS and the students whom the team met reported on good practice in the provision of assessment criteria, by way of example, written information being supplemented by oral briefings or the provision of module assessment briefings as in the University of Wolverhampton Business School. From its reading of documentation and discussion with staff and students the team concluded that there was no central systematic approach to confirmation of the provision of assessment criteria to students if the criteria had not been considered at validation. The team also came to the view that the variability in the approach to the provision of assessment criteria had the potential to disadvantage some students. Accordingly, the team considers it desirable that the University secure consistency in the provision of assessment criteria at module level, in the interests of equity of treatment of students across its provision.

42   University-wide changes in assessment regulations must be agreed by the Academic Board, which is also informed about, and must approve, the arrangements for implementation. For example new undergraduate academic regulations were introduced in the academic year 2008-09 and an accompanying paper set out the dates of implementation, with provision for ongoing students. Staff told the audit team that there had been extensive dialogue with students before the changes were implemented and that it had been established that no students would be disadvantaged; in this case, therefore, the changes had been implemented for most students with immediate effect.

43   From its review of the relevant documentation and discussion with staff and students, the audit team concluded that the University's assessment policies and regulations were fit for the purpose and were deployed effectively in the management of academic standards.

Management information - statistics

44   Staff whom the audit team met confirmed that the centrally provided data were useful and accurate for all student types; schools occasionally carry out additional data analysis to test linkages between student characteristics and performance. Annual monitoring involves review of student cohort characteristics, for example, age, ethnicity, gender, entry qualifications, individual needs, and of student progression and achievement, largely using data available through SITS. The validation and review handbook makes it clear that revalidation should also be informed by data about progression, achievement and recruitment and documentation viewed by the team showed that this was the case, largely through the use of annual monitoring reports. The team's reading of a selection of reports established that data were widely used as part of annual monitoring and review, making an effective contribution to the assurance of academic quality and standards.

45   The institution has developed a high level set of key performance indicators (KPI) using student data on such matters as recruitment, retention and progression, academic achievement, student satisfaction and which are reported by the Academic Board to the Governors. Schools are aware of these KPIs, but, at the time of the audit, there was not yet a comprehensive system for monitoring KPIs at all levels. In the opinion of the audit team, the University makes good and systematic use of management data at all levels to ensure the security of academic standards.

46   The audit found that the University made effective use of the Academic Infrastructure and other relevant external reference points in its management of the academic standards of its awards. The University also deploys carefully defined assessment policies and regulations to safeguard the security of academic standards. There was evidence that the University made good and systematic use of management data at all levels to ensure the security of academic standards. The audit confirmed that the University made strong and scrupulous use of external examiners in summative assessment, supporting a judgement of confidence in the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

47   The University deploys a range of processes and procedures in its management of learning opportunities. The Learning and Teaching Strategy sets out the University's aspirations for the learning experience that it seeks to offer its students. The Strategy is translated into local school annual learning and teaching action plans overseen by the school quality enhancement committees.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

48   The institution has designed its own internal processes and procedures so that following them also achieves consonance with the *Code of practice*. The Quality and Academic Standards Division (QASD) is responsible for reviewing changes to the *Code* and ensuring that any necessary amendments are made locally. The University website contains material demonstrating the alignment of the University's own Codes with the *Code*. Standard pathway and module

documentation is designed so as to show clearly alignment with external reference points, including the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001*.

49   Collaborative provision is expected to comply with University of Wolverhampton requirements and therefore the Academic Infrastructure is deployed in the same way as occurs for the institution's own provision.

50   In the audit team's view the University makes effective and systematic use of the Academic Infrastructure to ensure the effective management of learning opportunities.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

51   The University approves programmes through the process of pathway validation. Annual monitoring and review, and revalidation, the equivalent of periodic review, are also carried out. There are clear procedures for pathway validation and for review and revalidation set out in the review and validation handbook. Following the Academic Governance Review of February 2007, the Academic Board in June of the same year approved major changes to the validation and monitoring system which sought to reduce the burden of the procedures and to delegate some aspects to schools whilst maintaining rigorous and effective quality assurance and planning procedures. The principal changes took effect from the academic year 2008-09 and draw on a risk assessment carried out by the Programme Approvals Sub-Committee (PASC) to determine whether the validation/revalidation will be carried out at school or University level. As this risk-based approach was new at the time of the audit, it was too recent too appraise its effectiveness. The approach to the changes in process demonstrates that the University regularly reviews the effectiveness of its procedures and makes modifications as appropriate.

Validation (approval) and revalidation

52   In addition to the review and validation handbook there exist a number of checklists and pro forma to support the validation (approval) process. The PASC considers the strategic case for a new programme and related resource issues before referring the validation either to a school validation panel, University Quality Panel or to the Overseas Quality Panel for international collaborative provision, depending on the risk assessment. In the case of collaborative provision responsibility for validation and review is retained centrally. The validation process draws on input from Library and Information Services (LIS) and Information Technology (IT) Services. In one case seen by the audit team LIS had provided written comments on the draft documents which the team considered to be a useful contribution to the process. The audit team viewed the engagement of LIS in the validation process as good practice.

53   Validation and revalidation draw on external experts in all cases, with the precise nature of their involvement being determined by the panel chair, depending on the scale and nature of the proposal. He or she may discuss the matter with the Pro Vice Chancellor (PVC) (Academic) and/or the Head of QASD. It is not always deemed necessary for the external adviser to visit the University, but according to the staff the audit team met, such practice is uncommon and would be based on the risk assessment. Programme proposers can nominate external advisers but approval of the nomination is vested in the chair of the panel. Each panel must include at least one independent external academic adviser who is not a current external examiner. Sometimes, at the discretion of the panel chair, additional external advisers may be included to represent PSRB interests. Prior to the approval event, external advisers provide written reports, using a template, to which providers must respond. The team reviewed a range of validation documentation and confirmed that the procedures were observed in practice and that external advisers were recorded as present at validation meetings and in meetings with students.

54   Revalidation every six years is based on a school review of performance and a self-evaluation document. Guidance is provided on the issues to be covered and the documents to be provided. Once the review has taken place, a separate revalidation of the programmes occurs in which provision may be discontinued, amended, added and continued. Where it is proposed to discontinue a programme, the proposer has to produce a plan for the PASC, showing how this would be implemented while protecting the interests of students who need to complete the programme. The audit team reviewed a range of documentation for review and revalidation and confirmed that matters identified for attention in the review process were carried forward and considered in the revalidation of the programmes.

55   Validations of collaborative programmes go through essentially the same validation process, except that all overseas collaborative provision is handled by the Overseas Standing Panel and for UK collaborations by the University Quality Panel, rather than being devolved to schools, because the institution feels that this area requires specialist expertise. Education Partnerships (for UK collaborative provision) and the International Office (for international collaborations) are involved in planning new programmes from the earliest stage and will carry out the risk assessment and partnership overview analysis. The proposed partner must be evaluated before application is made to the PASC for planning approval. Further detail of the University's management of its collaborative provision may be found in Section 5.

Annual monitoring

56   Programme monitoring is carried out annually by schools. While there is no pro-forma for annual monitoring there is a checklist to guide schools on expectations for the process, which includes a report from the school to the University Quality Enhancement Committee (UQEC) on an exception basis. A range of reports seen by the audit team included action plans, which were followed up the following year, and identified good practice and action taken in relation to the University's four chosen enhancement themes (see paragraph 114). The UQEC receives an annual summary report highlighting issues emerging from the process, which is also presented to the Academic Board. This report describes the conduct of the process, in particular how the reports were considered by a small working group and also how students were consulted by UQEC members, principally the Dean of Students, attending school forums. The summary report also includes an overview of the issues raised by schools and notes areas of good practice drawn to its attention.

