

# University of Bradford

**December 2007**

## **Annex to the report**

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## Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Bradford (the University) from 3 to 7 December 2007 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

### Outcomes of the institutional audit

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

- confidence can 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

Overall, the audit team concluded that the institution's approach to quality enhancement is satisfactory but would benefit from clearer articulation of the University's understanding of quality enhancement and its relationship to assurance, together with a more proactive, systematic approach and strategic focus at the institutional level.

### Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The audit team concluded that the institution'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 secured appropriate academic standards and quality of provision for its postgraduate research programmes.

### Published information

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

### Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the partnership approach with the Students' Union (paragraph 128)
- the strategic and coordinated institutional approach to the development of student engagement and support (paragraphs 143, 162)
- the successful institutional arrangements for widening participation (paragraph 149)
- the developing use of the balanced scorecard method to align central plans with school plans and with performance management (paragraph 178).

### 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 review the use of participants external to the University in programme approval and review, particularly to ensure that at least one appropriate academic external is present at each event (paragraph 50)

- to ensure that its policy of external examiner membership of assessment committees is fully implemented, and that external examiners are fully involved in the business of both assessment committees and boards of examiners; and ensure that all external examiners are made aware of the revised report pro forma, which addresses comparability of academic standards (paragraphs 59, 63)
- to put in place appropriate mechanisms and oversight to ensure internal comparability of academic standards (paragraph 80)
- to specify clear minimum requirements for schools' management of academic quality and standards and reinforce the use of formal reporting systems to demonstrate fulfilment of these requirements (paragraphs 40, 96, 99, 102, 109).

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- to consider means for the systematic capture and dissemination of good practice across the institution (paragraph 185)
- to ensure consistent representation of postgraduate research students at institutional level (paragraph 214).

## **Section 1: Introduction and background**

### **1.1 The institution and its mission**

1 The University obtained its Royal Charter in 1966, having developed from the Bradford Institute of Technology, founded in 1957. The Institute succeeded Bradford Technical College, which had roots in the mid-nineteenth century Bradford schools of weaving, design and building. This background of vocational education has had a major influence on the University's mission, which is encapsulated in the motto 'Making Knowledge Work', which is part of the University's corporate visual identity.

2 The University's mission statement focuses on delivering vocationally relevant courses, on producing research of international quality that contributes to wealth creation, social cohesion and the quality of life, and on its contribution to the city of Bradford and the region around it. The focus is thus very much on the application of knowledge to practical ends. The University is organised into seven schools and one administrative unit (Corporate Services).

3 In 2006-07, the University had a total of 11,288 students: 8,644 undergraduates, 2,079 taught postgraduates and 565 postgraduate research students. Of these, 387 undergraduates were from European Union (EU) countries other than the United Kingdom (UK) and 952 were from non-EU countries. The figures for postgraduates (taught and research) were 124 EU and 1,038 non-EU. Thus 22.2 per cent of students come from outside the UK. Of the full-time home undergraduate students, 53 per cent are from black and minority ethnic communities.

4 The student population is thus very diverse in its make-up, although at the same time drawing heavily from Bradford and the surrounding area; 41.7 per cent of first and foundation-year students live at home. The gender mix is 51.4 per cent female and 48.6 per cent male. Mature students made up 29.3 per cent of 2006-07 first-year and foundation-year starters. The University beats its benchmarks for participation in first degrees from low participation neighbourhoods and has a higher percentage from lower socioeconomic groups than the national average and a comparator group of Yorkshire universities. The University's achievements in this area are further elaborated in Section 3.8 below.

5 In 2006-07, the institution had 3,298 members of staff, of which 536 were full-time teaching and research staff and 1,315 were part-time hourly-paid staff engaged in teaching.

6 The institution has numerous collaborative links, mostly abroad, but also including Foundation Degrees based in further education colleges and some continuous and professional development provision in the National Health Service (NHS). Collaborative provision lies outside the scope of this audit.

## 1.2 The information base for the audit

7 The University provided the audit team with a briefing paper and supporting documentation, including that related to the sampling trails selected by the team. The index to 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 a hard copy of all documents referenced in the Briefing Paper; in addition the team had access to the institution's intranet.