57   School quality enhancement committees (SQEC) can approve minor changes to modules and pathways outside of revalidation. The SQEC handbook lists what it defines as minor and suggests a 45-credit limit on a pathway. There is an expectation that external examiners be consulted about changes and that any working group reviewing changes will include a member of academic staff from another school. The University can also devolve authority for considering more substantial changes, depending on its assessment of risk, for example the experience of the school in the area.

58   The Work-Based and Placement Learning Guidelines set out the good practice requirements in this area, including assessment and safeguarding academic standards and quality. The guidance also makes it clear that the normal quality assurance procedures, for example annual monitoring, apply to such provision. There are also specific guidelines for the validation of flexible and distance learning, which state that as far as possible such validations should follow the normal pattern. The course documentation must include module specifications and a draft module guide and at least one fully completed module, including all the teaching and learning materials. As an additional safeguard where the provider has limited experience in the delivery of flexible and distance learning, the chair may require more materials to be available for scrutiny. The audit team considered that the procedures for the consideration and approval of flexible and distance-learning programmes were rigorous and met the expectations of the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*.

Management information - student feedback

59   The Briefing Paper stated that student feedback was obtained through module evaluation, largely through module questionnaires, staff-student liaison meetings, focus groups, student representation on SQECs and student council meetings. Some schools have introduced mid-module evaluations to provide opportunities for students to comment on issues relating to their progress. Module evaluation questionnaires are processed centrally with results passed back to schools. They inform module and pathway review, and thence annual monitoring and review and revalidation.

60   Notification of responses to student issues is carried out through a variety of mechanisms. The University, in conjunction with the Students' Union, has introduced a formal leaflet, Your Opinion makes a Difference, which reports back to the University community on developments and changes being made in response to feedback and opinions. Examples of such responses include improvements to IT services; transforming of timetabling; bar code receipting of coursework and the launch of an online student helpdesk service. A University report 'Bringing it all together: listening to the student voice' drew on the 2007 National Student Survey, the University's internal student survey, the postgraduate student survey and student council meetings. The report noted areas of satisfaction as well as areas where criticisms were raised.

61   The audit team noted a more recent report which concluded that while students were full of praise for the best teaching staff and the overall quality of the learning environment, they were becoming more discerning in relation to what was good or poor staff performance and were demanding greater consistency in the standard of their experience. The issue of inconsistency in the quality of teaching across the institution was also raised in the SWS.

62   The SWS indicated that the process of 'closing the loop' on student feedback was not consistent and often not timely. Students whom the audit team met also endorsed this view. In meetings with the audit team staff acknowledged that there were issues of timing with end-of-module feedback and reported that a number of schools had adopted mid-module feedback to solve the problem. Some schools use module guides to inform the next year's students what has been done in response to the previous year's students' feedback, in order to show that student feedback did make a difference.

63   The University Student Affairs Committee (USAC) had been recently constituted at the time of the audit to have an explicit focus on the student experience and to provide advice, guidance and recommendations on all aspects of the student life cycle. It receives reports from student-staff liaison committees and student councils and reports to the Academic Board. Chaired by the PVC (Student Affairs), it recommends ways of ensuring high standards in the overall student experience and support for the whole student population. There is wide representation from academic schools and service departments, the Students' Union and student representatives. the USAC maintains an overview of student feedback at institutional level and receives a useful annual summary of all student feedback across the institution compiled by the Dean of Students. The compilation of this summary is an example of good practice, in the opinion of the audit team, because it brings together all sources of student feedback in one short, but effective, institutional overview. The University uses the report to influence policy and service development across the institution.

64   The audit team found that the University made effective use of student feedback to assure and enhance the quality of learning opportunities and identified as good practice the systematic approach, led by the Dean of Students, to the collation of student views from a range of internal and external sources, which demonstrates the University's regard for the student voice.

Role of students in quality assurance

65   The present audit team found evidence that, in response to the previous institutional audit, the University had improved communication with, and feedback to, students on the management of academic standards and quality at all levels of the University and had increased student representation on institutional and school-level committees. The improvements have been achieved through a Student Voice project and the published Student Voice System. The Student Voice team of Students' Union Officers and schools' academic student liaison officers have implemented training for all students undertaking the role of representative. There is a handbook to support student representative activity. Provision was made for the certification of transferable skills for student representatives and information was provided about how to 'sell' their experiences as representatives. Recognition has since evolved into a certificate of volunteering with students also receiving support in developing their curricula vitae.

66   A revised policy on student representation was introduced in June 2006 and embeds a framework for student representation across all schools, setting out minimum requirements for the operation of the system. This policy requires the student voice in quality assurance processes and uses student feedback and survey outcomes in schools and institutionally. There are regular meetings between the Vice Chancellor and the Students' Union President and between the PVC (Academic) and the Students' Union Academic Vice President. Students whom the audit team met valued these meetings and the opportunity to raise directly with the senior management matters of interest to the student body.

67   At institution level, students are represented on the Board of Governors and Academic Board and on the principal committees, including the USAC, UQEC and the University Academic Governance and Audit Committee University Academic Governance and Audit Committee. Student sabbatical officers are also represented on various working groups of the USAC. At programme level, defined area representatives stand for students in their course/subject/year group/cohort/pathway and attend staff/student liaison meetings termly to discuss issues which affect the school.

68   At school level, students are represented on SQECs. Additionally, student councils take place termly in each school across the University and are attended by school representatives, who are elected through Students' Union elections. School councils are often attended by Students' Union officers and the Dean of Students and a formal report on School Council activity is considered annually by the USAC and the Academic Board. Documentation seen by the audit team confirmed that issues and themes raised informed the development of committee work in the following academic year.

69   Student representatives whom the audit team met were clear about the arrangements for staff-student liaison committees, school councils and various internal and external surveys in gathering student views. The team considers it a strength that each school has a student liaison officer who attends school council meetings, where all the student representatives in a school meet together twice a year.

70   The previous institutional audit team considered it desirable that the University improve communication with, and feedback to students on the management of academic standards and quality at all levels of the University. Additionally, it advised that the University review the extent of student representation on institution and school-level committees. The University's 'Listening to the Student Voice' document sets out clearly the University's considered and systematic approach in this area The University's commitment to a student-centred focus is further demonstrated by the creation and appointment of a new post of Dean of Students in 2006 with specific responsibility for improving the student experience, supporting and developing students, listening to, encouraging and responding to the student voice. The present audit team concluded that the measures taken by the University had met the advice of the previous audit team and that the role of the Dean of Students has been instrumental in this success.

Links between research and scholarly activity and learning opportunities

71   The University's strategic management approach to linking research and teaching is described within its Learning and Teaching Strategy 2006-10. The institution aims to build capacity and increase the quality outputs in research through a range of schemes and programmes. These include the funding, initiation and dissemination of research from learning and teaching projects, which focus on key pedagogical research expertise within schools and the strengthening of the research cluster networks.

72   School associate deans carry responsibility for the local adoption of the Teaching and Learning Strategy and the development of school action plans, which specify research targets in developmental and action research, including pedagogical issues. Each school has learning and teaching coordinators who ensure that the action plans are implemented and monitoring of progress is scrutinised through SQECs. The Institute for Learning Enhancement (ILE) organises meetings of associate deans and learning and teaching coordinators to foster the sharing of good practice.

73   The review and validation handbook states the expectation that programmes be supported by current research and practice in the application of knowledge in the relevant disciplines, technological advances and developments in teaching and learning and this was confirmed through scrutiny of validation and periodic review reports.