8 The Students' Union produced a student written submission 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.

9 In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the Review of research degree programmes, conducted by QAA, July 2006
- the report of the collaborative provision audit, conducted by QAA, July 2006
- the University's progress report to QAA in response to the institutional audit report, March 2005
- the report of a Foundation Degree review of Engineering Technology: University of Bradford, Bishop Auckland College, Bradford College and Wakefield College, conducted by QAA, March 2005
- the report of the Major review of healthcare programmes: University of Bradford and West Yorkshire NHS Workforce Development Confederation, May/June 2004
- the report of an Overseas audit: University of Bradford and the Social Scientists' Association, Sri Lanka, conducted by QAA, May 2004
- the report of the institutional audit, conducted by QAA, November 2003.

## 1.3 Developments since the last audit

10 The last institutional audit took place in November 2003. The report concluded that: broad confidence could be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards. Confidence in the capacity of the University to manage the quality and standards of the awards made in collaboration with Bradford College was limited.

11 Since the last audit, QAA has been provided with information that indicated that appropriate action had been taken by the University in response to the findings of the report. As a result, the audit was signed off in June 2005.

12 The previous audit team identified several areas of good practice and also recommended that the University should consider further action in a number of areas to ensure that the academic quality and standards of the awards it offered were maintained. These recommendations, together with the present audit team's appraisal of the response taken, are briefly considered here. It was essential that the University:

- reviewed and modified monitoring processes to ensure effective oversight of its collaborative provision and secured appropriate and formal agreements with Bradford College.

13 The University has withdrawn from its partnership with Bradford College, but has put in place appropriate measures to maintain the quality of academic standards and learning opportunities for the small number of remaining students on its awards based at the College.

14 The audit advised the University to:

- without delay, progress the work to define assessment levels to ensure consistent standards across the University

15 The audit team found that this work had not been progressed on the grounds that the University considered that such criteria could not be agreed on an institution-wide basis and in some cases not even across a subject area. This point is covered in more detail in Section 2.4 below.

- without delay, initiate a review of the strategy and structures for the management of quality and standards

16 The audit team found that there clearly had been some changes to the strategy and structures for the management of quality and standards since the last audit, although did not find evidence of a review as such.

- review the effectiveness of the structures and processes for annual monitoring of academic provision

17 The audit team found that there had been a review of the annual monitoring process as a result of which the process had, in most cases, been devolved to Schools to give them greater ownership of the process and to increase its value to them. Nevertheless, the team considered that the potential of the process to identify and disseminate good practice was as yet underdeveloped (see Sections 2.1 and 4.2).

- in collaboration with the student body, develop effective and transparent arrangements for student participation in all appropriate quality assurance processes

18 The audit team found that good progress had been made in this area (see Section 3.4).

- ensure that the current review of the tutorial system delivers an effective and appropriate level of support across the University

19 The audit team found that work was progressing on this recommendation as part of the University's strategic review of student engagement. Student views on the effectiveness of personal tutors were varied. This issue is covered in Section 3.9 below.

20 In the last audit it was considered desirable for the University to:

- consider how it could improve the extent to which students felt they were informed of the outcomes of the feedback they provided and the manner in which it was employed

21 In meetings with students, the audit team found that students did feel that the outcomes arising from student feedback were reported back to them, principally through staff-student liaison committees. There is further information on this in Section 3.4 below.

- consider furnishing either the Academic Policy Committee or the Quality Assurance Subcommittee with statistical analyses of student progression and completion across the full range of the University's provision, including that which was offered in partnership with other organisations

22 The audit team found that, in consultation with schools, work was continuing on the improvement of the cohort data to support the annual monitoring process (see Sections 2.5 and 4.1).

23 In March 2006 an audit of collaborative provision was undertaken by QAA which concluded that:

- broad confidence could reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards made through collaborative arrangements
- broad confidence could reasonably be placed in the present and likely future capacity of the University to satisfy itself that the learning opportunities offered to students through its collaborative arrangements are managed effectively and meet its requirements.

24 The collaborative provision report identified a large number of areas of good practice and made a small number of recommendations for the University to consider.

25 A Foundation Degree review of Engineering Technology, validated by the University of Bradford, and delivered by three further education colleges, was carried out by QAA in March 2005 and concluded that confidence could be placed in the academic standards and achievements of students and in the quality of learning opportunities provided for students.

26 An overseas audit of the Postgraduate Diploma in Conflict Resolution and Peace Preparedness, run in conjunction with a Sri Lankan partner, conducted by QAA, expressed confidence in the University's stewardship of academic standards and the quality of the student experience in its collaborative provision in Sri Lanka.

27 In July 2006, QAA carried out a desk-based special Review of postgraduate research degree programmes, which concluded that, overall, the University's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree provision was appropriate and satisfactory. Three areas of good practice were also noted.

28 The Major review of healthcare provision, conducted by QAA in May/June 2004 covered nursing, midwifery, physiotherapy and radiography (diagnostic) programmes at the University run in collaboration with the West Yorkshire NHS Workforce Development Confederation. Confidence was expressed in the academic and practitioner standards achieved by the programmes. The review identified a large number of strengths and a small number of weaknesses, none of which relates to the University's systems for the management of academic quality and standards.

### **Other developments**

29 The main development since the last audit was the decision to end the collaborative partnership with Bradford College and to call off any possible merger of the two institutions. Other significant developments include:

- the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor, who took over the role in June 2007
- a review of the undergraduate subject portfolio, resulting in the introduction of new subject areas
- a new corporate strategy 2004-09, launched in September 2004
- the introduction of a system of planning and performance management based on the balanced scorecard approach and a set of 20 key performance indicators, which are used across the institution at different levels to measure performance (see Section 4.1)
- the merger of the School of Archaeological and Environmental Sciences and the School of Life Sciences
- the redevelopment of the University's learning, teaching and assessment strategy and the formulation of school learning, teaching and assessment plans
- a review of student engagement (see Section 3.9).

30 The University sees itself as having undergone a 'paradigm shift' in the way it conducts its business; in particular it stated that it has become more consultative in its decision-making and more prepared to invest in rewarding teaching and to review its practices and procedures in the light of available evidence. The audit team did find evidence to support this assertion, especially in relation to investment in rewarding teaching (see Sections 3.10 and 4.3).

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

31 The Senate, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, is the supreme institutional authority on academic matters. Senate discharges its responsibilities through the Academic Policy Committee, chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching. The Academic Policy Committee oversees the development, implementation and evaluation of matters relating to academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities and reports directly to the Senate on matters of academic policy, ordinances and regulations, and on other matters via the Corporate and Finance Strategy Board. This Committee is supported in its work by two subcommittees: the Learning and Teaching Subcommittee and the Research Degrees Committee. The Academic Policy Committee can also refer matters for more detailed consideration if necessary to an advisory group, the Standing Committee.

32 The Learning and Teaching Subcommittee is chaired by the Head of the Teaching Quality Enhancement Group (see below paragraph 38) and its membership includes the associate deans, learning and teaching of each school and student representatives. Its remit is chiefly related to quality enhancement.

33 The role of the Research Degrees Committee is to advise the Academic Policy Committee on academic policy, regulation, and guidance relating to the quality and standards of higher degrees by research, and to consider on behalf of schools the progress of individual candidates for higher degrees by research. Its core membership is the associate deans, research from each school and postgraduate student representatives.

34 There is shared responsibility for academic standards and quality between the University and its seven schools, which is monitored and evaluated by the Academic Policy Committee. Each school has a school board, whose role is to advise the dean on all matters relating to the general conduct and organisation of the school, its academic work and the effective use of all resources allocated to it, including any matter referred to the school by the Senate. In dealing with the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, deans are supported by associate deans, learning and teaching and associate deans, research. Each school has a committee, variously named, which deals with learning and teaching matters, and is chaired by an associate dean, learning and teaching.

35 Associate deans, learning and teaching play a key role in the institution's framework for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. They play a strategic role within the school and are members of schools' executive/management committees. Associate deans, learning and teaching carry out their roles and responsibilities with the delegated authority of their dean and the support of their academic standards administrator and meet informally on a monthly basis with the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching in order to 'provide a sounding board for policy development' as well as to provide an opportunity to reflect on practice, and advise on implementation of institutional strategic goals.

36 The Academic Policy Committee and schools are supported by the Academic Standards Support Unit, which exists to help assure and enhance the quality and academic standards of the University's taught courses. A named individual from the Academic Standards Support Unit, is assigned to work with each school with the aim of ensuring that policy and regulations are implemented consistently, while acknowledging the diversity of approaches appropriate for each academic school's provision.



37 Strategic direction in quality and academic standards has been set down in an academic policy. At the time of the audit, the University was in the process of developing a new policy: Academic Priorities (2007-10). The University's approach to the management of academic standards and quality is characterised by institution-wide procedures set down in the Quality Assurance Handbook including a regime of annual monitoring and periodic review of programmes within subject areas.

38 The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy provides a framework for the development of learning opportunities, which are implemented at school level through annual learning, teaching and assessment plans. This Strategy covers the institutional approach to the curricula, personal development planning, assessment, e-learning, diversity and inclusion, student success and retention, employability, and rewarding excellence in learning and teaching. The Teaching Quality Enhancement Group aims to support the Strategy and the dissemination of good practice in teaching, learning and assessment.