74   The University's Research Strategy indicates that it expects and facilitates the engagement of all academic staff in the achievement of scholarship and research outcomes against established targets, and that it promotes and develops scholarship and research in alignment with curricula development through its academic schools. Targets for research, conference presentation and publication are set at appraisal. Progress towards the achievement of targets/objectives is monitored by the appraiser and reviewed at the next appraisal point. Throughout the year, opportunities exist for staff to make research bids through the appropriate committee structure. Annual monitoring reports at subject level also identify research and scholarly activity outputs related to the discipline area. There is a requirement within school plans to identify outcomes against objectives, which are monitored within schools by school research committees and school executive teams.

75   Much emphasis is placed by the University on pedagogic research and the Learning and Teaching Research Network supports staff in such activity. Three research clusters have been established, which concentrate on the positive student experience; learning technology; and assessment and achievement. Reports from these clusters are presented to UQEC annually. It is part of the role of the ILE to arrange for the sharing of relevant internal and external research and scholarship to promote effective learning and teaching practice in the University.

76   The audit team was able to confirm, as a result of its scrutiny of documentation, that the availability of relevant research expertise is considered during the approval process for new programmes. In particular, programme teams must demonstrate how the research and scholarly activity influences the content and process of the teaching programme.

77   The audit team concluded that research and scholarly activity were linked to students' programmes of study in many areas of the University, and that they contributed to the effective management of learning opportunities.

Other modes of study

78   The University operates on four campuses. The main facilities are based at the City campus, while each of the four campuses has a learning centre. Student support services are offered through Gateway at the City and Walsall campuses and on a visiting basis at other campuses.

79   The University has experienced an overall reduction in the recruitment of home full-time undergraduate students and a growth concentrated in continuing professional development, part-time undergraduate and postgraduate, work-based and employer co-funded programmes and international activity. Accordingly, flexible modes of delivery are in operation, including e-learning, work-based and placement learning and learning materials development. In addition, less mainstream blended learning areas, such as podcasting and mobile learning are used.

80   The University's web-based virtual learning environment (WOLF) is a key system used by students and staff to support learning across all campuses and partner colleges, and provides a range of tools and facilities by which tutors can deliver learning material in support of classroom-based teaching. Training for staff in the use of the virtual learning environment is organised through the corporate staff development programme. Annually over 21,000 students use the service and students commented on its value in the progress of their studies. Remote access is available and WOLF is available to students in collaborative institutions in the UK and overseas. The SWS confirmed the usefulness of the WOLF in supporting students in their learning, but expressed some dissatisfaction with the level of use by teaching staff. Students whom the audit team met confirmed that use of the WOLF was variable, stating that some teaching staff provided more information than others about assessment requirements, lecture schedules and resit information.

81   A generic work-based and placement learning framework has been developed, which provides guidelines on the management of work-based and placement learning activity. Schools and divisions interpret the requirements to ensure that such activity is consistent with University regulations and other relevant reference points, including the *Code of practice*.

82   An internal review of e-learning in the academic year 2007-08 led to the development of a blended learning strategy and a blended learning policy, introduced in May 2008, to enhance student learning and improve the student learning experience. The strategy relates to the use of technology in learning and describes six student entitlements that directly address the mechanisms for engagement with learning opportunities. At the time of the audit, the strategy was too recent for the audit team to be able to appraise its success in achieving its aims.

83   In the audit team's view, the University has effective communication systems in place to support learning and strives to make its multicampus arrangements work well and responsively. The team considered that the University's approach to the provision, distribution and enhancement of its e-learning facilities was effective.

Resources for learning

84   At the time of the audit, a new Estates Strategy was in the process of approval by the Board of Governors, concentrating on improvements in quality, efficiency, flexibility, responsiveness to changes in technology, improved environmental performance and partnership arrangements. Generally, students express satisfaction with the quality and conditions of classrooms and the general campus environment, although the Compton and Walsall campuses are referenced as areas of some dissatisfaction.

85   Students' resource needs are identified through a range of mechanisms at the course, school, and University levels and the effectiveness of learning resources is monitored through the University's quality assurance processes. The annual business planning process takes account of resource implications following annual monitoring of programmes. Resources for new programmes are identified during the validation process and are discussed and agreed at the Academic Board, following approval by the UASC. The National Student Survey and the University's student satisfaction survey both scored high levels of satisfaction with library and computing facilities.

86   The Library and Information Services (LIS) provides learning centres on each University campus and offers a range of learning environments and access to information technology (IT) and technology-supported learning facilities. The LIS staff are members of major University and school committees and management bodies and are active partners in curricular development and review.

87   IT Services supports the physical and virtual learning environments and works with schools through account managers. The University provides a range of IT facilities. The e:Vision information gateway allows new and current University students to perform a variety of essential tasks, such as tracking application progress, applying for accommodation, enrolling, and checking module marks. At the time of the audit, in order to meet the expectations of staff and students in terms of the range of services offered, and the standards, access and availability of those services, the University was developing an integrated approach through closer coordination of Institute for Learning Enhancement, LIS, IT Services, QASD and the Office of the Dean of Students.

88   The audit team found that the University's approach to the oversight and development of its learning resources made an effective contribution to the institutional management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

Admissions policy

89   A revised admissions policy, taking into consideration the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*, was approved during the academic year 2007-08, Admission processes for all courses and postgraduate research are published in prospectuses and on the University website. Applicants are able to engage with the University through their own personalised account portal and are able to apply online.

90   UK admissions to the University are managed through a central Admissions Unit, within the Academic Registry. The Unit was restructured following a review of student administration, and standard admission processes were developed and streamlined to reflect the new admissions policy. The International Office manages the admission of international students. All admissions to collaborative institutions are managed through the University's central Admissions Unit.

91   Independent data confirm that the University has maintained its position as one of the most successful UK institutions in recruiting students from working-class backgrounds and it remains strongly committed to widening participation, as reflected in the Strategic Plan. This commitment is demonstrated through the University's strenuous efforts to meet the need of an increasingly diverse student body. As part of its commitment to its regional mission, the University leads on partnership developments between the University, primary schools, secondary schools and colleges of further education. It has also been selected as part of a HEFCE research programme, which examines exemplars of good practice in using compact agreements. Its partnership activities have recently been enhanced by its involvement in the Black Country Challenge, which promotes significant improvements in educational outcomes for young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and raises pupil aspirations in primary and secondary schools. Opportunities are provided for students in schools and colleges to undertake University Level 1 study as part of the Higher Education Modules in Schools initiative. At the time of the audit, a framework to develop progression agreements was being developed to build on the demonstrably strong links with lifelong learning networks and further education partner colleges.

92   Students commented favourably in the SWS on the operation of the HE Shop, a drop-in facility based in the city centre, where prospective students were able to obtain impartial advice on higher education study opportunities. When the city centre premises closed, the University transferred its services to its main administration building. Following representation from the students, the University is intending to re-launch the service to prospective students in new premises in Wolverhampton's city centre.

93   From the evidence available, the audit team concluded that the University of Wolverhampton was professional in the conduct of its admissions policy and consistent in its implementation.

Student support

94   The Dean of Students is responsible for the strategic management of student service areas. In addition to central services, schools make local arrangements, informed by factors such as subject requirements, patterns and mode of attendance and resource implications. Students spoke favourably about the provision of school student offices, with particular reference to support for distributed learning and the operation of provision across a number of campuses.

95   In the report of the previous institutional audit, the University was recommended to improve the consistency and robustness of its personal tutor system for undergraduates. Following extensive consultation with other higher education institutions, a new policy was approved by Academic Board and introduced in 2008. Students who met the audit team were positive about the progress made in the operation of the scheme. A working party has been established to oversee and evaluate the implementation of the policy, reporting to UQEC. The review and revision of the approach to personal tutoring exemplifies the structured way in which the University uses information about practice elsewhere in the sector in the development of its policies and procedures, which the audit team considered to be a feature of good practice.

96   The University's ePortfolio system, PebblePAD, allows students to record skills, events and achievements throughout their academic study, although its use is voluntary and not universal and student views were divided as to the utility of the system.

97   Student support services are provided by the LIS in learning centres and remotely through telephone, online chat and electronic services. Study-skill support is provided through specialist advisers. A dedicated website 'Sharpen up your skills' contains a variety of study-skills materials across a range of areas; there was evidence that the website was both well published and used by students.

98   In the previous audit, attention was drawn to the University's good practice in relation to measures to improve retention. The present audit team established that drop-out and progression rates continued to be issues for the University (see Section 2). A number of steps have been taken to attempt to improve matters, with some success. A Progression and Retention Strategy has been developed which includes disseminating successful project outcomes from the University's Centre of Excellence in Learning and Teaching.

99   The StartRight project was developed in 2004 as part of the University's retention strategy to provide a recognised and supportive transition process into higher education for undergraduate students. The present audit team found that this initiative provided, in collaboration with the Students' Union, a coordinated and extended induction programme with a blend of school and social learning activities. An evaluation of StartRight in 2007 showed that the number of students withdrawing in the first four weeks of study had remained stable (27 in 2007, 26 in 2006). The project is illustrative of the University's methodical approach to improving student retention and progression. It was clear to the present team that, while the University continued to have concerns regarding retention, earlier good practice had been further developed, although it was too early to assess the combined impact of all the initiatives.

100   The University's pastoral student support services are administered by the Office of the Dean of Students and include counselling, careers and employment services, a financial support unit and a student enabling centre. The International Office provides support to all international students at the University, offering advice on finance and bursaries, visa and immigration issues and progression on academic programmes.

101   The audit team found that the University and the Students' Union worked closely to provide a coordinated and comprehensive approach to student support and enquiry handling. Financial support is provided to the Students' Union to run an independent advice and support centre, through specialist advisers in finance, debt and money management, housing and academic matters. The effectiveness of this arrangement drew positive comments from students whom the team met.

102   The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for student support were appropriate and effective, and that they contributed positively to the management of the quality of learning opportunities. The team found the University to be an open and responsive institution, and considered that the University's cooperative partnership with the Students' Union, exemplified by the work of the USAC and the Dean of Students and the provision of pastoral support, was a feature of good practice in the management of learning opportunities.

Staff support (including staff development)

103   The University's commitment to help staff to develop their skills in respect of learning and teaching is embodied in both the Strategic Plan 2006-2012 and the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The Staff Development and Training Policy indicates that significant steps will be taken in developing career paths for staff who are predominantly involved in teaching. Additionally, the University seeks to ensure that all staff are fully equipped to support student learning and assessment, through the effective use of e-learning technologies and appropriate pedagogic research.

104   Although the University's most recent Human Resource Strategy operated from 2002 to 2006 and, at the time of the audit had not been reviewed or replaced, the audit team did find evidence of relevant human resources policies as free-standing documents and reference was made to human resource aims and objectives contained in policy documents.

105   The audit found that there was a comprehensive corporate staff development programme in a broad range of topics organised by the University's personnel department. The University's Pathways programme allows any member of staff, including those in collaborative partners, to undertake a part-time programme offered by the University or a partner college free of charge. Staff development in pedagogy is organised through the ILE and a suite of courses that address the needs of all categories of staff and information relating to these courses is available through the website and promotional documentation.

106   All new academic staff with fewer than three years' teaching experience and visiting lecturers with substantial teaching loads must complete the Postgraduate Certificate in Education training programme. There are other postgraduate programmes, including the MA and Professional Doctorate in Higher Education, available to staff. The audit team saw evidence of enrolments to these programmes across the full spectrum of Schools. In addition to the postgraduate programmes, the ILE organises a series of short courses through the Learning and Teaching Professional Development programme, although recent analysis demonstrates a less than 10 per cent average attendance by schools across the University on these programmes.

107   The University's Staff Development Policy states that it will regularly and actively take steps to identify training and development needs for individuals and groups of staff and that it will fully evaluate the benefits and effectiveness of investments in training and development activities. The audit team was provided with evidence of a summation report of staff development activity 2007-08 in the School of Health to be considered by the SQEC. The team considered that this approach was comprehensive and would help to inform the school's strategy for staff development and that there might be benefit in extending the approach across the University.

108   The University operates an academic appraisal scheme, which has been in existence since 1998, and, at the time of the audit, was undergoing review to assess its benefits to staff and to the University. Training programmes are organised for appraisers through the corporate staff development programme. Although there was clear evidence that staff were engaging in the annual appraisal programme, there was no evidence of any consideration of school summation reports to inform institutional staff development needs. As the University reviews its approach to appraisal of staff, it may wish to consider whether a mechanism to take an institutional overview of the outcomes of appraisal might assist in the determination of priorities for staff development.

109   All schools are required to operate the University's policy of peer observation, which is separate and distinct from the appraisal scheme. The audit team confirmed that all schools were engaging in the annual process of peer observation but participation by staff varied between schools, with one school reporting that only 23 per cent of its staff had been observed. Minutes of committee meetings indicated that outcomes of peer observation had been discussed, but it was unclear how good practice would be disseminated, although it is intended that, in future, the ILE produce an overview report for UQEC. The team found that the University's policy for peer observation was sound, but that there was inconsistency in its observance across the institution and a lack of clarity about how the policy contributed to the management of learning opportunities.

110   The University's Leadership and Development Unit (LEAD) exists to assist staff, including those in partner institutions, to access training and coaching and to attend courses and other events to develop their careers. LEAD also runs an ongoing Leadership Development programme to maintain and enhance the leadership and management abilities of University staff.

111   'Rewarding Excellence' is the public statement of the University's support and commitment to staff in improving the student experience. In the year prior to the audit, the Rewarding Excellence scheme made 34 awards across each of the 10 schools, with awards also made to staff in IT Services, LIS, the Office of the Dean of Students and in further education partners. The scheme was reported to the audit team to be well received by staff.

112   In appraising the University's approach to the management of learning opportunities, the audit team found that the institution made effective and systematic use of the Academic Infrastructure. The University has effective and sound procedures for the approval of new programmes and the annual monitoring and periodic review of existing provision, which help to assure the quality of learning opportunities The systematic approach, led by the Dean of Students, to the collation of student views from a range of internal and external sources, which demonstrates the University's regard for the student voice, is identified as a feature of good practice. The team determined that the University manages the provision, allocation and management of learning resources effectively in order to maintain the quality of students' learning opportunities. The establishment of a range of methodical initiatives, for example effective study-skills support, designed to improve student retention and progression, is identified as a feature of good practice in the audit.

113   The audit team found that confidence could reasonably be placed in the University's present and likely future management of the quality of learning opportunities.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

114   The University' approach to quality enhancement is to focus on improving the student learning experience. This focus has been supported by changes in academic governance, the re-definition of the University Quality Enhancement Committee's (UQEC) role to link learning and teaching with quality assurance processes, and the identification of specific themes for enhancement (retention and progression, personal tutoring, communication with students, and student behaviour). It was clear to the audit team that University staff were familiar with and committed to, the implementation of these themes. The University Learning and Teaching

Strategy sets out a series of precepts and principles which encapsulate the approach to curricular delivery, development and review. The PVC (Academic) has responsibility for the quality systems, learning and teaching, student learning experience and e-learning and chairs UQEC, the University Academic Strategy Committee (UASC) and the Programmes Approval Sub-Committee. The PVC (Student Affairs) is accountable for promoting services outside learning and teaching to students, and chairs USAC. The UQEC devolves work relating to quality enhancement to a variety of other bodies, chief among which are the school quality enhancement committees.