39 Since 2004, the University has had an e-strategy that will deliver an internet-enabled campus, supported by mobile computing and wireless networking, a smart administration for flexible learners, staff and business partners, and learner support to develop key skills to communicate effectively.

40 The audit team found that the institution's framework for managing academic standards and learning opportunities was generally effective, although, as will be highlighted in later sections, there is a high degree of delegation to schools within loose central frameworks, which has led to inconsistencies in practice. Although formal systems exist, there is an emphasis on informal systems that are allied to the University's culture of collegiality, in which a lot of things are not formally recorded. The team found that, in practice, collegiality appears to mean that schools are allowed to implement policy in significantly different ways, and to develop local policy that has led to inconsistency of practice. These, together with a substantial reliance on oral reporting, might potentially undermine the University's capacity to exercise its responsibility, at institutional level, for academic quality and standards (see particularly Section 3.2 below). The University is, therefore, advised to specify clear minimum requirements for schools' management of academic quality and standards, and to reinforce the use of formal reporting systems to demonstrate fulfilment of these requirements. In making this recommendation, the team considered that the concept of collegiality was not necessarily at odds with institutional coherence of policy and procedures, or consistency of practice, but that an appropriate balance needed to be maintained.

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

### **2.1 Approval, monitoring and review of award standards**

41 The University's processes for approval, monitoring and review are common to both the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. These processes and the audit team's view of their effectiveness are set out in Section 3.2 below. The composition of approval and review teams is set out here together with those elements of the processes that are specific to academic standards.

#### **Approval and periodic review**

42 The University has a well-defined set of processes, described in the Quality Assurance Handbook, for the approval, review and monitoring of programmes through which learning opportunities and the academic standards of awards are assured. Approval and review involves schools and the institution, each of which makes different contributions to the processes. Schools and course approval and review teams report to the Academic Policy Committee and thence to the Senate; the University states that this enables the Committee to review the effectiveness of policy and process.

43 A course approval and review team is assigned to each school and its members are drawn from a cross-institutional Course Approval and Review Panel, which meets annually to review the effectiveness of its processes, share good practice, note concerns and propose improvements to the Academic Policy Committee. Staff members of the Panel are normally senior and experienced academics; they are appointed for three years, renewable for a further three years. The Quality Assurance Handbook states that the Panel includes external experts, but the audit team was told that external experts were appointed to course approval and review teams rather than to the Panel. The audit team considered that the University should clarify its documentation in these respects.

44 Each school's course approval and review team is chaired by a member of another school. Each course approval and review team's membership includes two members from the school, two members of the Course Approval and Review Panel from other schools, an academic member of Teaching Quality Enhancement Group, a member of the Learner Support Planning Unit. Input from students depends on the policy agreed by each school and is 'appropriate to the courses under consideration'. The associate dean, learning and teaching for the school, and a member of the Academic Standards Support Unit, attend course approval and review team meetings.

45 Course approval and review team external experts, one for each discipline or subject area within the school, 'bring an independent, specialist view' in approval and reviews. They may be from academia or from industrial or professional organisations. External members of the teams are appointed for five years, with the possibility of renewal for a further two years. The current list of course approval and review team external experts seen by the audit team represented a wide range of UK universities and a number of industrial or professional organisations. The audit team considered, however, that the lengthy period of appointment for external experts was inconsistent with the notion of externality. Furthermore, although some members of a team will have changed, the same external expert could be involved in both the approval of a course and its first periodic review if the initial period of approval was less than the maximum period allowed. The audit team formed the view that there is potential for these factors to compromise the independent judgement of the external expert.

46 Current external examiners may not be external experts on course approval and review teams, nor indeed anyone who has had a professional relationship with the school in the last three years. Appointments are approved by the Chair of the Senate, though currently this responsibility is delegated to the Chair of the Academic Policy Committee. If an approval or review event is carried out in conjunction with a public, statutory and regulatory body, a representative of the body provides the external expertise.

47 The Course Approval and Review Panel and course approval and review team members receive clear and comprehensive briefing information to support their roles and the review events they participate in. Learning support seminars are provided for course approval and review team members. The Academic Standards Support Unit also gives advice and guidance on these processes.