115   The UQEC has a strategic overview of annual monitoring, evaluation and review, learning and teaching plans, external examiner and student feedback and makes recommendations for enhancement on these to Academic Board. Analysis and review of this information by the Committee provides the basis for University-wide themes for enhancement, setting short and medium-term outcomes and establishing working project groups as appropriate. The University uses a variety of data for analysis, including the annual student satisfaction survey, school overview reports, outcome reports on periodic review, student module evaluations, the National Student Survey (NSS), external examiner reports, and reports on PSRB's visits. In the academic year 2007-08 UQEC reviewed, amongst other matters, school learning and teaching plans and the outcomes of the NSS.

116   The audit team determined that the University gathered evidence from students to contribute towards enhancement initiatives from a number of sources. Students contribute to enhancement through the feedback that they give in formal representation, participation in periodic review, evaluations of modules and courses which feed into annual monitoring and review and validation.

117   The audit team established through examination of documentation and meetings with students and staff that the key focus at the time of the audit was student retention and progression. Initiatives developed to enhance retention and progression include the First Year Experience Project. Recommendations arising from the Project in 2007-08 included the development of the simplified grading structure for Level 1 undergraduate assessment. This was designed to enable staff to concentrate on qualitative feedback to encourage and inform the development of skills, learning and engagement and at the same time promote relevant and timely feedback to students. Codes of conduct for students have also been developed. The Business Learning and Information Steering Group has a role in coordinating the totality of systems to ensure that links between various projects are identified and managed.

118   To support the schools in the enhancement of quality, in January 2008 the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) was renamed the Institute for Learning Enhancement (ILE). In this form it aims to improve learning and teaching activity, and to enhance the quality of teaching consistently across the University. The Institute for Learning Enhancement adopts a 'hub and spokes' approach with a core central staff working with representatives in schools including associate deans, support coordinators, learning and teaching coordinators, and technology supported learning coordinators. These role-holders meet regularly to share good practice. Local responsibility for the quality of learning and teaching rests with the associate deans. A series of away days for the associate deans are held where the focus is on issues of significant importance to the University such as, the blended learning strategy, the learning and teaching strategy, first-year assessment, use of data, and curricular design challenges. ILE also provides staff development courses which, at the time of the audit, had recently had a particular focus on technology supported learning, responding to students, and teaching for learning.

119   The Learning and Teaching Strategy (2006-10) sets out an approach to curriculum delivery including curriculum development and review to maintain a current and relevant student experience reflected in references to employability, employer engagement, internationalisation of the curriculum, and national and global issues. The Learning and Teaching Action plan includes proposals to identify current findings from pedagogical research which will improve learning and teaching practice, and to increase and sustain active membership of the learning and teaching

clusters through the internal funding of collaborative learning and teaching projects that focus on key pedagogical research expertise within schools. Each school manages its own learning and teaching strategy action plan through its school quality enhancement committee (SQEC) and reports to UQEC on progress made against the learning and teaching targets and actions.

120   The Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) has been renamed Critical Interventions in Enhanced Learning (CIEL) and is an integral part of ILE. Its focus is the first-year student experience and it is multidisciplinary. It identifies excellent practice in four areas of the University, art and design; applied sciences; humanities, languages and social sciences; and Education. CIEL identifies pedagogies, support systems, activities and initiatives that in some way offer critical interventions that help students to successfully achieve their goals. Its aims for 2005 to 07 focused on retention and progression outcomes for students at Level 1. In the academic year 2007-08 the focus moved from developing excellence in each of the four starter schools to extending the expertise across the University. Connections were made with other projects such as the First Year Experience Project. A video detailing the first two years of the CETL was created and shown at the Rewarding Excellence ceremony and has been made available across the University and the sector.

121   Good and innovative practice was reported to the audit team to be identified and endorsed by the SQECs for dissemination to a wider audience within the school and informal promulgation at meetings of learning and teaching staff across schools. The team found few examples in practice of such dissemination: the main means of disseminating good practice systematically throughout the University seemed to the team to be through professional development courses. So while the team found considerable evidence of a range of good practice in relation to teaching and learning, they also found evidence that this was not always systematically promoted across the University. For instance, the e-learning review, while confirming the University's strengths in innovation, noted that the University was poor at sustainable implementation. This reflected findings from the reviews of student feedback undertaken by the University, evidence from the SWS and meetings with students, all indicating inconsistency in implementation of good practice across the University, with some evidence of poor practice.

122   Overall, the audit team concluded that the University had appropriate systems for the identification of good practice and found many examples of good practice, but that there were weaknesses in the systems for the dissemination of that practice. In the view of the team, it would be desirable for the institution to develop a more strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities across the University, to include the development of a systematic means of dissemination of good practice across the University.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

123   The University has entered into collaborative provision arrangements with both UK and overseas partners. Within the UK, collaborative provision activity is largely regional and is seen by the University as making a strong contribution to the University's commitment to widening participation and to increasing access to higher education for students from underrepresented groups. The University believes that collaboration with a range of partners who share this educational objective plays a key role in achieving this aim. In support of this commitment, the University works with a large number of further education colleges and other providers across the West Midlands, Shropshire and Staffordshire to deliver a range of provision including Foundation Degrees, BA and BSc degrees and the Professional Graduate Certificate in Education. The Briefing Paper noted that in the academic year 2007-08, approximately 5 per cent of the total number of the University's students were taught under UK collaborative arrangements. In the 2007-08 academic year, 356 undergraduate students and 151 postgraduate students were enrolled on University programmes delivered in collaboration with overseas partners.

124   Overseas collaborative provision is largely focused on links with institutions in the Far East, and to a lesser extent in Europe, India and south-east Asia. Within this framework, the links with an institution in Amsterdam and with one in Hong Kong feature most prominently. The latter has been strengthened by the appointment of a Hong Kong Development Manager and a Hong Kong Operations Administrator to oversee, develop and support the partnership.

125   At the time of the audit, the principal distinction between UK-based and overseas collaborative provision lay in the role of the partner. Whereas in the context of UK collaborative provision further education partners are responsible for delivery of the programme at Level 1 within their own institutions, in the context of overseas collaborative provision, it is the University's staff who are responsible for teaching delivery using the premises of overseas partners, with the partner providing access to learning resources and administrative support, in accordance with its agreement with the University. One exception to this general pattern is the long-standing BA (Hons) Education Studies and English (IDEE - International Degree in English and Education) delivered jointly by the School of Education at the University and an institution in Amsterdam, during which students attend both institutions. The University is committed to extending its international collaborative provision and has set out is broad intentions in this area in the International Strategy Statement 2006-2011.

126   An audit of the University's collaborative provision was undertaken in 2006, resulting in judgments of broad confidence in the University's management of both the academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities in its collaborative provision. Strengths identified included a strong, central strategic system for managing collaborative provision that was also sensitive to local needs; the Annual Operating Statement and its target-setting for UK partnerships; the role of standing panels, for instance, the Overseas Standing Panel, together with their administrative instruments; the cooperative arrangements functioning within the Associate College Network (ACN), the staff development opportunities shared between the University and its partners; and the extension to the partners of University initiatives to enhance the student experience. The report also included a number of recommendations for consideration by the University; the present audit team was able to confirm that the University had responded appropriately and taken action in respect of all of the recommendations.

127   Since the 2006 audit of collaborative provision, the University has introduced some revisions to its overall governance structure which have occasioned changes to the structures for the institutional oversight of collaborative provision in place at that time. In particular, while the Overseas Standing Panel has been retained in order to provide consistency and continuity in the approval of overseas collaborative partnerships, the UK Standing Panel was dissolved and its business was absorbed into the remit of the University Quality Panel. At institutional level, responsibility for final approval of UK collaborative provision on behalf of the Academic Board passed first to the University Quality Committee and then to its successor body, the University Quality Enhancement Committee (UQEC). Following further revisions to the governance structure, as of the academic year 2008-09, the Partnerships and Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee deals with all matters relating to the quality assurance processes for UK and international collaborative provision on behalf of UQEC. This new sub-committee also now receives reports of meetings of the Collaborative Quality Forum (CQF), a body that brings together University and UK collaborative partner staff with responsibility for quality and standards in the context of UK collaborative provision. CQF meets three times a year and aims to explore theoretical and practical issues relating to quality and standards of higher education delivered in the partner organisations. At the time of the audit, overseas collaborative partners did not participate in CQF activities but notes of meetings were circulated to the Director International. As noted in the collaborative provision audit in 2006, CQF plays a valuable role in the exchange of information between the University and its collaborative partners and in arranging relevant staff development activities.