48 The Quality Assurance Handbook states that the external expert members of panels for both new course approval and periodic review are required to attend panel meetings. However, the audit team saw a small number of examples of course approvals in the past where the outcomes of the approval were dependent upon receiving comments from the external expert. Under these circumstances the audit team was concerned that the external expert could not fully engage with the process. The University's Code of Practice states that this is now possible only in exceptional circumstances and with prior approval of the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching. The team heard from associate deans, learning and teaching, that such approval would rarely be given, but evidence was not available to confirm that such approval had been given. The University will wish to ensure that its requirements in respect of the participation of externals are always implemented.

49 A further matter of concern to the audit team was the fact that the one external expert on the course approval and review team for a broad subject area may not have the specific expertise associated with a particular course being considered for approval. Although an example was seen in the School of Management where four external academics attended a review event for postgraduate programmes, the audit team remained concerned at the possibility of reliance on a single external expert appointed to the course approval and review team. The audit team also noted that the University's guidelines for members of the course approval and review team state that the external experts may be academic staff from other institutions, members of relevant professional and statutory bodies or representatives from industry or commerce. This gave rise to concern about the possibility of the external view being solely from a practitioner who may not have an adequate knowledge of *The framework for higher education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and subject benchmark statements to give an independent view of the alignment of the standards of an award with these two key external reference points.

50 The concerns noted above bring in to question the University's assertion that there is an 'appropriate level of externality' in programme approval and review. The University is advised to review its use of experts external to the University in programme approval and review, particularly to ensure that at least one appropriate academic external is present at each event.

51 As part of the approval process, course developers are required to explain how external reference points have been used and are referred to subject benchmarks, relevant sections of the *Code of practice* and FHEQ. Attention is drawn to the need to check articulation with the level specified in FHEQ.

52 Similarly for periodic review, course teams are required to demonstrate consideration of the academic standards of the awards under review, including an evaluation of the learning outcomes in relation to FHEQ, subject benchmark statements, and any relevant professional body requirements. The audit team saw examples of course approval and course review documentation from which it was clear that the course team had explicitly taken account of the FHEQ, and relevant subject benchmarks. In most cases seen by the audit team, the course approval and review team reports to the Academic Policy Committee stated that the course aligned with the FHEQ.

53 Programme specifications are produced as part of approval and review and the University requires these to 'demonstrate articulation' between the level of the programme and the appropriate qualification descriptors in FHEQ. However, some examples seen by the audit team were only just adequate (see paragraph 91).

54 Overall, the audit team concluded that the procedures for approval and periodic review contribute to the management of academic standards and work as intended by the University.

### **Annual monitoring**

55 All taught programmes are subject to annual monitoring. The Quality Assurance Handbook states that the purpose of annual monitoring is to assure and enhance the quality of all of the University's taught provision, whether undergraduate or postgraduate, including taught doctorates. While the emphasis of annual monitoring is on the student experience, it is clear from the Quality Assurance Handbook that the process is also concerned with the academic standards of awards since the reviewers are expected to draw conclusions about the extent to which course aims and learning outcomes have been achieved by students.

56 Course annual monitoring reports seen by the audit team confirmed that annual monitoring teams reviewed the course learning outcomes, considered student performance and evidence from external examiners' reports on the extent to which students met learning outcomes, although the reports were inconsistent in their structure and coverage. Summary reports from schools on their annual monitoring were more variable. The reporting of annual monitoring and the team's view of its overall effectiveness is considered in more detail in Section 3.2 below.

## 2.2 External examiners

57 In its Briefing Paper, the University stated that it attaches great importance to the contribution of its external examiners to the maintenance of academic standards. The University has a Code of Practice for External Examiners, which contextualises the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*, and addresses all facets of the University's relationship with its external examiners for taught courses. Arrangements for the formal appointment of external examiners are clear and appropriate. Newly appointed external examiners are provided with suitable induction, guidance and training.

58 All external examiners' reports are seen by the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching, who responds directly and sends both report and response to the relevant dean for consideration. The reports then go to the associate deans, learning and teaching, and relevant programme leader. Any actions arising from issues raised by external examiners are picked up in the annual monitoring report action plan. The audit team saw examples of such actions. The Briefing Paper cited an example of marking inconsistencies noted by an external examiner that led to the development of master's-level assessment criteria in the School of Health Studies, the success of which was followed by development of undergraduate assessment criteria. However, the team saw an example where action on an issue raised by an external examiner was not addressed, and the external examiner raised the issue again in his following report. External examiners' reports seen by the team were variable in their quality; while mostly satisfactory, some through their brevity were barely adequate. It was not clear that there were processes in place to follow up such shortcomings.