128   Since the collaborative provision audit in 2006, which identified the cooperative arrangements functioning within ACN as a strength, the University has undertaken a review of that arrangement in order to expand and strengthen the network. Building on the strengths and experience of ACN, the University has now established the University of Wolverhampton Collaborative Achievement Network (UWCAN), a partnership between the university and 14 partner colleges across the West Midlands, Shropshire and Staffordshire. UWCAN's aim is 'to enhance student progression to HE…' and to enable 'college and university staff to work collaboratively on developing new courses and opportunities for students across the region'.

129   The Briefing Paper summarised the University's framework for managing collaborative arrangements with UK and overseas partners. In particular, the University emphasised that it retained full responsibility for maintaining the academic standards of its awards and for assuring the quality of learning opportunities. As such, the University is clear that its overall framework for managing arrangements with collaborative partners, whether in the UK or overseas, does not differ in any significant way from the arrangements in place for University-based provision. Detailed guidance for staff and partners involved in establishing, managing and reviewing collaborative partnerships is set out in the collaborative handbook. The audit team found this to be an extensive and comprehensive document, which acts as the definitive source of information and advice in relation to collaborative provision.

130   The audit team confirmed that the provisions enshrined in the University's collaborative handbook demonstrated clear understanding of, and respect for, the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, in relation to the responsibilities of the University for managing the academic standards of awards and the quality of learning opportunities in the context of UK and current overseas collaborative provision. The handbook also offers guidance on the use of the Academic Infrastructure and the *Code of practice* in informing early discussions with prospective collaborative partners and the way in which 'they continue to shape and influence partnerships as an ongoing aspect of collaborative provision processes'.

131   There are defined procedures for the approval of collaborative arrangements based on the processes of partner approval and programme approval, as set out in the collaborative handbook. Responsibility for the partner approval process rests with Education Partnerships for UK-based collaborative provision and with the Director International for overseas collaborative provision. The respective postholders exercise devolved authority from UQEC for gathering information, in conjunction with the University school, and for making judgements about the proposed partner for eventual upward recommendation, as appropriate. The Programmes Approval Sub-Committee (PASC) receives reports on the outcomes of the partner approval phase.

132   The Briefing Paper also set out the framework for agreeing and operating collaborative partnerships, following due diligence and related procedures, which are expanded upon in more detail in the collaborative handbook. This framework adopts a two-tier approach whereby the strategic intent for collaborative arrangements is governed by a Memorandum of Understanding and legal details of the proposed collaboration are set out in a Memorandum of Co-operation, which is submitted at validation and sets out the academic, administrative, financial and legal elements of the collaboration agreement. The audit team studied memoranda of cooperation in relation both to UK and overseas collaborative provision and confirmed that these set out clearly the responsibilities of both partners.

133   A key feature of the memoranda are the annual operating statements. The statements are a supplement to the memoranda and identify any changes to the original agreement in respect of delivery, financial arrangements, staffing and modules. The Annual Operating Statement is reviewed and updated annually by education partnerships, in order to ensure that both partners are kept abreast of the current status of the collaboration and any revisions to its operation. In relation to UK collaborative provision, the Collaborative provision audit of March 2006 identified

the Annual Operating Statement and its associated target-setting for UK partnerships as a feature of good practice.

134   The University emphasised in the Briefing Paper that its approach to the management of its collaborative provision was governed by the same framework and quality assurance processes that apply to the management of its 'home' provision. Thus, as with University-based provision, PASC is now responsible for assessing the strategic alignment of the programme proposal with the mission and the portfolio of the university and for granting planning approval for new proposals to go forward for curriculum development and validation. Following PASC approval, proposals are forwarded to the University Quality Panel (UQP) in the case of UK-based provision, and to the Overseas Standing Panel (OSP) in the case of overseas provision to be taken forward for validation. The University has not devolved approval of collaborative provision to school validation panels.

135   The audit team studied the operation of UQP and OSP in the context of the validation/revalidation of both UK and overseas collaborative provision. The team noted in particular the careful use, by both panels, of pro forma and checklists, including comments from external advisers, designed to provide the University with full information relating to all academic and other relevant aspects of the collaboration under consideration.

136   Assessment arrangements for collaborative provision are governed by the provisions of the University and school assessment handbooks. Changes to the assessment regulations for undergraduate programmes were introduced for the academic year 2008-09; these include revisions to the grade scale system for Level 1. In view of the impact of these changes on UK collaborative provision delivered in partner colleges, they have been communicated to partners through the CQF. In future, the CQF will also be providing additional information and staff development support for partner colleges, particularly in relation to the use of WOLF for formative assessment purposes and for the management of assessment boards.

137   The University is responsible for issuing transcripts recording the achievements of students registered on programmes delivered in collaboration with partner institutions. Where a programme has been delivered abroad, the certificate records the name of the institution, the place and the language of study.

138   The Briefing Paper gave specific information relating to the appointment of external examiners in the context of collaborative provision related to University-based awards. In line with a recommendation from the Collaborative provision audit of 2006, the external examiner report template has been amended to include reference to collaborative institutions involved in the delivery of the award. Further, the external examiners' handbook now includes explicit guidance on reporting on collaborative provision and the University's induction session for external examiners likewise covers the external examiner role in commenting on collaborative provision. The audit team had access to school documentation that suggested that these actions had led to qualitative improvements in external examiner reports relating to collaborative provision. For overseas collaborative provision, external examiners are now normally required to visit the overseas partner biennially.

139   In terms of annual monitoring, the arrangements for collaborative provision do not differ in any substantial way for those in place for University programmes, with schools being responsible for confirming the academic standards and quality of the programmes they offer, including those delivered by collaborative partners. Under the terms of the Memorandum of Cooperation both the school and the partner are required to appoint programme managers, both of whom are members of the Programme Management Committee; this Committee receives and approves the annual monitoring report for forwarding to the school quality enhancement committee. In the context of collaborative provision, it is a key responsibility of the delivery partner, with guidance from the schools as appropriate, to produce the annual monitoring report. Given the nature of the University's current collaborative arrangements, this responsibility is discharged, with very few exceptions by UK collaborative partners only.

140   A standard template for UK collaborative partners' annual monitoring reports was first introduced for the 2005-06 academic year. As of the academic year 2008-09 the standard annual monitoring (collaborative) reporting template was being adopted for all collaborative provision, whether UK or overseas. The University believes that this approach will provide a level of consistency in reporting across the range of collaborative provision. Education partnerships have responsibility for maintaining the Register of Collaborative Partnerships (UK and overseas). The University emphasises that the review and revalidation of all collaborative provision is governed by the same framework as for University-based provision and will normally take place within six years of the date of the initial approval. In the case of a newly approved overseas collaboration, an interim review will normally take place after three years of programme delivery. As part of the planning approval arrangements, a revisit to the partner institution may form part of the review and revalidation process. In relation to overseas collaborative provision, the OSP has developed a pro forma checklist for such visits.

141   The audit team studied samples of the review and revalidation process in relation to collaborative provision with both UK and overseas partners. The documentation, which was extensive, provided evidence to support the University's claim that the process of review, and revalidation where appropriate, of collaborative provision is conducted in accordance with its framework for University-based provision.