59 The University has recently introduced a new pro forma for external examiner reports which requires a response to a series of questions, and invites external examiners to make additional comments. The audit team found that the pro forma published in the Quality Assurance Handbook did not ask external examiners specifically to comment on the standard of awards or comparability with similar awards elsewhere in the sector. The University was apparently unaware of this omission, which had occurred as a result of a modification of the pro forma following the removal of published information from external examiners' reports. While there was no evidence that academic standards had been compromised, the University is advised to ensure that all external examiners are made aware of the revised report pro forma, which addresses comparability of academic standards.

60 The Academic Standards Support Unit carries out an annual review of external examiners' reports which is presented to the Academic Policy Committee. This enables this Committee to assure the University about standards, draw attention to common concerns about standards, regulation or policy, and identify good practice. Recent changes have included revision of the standard external examiner report form (see previous paragraph), a requirement for external examiners to submit reports electronically, and a decision to continue the policy of sharing external examiners' reports with student representatives via the annual monitoring process.

61 The audit team noted from recent Academic Standards Support Unit reports, which are produced in mid-January following the academic year to which the reports relate, that approximately one-third of reports had not yet been received at that point. The University confirmed that the deadline for submission of reports on undergraduate provision is 30 September, and for postgraduate provision 30 November. The team was concerned that this shortfall would both undermine the annual monitoring process, and potentially put academic standards at risk. However, the team was somewhat reassured to learn that this Unit is responsible for following up non-submitted reports, and that a new approach had recently been introduced which would result in the University terminating the contract of an external examiner who failed to submit a report. Nonetheless, the University will wish to monitor the situation closely and may wish to consider whether further steps might be needed to ensure the quality and timely submission of reports.

62 External examiners' reports are an important element of annual monitoring and it was clear from examples seen by the audit team that these reports are fully taken into account during the annual monitoring process.

63 The University operates a two-stage process to confirm marks and awards: an assessment committee and a formal board of examiners, where progression and awards are confirmed. The audit team noted that external examiners are members of boards of examiners and of assessment committees. However, the team saw an external examiner's report for 2006-07 where the examiner was critical of his lack of involvement with the assessment committee which prevented him from fulfilling his role. The team also noted, from minutes of both boards of examiners and assessment committees from 2007 and the early part of the 2007-08 academic year, that the agendas of boards of examiners explicitly provide for comments from the external examiners, whereas those for assessment committees do not. Furthermore, the team noted from examples of minutes of boards of examiners, that the external examiner was absent. The University is advised to ensure that its policy of external examiner membership of assessment committees is fully implemented, and that external examiners are fully involved in the business of both assessment committees and boards of examiners.

### 2.3 Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

64 The University aims to ensure that its standards and procedures are consistent with the Academic Infrastructure. This aim is supported by the Academic Standards Support Unit's dissemination of information about the Academic Infrastructure, and by the provision of contextualised guidance documents in the Quality Assurance Handbook, prepared in the Unit and approved by the Academic Policy Committee to assist the work of all those involved in course development, delivery and review. The Academic Standards Support Unit is also tasked with monitoring and considering developments in relation to the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points as they emerge.

65 The University uses the *Code of practice* to inform its policies, regulations and guidance, and it states that these 'interpret' the *Code*. The University states that it has 'addressed appropriately' each new section of the *Code* as it has been published, and now takes 'a more systematic and coordinated approach'. The audit team found evidence that sections of the *Code* had indeed been used systematically. For example, the University's review of policy and procedures in the light of the *Code of practice, Section 3: Students with disabilities* led it to propose changes to the examination process for students with disabilities. This review activity is continuing: the Academic Policy Committee recorded in September 2007 that the institution was not yet fully aligned with the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education*, but work is in progress to address this (see below Section 3.7). The University's course approval, monitoring and review procedures have been formally reviewed in the light of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*. While noting that these procedures are generally aligned with the *Code of practice*, the audit team considered that some aspects of the institution's use of externality did not fully reflect the spirit of the *Code of practice, Section 7* (see also Sections 2.1 and 3.2).

66 In terms of the academic standards of courses, the use of the Academic Infrastructure is primarily in programme design and review through the application of relevant subject and award benchmark statements, FHEQ, and the development of programme specifications.

67 The Academic Standards Support Unit notifies schools of updated subject benchmark statements, and the Quality Assurance Handbook provides schools with a framework and guidance on the use of subject benchmark statements in the development and management of taught programmes.