142   The arrangements for student involvement in quality assurance in the context of collaborative provision are largely informed by the same mechanisms as obtain for University-based provision, including module evaluations and staff-student liaison meetings. The Programme Management Committee brings together staff from the University and the partner organisation, as well as student representatives to discuss a range of programme-related issues and to receive and approve the annual monitoring report.

143   The SWS provided no information specifically in relation to arrangements for students in collaborative partner organisations to provide feedback, but was generally clear that the University provided ample opportunities, both formal and informal, for students to do so and for student views to be heard. This was largely borne out in the audit team's meetings with students although one student informed the team that staff at a partner further education college had not sought any feedback during the first year of a Foundation Degree delivered on college premises, and contrasted that with arrangements in operation at the University during the second year. Staff from the school concerned, whom the team met subsequently, indicated that in the context of new collaborations, in particular, there had been a steep learning curve for both partners.

144   Arrangements have been put in place designed to ensure that staff and students in collaborative partner institutions have access to the learning resources and staff development opportunities available to university-based staff and students. Thus, all students have access to WOLF and the e-Vision information gateway, and to the University's library resources, either physically and/or remotely.

145   As mentioned above, CQF has a remit to provide staff development opportunities for University and UK partner staff engaged in collaborative provision delivery. Minutes of CQF meetings available to the audit team made reference to a range of training and development events and workshops covering issues specific to higher education provision in further education, such as mechanisms for gathering student feedback, and to other events specific to the operation of collaborative provision arrangements, including training for chairs, secretaries and staff members of assessment boards. UK partners in collaborative provision also have access to University funding to support the development of teaching observation. The aims of the UWCAN network include support for staff needs in skills development and engagement with research and scholarly activity.

146   In addition to these arrangements, which are specific to the operation of the University's relationship with its UK collaborative partners, the University operates the Pathways scheme, a reciprocal arrangement for remission from fees for University and partner college programmes for staff development purposes. In relation to the development needs of staff in overseas partner institutions, the University provides induction, training and development for administrative and academic staff as required to support delivery and operation of the programme(s) concerned.

147   There are no arrangements for student support and information specific to collaborative provision which differ in any significant way from those in place for University-based programmes.

148   The Students' Union operates an Advice and Support Centre that provides advice to students in relation to complaints and appeals. Officers of the Students' Union confirmed to the audit team that this service was open to all students, including those enrolled on University programmes in collaborative partner institutions. Further, students with experience of programme delivery in a partner institution likewise confirmed to the team that they were aware of the University's procedures for making complaints and appeals.

149   The collaborative handbook sets out in very specific detail the arrangements for marketing the programme and the responsibilities of both parties for ensuring the accuracy of the print and web-based materials relating to the programme to be placed in the public domain.

150   The audit team accessed the University website and the websites of several partner organisations for information relating to University programmes delivered by, or at, collaborative partner organisations and noted that the course information given was generally presented in accordance with University policy and guidelines in this area, although it also noted some minor inconsistencies. These apart, the team was satisfied that the arrangements that the University had put in place to ensure the accuracy of published information relating to its awards delivered by or at partner organisations were well understood and respected by all parties, and were generally effective.

151   The audit team found that the University had in place well-defined policies and procedures for the management of academic quality and standards in its collaborative provision. The arrangements are based on the University's processes for the quality assurance of provision delivered at the University, with proper additional features specific to the superintendence of collaborative provision. Scrutiny of documentation related to the approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision led the team to be entirely satisfied that the University's claim, that its collaborative provision was governed by the same management and quality assurance framework as that in place for University-based provision, was substantiated in full.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

152   The Academic Board has full responsibility for the quality and standards of Research Degree Programme provision and empowers the University Research Committee (URC), chaired by the Dean of the Graduate School, to oversee the management of research degree programmes. URC considers strategic and policy issues relating to research, while the Research Degrees Sub-Committee (RDSC) oversees research student progression, approves the appointment of examiners, implements examiners' recommendations and recommends the conferment of research degrees. The full URC meets four times a year to consider strategy and policy issues relating to research, while the Research Degrees Sub-Committee meets monthly. Quality enhancement and the sharing of good practice are important aspects of the work of the committee.

153   The Graduate School, headed by the Dean of Research and Graduate Studies, has a University-wide remit to oversee postgraduate programmes. An associate dean has specific responsibilities for postgraduate research programmes. The Graduate School is integrated into the University's management structure through the direct line managerial relationship between the

Dean of Research and the PVC (Research and External Development). This arrangement ensures close alignment between research and third-stream activities, which is an important element in the University's plan to create sustainable research groups. The management of research students lies with student management boards (SMB) that meet monthly to monitor student progress and consider issues at the local level. The work of the SMBs is monitored annually by the URC.

154   A QAA Review of research degree programmes was undertaken in 2006. Areas of good practice identified included: the provision of comprehensive supervisor training; the presence of an independent assessor at the formal annual review of student progress; and the appointment of independent chairs to all final examination boards. In response to areas identified for improvement, the Graduate School produced an action plan that is monitored by the Research Degrees Sub-Committee. Since 2006, there has been a review of procedures and implementation of a new set of regulations, a Code of Practice for all students registering onto research programmes, a revised induction programme, and an outline of support which is available for both students and supervisors.

155   All research programmes are subject to a specific set of Academic Regulations and operate within an institutional Code of Practice which is supplemented by a number of other documents, including the research student handbook and University procedures for complaints, appeals and academic misconduct, intellectual property and good research practice. The University also has specific guidelines for the validation of professional doctorates.

156   A periodic review of research degree programmes is undertaken when changes to regulations and/or new codes of practice are introduced, most recently, at the time of the audit, in September 2005. The annual review of research degree programmes considers the management of research students by SMBs, student feedback, and the effectiveness of research skills development and supervisor training. RDSC takes action on this process in the autumn term and reports annually to URC in January. Issues raised have included out-of-hours access to facilities, progress and completion rates, and resource matters. The University has responded to these issues with a number of initiatives including learning centres identifying the special category of 'research student' which gives borrowing rights equivalent to those of staff, access to loan of laptops, the move to two annual entry points for students to help ensure a more effective articulation between admissions, induction and the skills development programme. Students from the University participated in the 2008 Post Graduate Research Experience Survey the analysis of which by RDSC identified a number of issues, which resulted in preliminary recommendations concerning various aspects of the student experience.

157   Research institutes and centres must demonstrate research achievement, a critical mass of research-active staff, and a track record in attracting external funding. The URC evaluates performance in each research institute and centre and reviews student performance as part of the annual monitoring of SMBs. Student feedback on completing their research degrees suggests general satisfaction although some issues relating to space allocation persist. Research students whom the audit team met confirmed that facilities provided were largely fit for the purpose.

Selection, admission and induction of students

158   The audit team found that there were rigorous criteria for the selection, admission and induction of research students which are clearly set out in documentation. A pre-admissions phase provides an opportunity for potential students to signal an interest in undertaking a research degree programme and to initiate discussions with appropriate staff. Students are advised of the resource and financial implications of registering for a research programme, and receive a thorough induction. The induction provided by the Graduate School was well received by students, but that on offer at the school level was mixed, varying from a relatively formal induction to informal meetings with other staff and students.