68 Programme specifications are a major feature of the University's quality assurance procedures and are published on the University's website. The audit team saw that programme specifications are produced in draft for programme approval events, and revised programme specifications are presented at periodic review. Approval and periodic review submission documents seen by the team also showed that development and review teams had taken account of relevant subject benchmarks.

69 The Briefing Paper stated that course approval and review teams explicitly take the FHEQ and the *Code of practice* into account in their deliberations about proposed courses. The audit team saw a range of examples of course approval and course review documentation where it was clear that the course team had explicitly taken account of the FHEQ, and relevant subject benchmarks.

70 Minutes of course approval and review team meetings seen by the audit team showed that course approval and review includes a careful consideration of programme specifications and the alignment of proposed courses with the FHEQ.

71 The audit team saw evidence of the use of other external reference points in programme approval and review. The University maintains its awareness of the Bologna Process by identifying a member of the Academic Standards Support Unit who has responsibility for 'keeping abreast' of developments in connection with the European Higher Education Area. It is preparing to provide Diploma Supplements electronically, as part of its e-strategy, from 2007-08 onwards. The credit structure of the University's integrated master's awards has been reviewed in the light of the Bologna cycle structure. The audit team concluded that the institution's approach to the Bologna Process is soundly based.

72 Overall, the institution makes effective use of the Academic Infrastructure as it applies to academic standards, and other appropriate external reference points.

## **2.4 Assessment policies and regulations**

73 The University has institution-wide assessment regulations that apply to programmes at both undergraduate and taught postgraduate levels, with associated regulations governing such matters as the conduct of examinations, decision-making on progression and award, and student appeals. There are clear administrative regulations relating to assessment that include the checking of marked work, internal moderation arrangements, and double-marking of projects or thesis work. The University regularly updates and revises its assessment regulations and guidelines.

74 The effectiveness of the University's approach to assessment policies and regulations is monitored as part of standard business. These include course approval and review team reports to the Academic Policy Committee on course approval and periodic review, and school annual monitoring reports to the same Committee. Periodic review includes an analysis of the effectiveness of the school's assessment strategy in measuring the fulfilment of the learning outcomes and in discriminating between different levels of performance. In addition, there are two processes which specifically relate to assessment procedures. One is the annual review of external examiners' reports. This review is undertaken by the Academic Standards Support Unit and includes recommendations to the Academic Policy Committee on University-wide issues concerning assessment regulation and practice. The second is the biannual meeting of chairs of boards of examiners, chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching.

75 The May meeting of the chairs of boards of examiners affords an opportunity to prepare for the June/July boards of examiners meetings and to outline the changes to regulations or developments in policy during the year. The September meeting is used to review the collective experience of the year and raise any issues that chairs feel have been pertinent to the process. If any direct recommendations arise from one of these meetings, these would be made to the Academic Policy Committee. Otherwise, issues are addressed as part of ongoing monitoring and review of quality assurance and enhancement processes previously noted. The team audit noted

that the meeting between the Chairs of boards of examiners and the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching was potentially a powerful and timely additional device for monitoring assessment procedures, and the University may wish to consider routine reports from these meetings to the Academic Policy Committee.

76 The audit team saw evidence that the assessment regulations were being applied effectively including a commendation by the International Accreditation Advisory Board of the Association of MBAs in its June 2005 report for the rigour of the assessment processes in the Management School, and confirmation at periodic review of internal and external moderation, also in the Management School.

77 Where the regulations for a particular course need to vary from the standard regulations, for example to meet with the requirements of a professional body, the University operates a waiver system. Waivers are identified at programme approval or periodic review, are applied for by the school to the Academic Policy Committee, and must be formally approved by the Senate.

78 Students met by the audit team confirmed that they were well informed about assessment requirements, that learning outcomes were specified, but that marking practices differed between schools.

79 The last institutional audit advised that the University should, without delay, progress the work to define assessment levels, to ensure consistent standards across the University. The present audit team noted that marking and grading criteria have been introduced in a few areas of the University, including school-wide M-level assessment criteria in the School of Health Studies, school-wide assessment and grading criteria for postgraduates in the Management School, and assessment criteria for the Master in Research Methods award. Criteria are generally set at the level of an assessment instrument and/or module but there is no consistency of practice. There was no evident progress on institutional criteria. The team heard that the University has chosen not to progress this recommendation for a number of reasons including the fact that some 70 per cent of undergraduate provision is professional, statutory and regulatory body-led, and the view that grading is the province of the subject area. The audit team was informed that course approval and review teams are responsible for a consistent approach to assessment, although from course approval and review team reports, the audit team could not see evidence of this activity.