Supervision

159   Each research student has a Director of Studies and at least one other supervisor. At least one member of the supervisory team must be currently engaged in directly relevant research, and at least one will be experienced at supervising through to completion. All members of the supervisory team must be appropriately qualified and have a research record in the field. Acceptable exceptions to these requirements are listed in the University Code of Practice and include 'proposed members of the supervisory team who have professional expertise germane to the project'. Inexperienced staff must participate in the University's Research Supervisor Development Programme. Existing supervisors demonstrate continuing professional development through participation in a range of activities developed by SMB. All SMBs have a designated member of academic staff who is independent of the supervisory team and able to provide general advice and support to students. Where students are experiencing difficulties relating to their supervisors they are encouraged to raise this with their postgraduate tutor in the first instance. Students reported that they felt able to raise issues through the Graduate School if necessary. The responsibilities of students and supervisors are set out in the University Code of Practice. Supervisor load is determined by a points system. The nature and frequency of formal contact is agreed at the outset of the research degree programme. Students reported having regular and frequent contact with their supervisors and receiving appropriate support from them. Feedback from the Quality Assurance of Research Degree Programmes 2006-07 report suggested that there were issues arising relating to the operation of procedures in individual research centres, in particular, there was a need for more systematic induction at the local level. At the time of the audit, these matters had not yet been discussed by the University.

Progress and review arrangements

160   Students and supervisors are expected to convene informal general review meetings on a frequent basis. Notes of these form part of the student's personal development portfolio. Student performance is assessed 12 months or the equivalent after registration. This 'confirmation' process includes external scrutiny. There are procedures for formal annual review which involve members of staff independent of the supervisors and the student. Where satisfactory progress has not been made the student is designated as 'at risk'. Students cannot be enrolled for a subsequent year unless satisfactory progress has been established.

161   URC receives analyses of progression and completion rates. These data were noted at the URC as problematic in relation to cohorts between 2002 and 2005, in particular in relation to the number of staff withdrawals. Initial measures taken in redress have had an impact and the number of withdrawals has fallen, and further measures have been proposed. Since the academic year 2007-08 the work of each SMB has been monitored and reports are submitted to and scrutinised by the URC subcommittee; student progress is reviewed after six months through a piece of assessed work; the importance of the first-year experience has been stressed by the URC; supervision is to be raised as an issue in appraisal; ways for staff to undertake a PhD by published work are being developed and, two fixed entry points to PhD programmes per year have been established. The RDSC also identified a delay between thesis submission and the conferment of degree and the high number of resubmissions. RDSC now requires that resubmitting students should develop an action plan detailing how they will meet the recommendations made.

Development of research and other skills

162   In 2002, the University introduced research-skills development based on compulsory modules for all newly enrolled research students. In response to external examiner and student feedback the modules were replaced by a series of research-skills development workshops. A skills assessment conducted at the start of each research degree programme helps to identify student's skills development needs. Personal and professional development opportunities are spread

throughout the duration of the research degree. The centrally organised skills development sessions are generally well received and attended. The University reviews its research and generic skills training systematically as part of the quality assurance mechanisms for research programmes. Students are encouraged to keep a record of personal progress. An annual poster competition is held to provide students, from which students can progress to a regional event.

163   The research students handbook indicates that research students may be asked to help to support undergraduate students, but students who met the audit team reported that opportunities for research students to undertake teaching were rare. Although the research students handbook is firm in stating that schools must offer training to research students who are asked to undertake teaching, in practice there is no structured approach to ensuring that this happens. The students indicated that, in general, research students would welcome increased opportunities to engage in teaching, which they considered would provide beneficial experience for them, echoing the results of the most recent postgraduate research experience survey. The team considers it desirable that the University review the approach to research students who teach, including the identification of suitable opportunities for them to teach and the provision of effective training and support.

Feedback mechanisms

164   The University has developed mechanisms to collate, review and respond to feedback from those concerned with postgraduate research programmes. Examiners' reports form part of the University's evaluation of the quality of its research degrees programmes and a summary of these is included in URC annual reports to the Academic Board.

165   Feedback is sought from those involved in the conduct of all viva voce examinations and on examiners' comments, and it is the associate dean's responsibility to follow up on any matters raised. Supervisors can feed in comments through representation at SMBs.

166   The Graduate School convenes annual meetings with students completing the skills development modules. Students have an entitlement to representation on SMBs and on the URC, although some institutes and research centres have had difficulty in recruiting representatives. The sensitive nature of discussion at SMB meetings of issues relating to other students has precluded student attendance for much of the business. In the view of the audit team, these arrangements have the potential to inhibit the ability of students to raise at the local level matters of interest to students. The team noted that the Graduate School offered two overarching meetings for all research degree students each year, but considered that such a meeting would not necessarily provide an effective forum for discussion of local issues. The team considers it desirable that the University give further consideration to the provision for research students to provide feedback at local level within research centres and institutes.

167   All students are asked to provide observations on their experience through questionnaires issued on completion of their research degree programme. The audit team, relying on a variety of sources of evidence outlined above, were satisfied that the University was considering means of taking action to resolve issues raised by students.

168   SMBs are asked to seek the views of external sponsors as part of their normal ongoing review processes. This process tends to be informal and part of the ongoing supervision process overseen by SMB. A summary report drawing together the feedback obtained through a range of mechanisms is presented annually to the URC Sub-committee. The report is presented to SMBs and should, through student representation on these boards, be fed back to the student community. The lack of student representation at many SMB meetings, already noted, is likely to have prevented this occurring. This reinforces the audit team's advice about mechanisms for feedback at the local level.

Assessment

169   The audit found that there are clear criteria for the academic standards required for the award of MPhil and PhD. The URC ensures that all examinations are conducted in accordance with the University's regulations. Two examiners are appointed who have relevant experience and expertise. Where the candidate is a member of staff, there is one internal and two external examiners. Minutes of the relevant committees demonstrate that there are sound procedures for the appointment of examiners through the SMBs and URC subcommittee. Candidates are offered a workshop to brief them about the examination procedure and the University encourages support for preparation for the viva voce examination, sometimes through a 'mock' examination. An independent chair is appointed by the RDSC to conduct the examination. The URC ensures that the same external examiner is not appointed too frequently in accordance with University regulations.

Representations both informal and formal including complaints and appeals

170   The University complaints procedure covers all aspects of the University's services. The University attempts to resolve all issues early before there are formal complaints. The appeals procedure can be used when a student wishes to appeal against an assessment decision or relating to progression on their research degree programme. The appeals procedure is articulated in the University's Code of Practice. Where a student is not satisfied they may make representation to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education. Students were aware of where they might look to find this information.

171   Overall, the audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for its postgraduate research students meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Section 7: Published information

172   In the Briefing Paper the University set out its overall approach for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the information presented to potential students and other interested parties. In particular, the Briefing Paper emphasised that, at institutional level, responsibility for the accuracy and completeness of documents published centrally rested with the Director of Marketing and Communications (MaC) who reports to the Senior Pro Vice Chancellor and the Vice Chancellor.

173   While the Director (MaC) retains this overall responsibility at University level, the responsibility for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the two main publications for prospective students, the undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses, resides with the deans of school. This responsibility includes ensuring that course information is consistent with validated provision, for example, that the information given is valid and current. Procedures are in place to ensure that publication of print-based information for external consumption has been authorised both by the school and a member of the MaC team.

174   The management of the provision of course information on the University website is subject to similar procedural safeguards, designed to ensure the accuracy and consistency of web-provided content with print-based course information, and to secure relevant permissions from the central Web Manager prior to any uploading of content. In the context of collaborative provision with UK and overseas partners, responsibilities in according to defined protocols set out in the collaborative handbook and enshrined in the memoranda of co-operation.

175   The audit team was provided with copies of the prospectuses and other centrally produced information and was able to confirm the effectiveness of arrangements for ensuring consistency of course-related information between the University website and the prospectus. In terms of web-based information, in its meetings with students the team established that there

were high levels of student satisfaction with the accuracy and completeness of the information published on the University website.

176   The SWS indicated some student concerns relating to the currency of information published in the prospectus resulting from the long lead times associated with its preparation and publication. The audit team took the view that in the context of preparation and production schedules, the University took all reasonable steps to ensure the accuracy and the currency of its print-based information.

177   The audit 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.