80 The present audit team appreciated that there are a number of factors, both internal and external, which influence grading and standards, but formed the view that this strengthens rather than detracts from the need for insitutional guidance which will provide the basis for the consistent and reliable determination of grades and setting of academic standards. Furthermore, the team concurred with the view expressed in the previous audit report, that the marking and grading criteria in use in a few, but by no means all, parts of the University does not meet the spirit of the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*, concerning institutional monitoring of academic standards. While the audit team found no evidence that standards have been compromised, it felt that there could be a potential risk to standards. The University is advised to put in place appropriate mechanisms and oversight to ensure internal comparability of academic standards.

## **2.5 Management information - statistics**

81 Statistics are provided to schools by central departments; this information is intended to support the appraisal of standards and forms an integral component of annual monitoring reports. The extent to which use has been made of the data in the review of programmes is addressed by the monitoring team.

82 The University's student record system, SAINT, is now an embedded source of management information and is the definitive student record in nearly all aspects of the University's business. The SAINT Implementation Board plans and oversees development and implementation of the system, and regularly reviews progress and addresses concerns with a view to improving understanding and extending use of this application. The audit team saw a detailed plan for the development of SAINT for 2007-08.

83 The audit team heard that in shifting from a localised to a centralised student management system there had been difficulties. The associate deans, learning and teaching have complained about the inadequacy of some data, and a small group has been created comprising the Head of the Academic Standards Support Unit, the Head of Strategic Planning, and two associate deans, learning and teaching to identify the issues, and most have now been addressed. A data centre has been created, which has been successful in delivering more reliable data. The team was satisfied that the University is taking steps to ensure that, from 2007-08, the supply of student data would fully meet the needs of schools.

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

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

84 The University's overall approach to the use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points is set out in Section 2.3 above. The University's approach to professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and the audit team's view of its effectiveness is set out in Section 3.2 below.

85 The audit team concluded that the use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points generally made a positive contribution to the institution's management of the quality of learning opportunities.

#### **3.2 Approval, monitoring and review of programmes**

86 Section 2.1 above describes the University's framework for approval, monitoring and review. The findings and recommendations noted there are equally applicable here. This section sets out the processes and focuses on matters that are particular to institutional management of learning opportunities.

87 The audit team's consideration of external experts' involvement in its processes has been noted (see above Section 2.1). The team considered that the course approval and review teams' internal membership provided a basis for balanced discussion and the sharing of good practice, particularly on the quality of learning opportunities. The team also noted the University's emphasis on the use of internal staff 'from cognate disciplines who provide internal externality'. The team formed the view, however, that this concept of 'internal externality' did not fully reflect the spirit of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*.

#### **Approval**

88 The University specifies 'major' and 'minor' routes for course approval. In the minor process a proposal is made on a standard pro forma which is considered and signed off by the dean and then by the Director of Academic Administration and the Director of Finance, before approval by the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching as Chair of the Academic Policy Committee. The Quality Assurance Handbook states that 'the Dean of School should advise if the course proposal is a minor or major route'; however, the audit team was told that, if there was any doubt about the appropriateness of the designation, the Academic Standards Support Unit would consult the Chair of the Academic Policy Committee and refer back on his advice. The University may wish to ensure that the whole of the process is clearly explained in the Quality Assurance Handbook.

89 The 'major' route for course approval (and review) is a phased process. In Phase 1, initial proposals, supported by market analysis and detailed costings, are made using a standard pro forma which is considered and signed off in the same way as for a minor proposal. Management accountants support the preparation of detailed costings and business cases. This pro forma has recently been revised and expanded, and now provides a more useful range of information.



90 The University states that 'consideration of the quality of learning opportunities is integral to approval...and review of programmes'. In Phase 2, course approval and review teams consider the quality of learning opportunities through programme specifications, which must include methods of teaching, learning and assessment, student support and guidance. The audit team found that course approval and review teams were presented with extensive documentation for course approvals, including programme specifications and module descriptors.

91 Templates for programme specifications and module descriptors are provided, along with detailed guidance, in the Quality Assurance Handbook. Module descriptors are compiled electronically and stored on the SAINT database. The University expects that programme specifications presented for approval will include information about learning, teaching, assessment and student support, and the audit team found examples to demonstrate this. However, the team also found considerable variability in the level of detail given both in programme specifications and module descriptors. The University might wish to review its procedures for ensuring that these documents provide appropriate levels of detail.

92 The audit team found that course approval and review teams scrutinised new course proposals in detail, and discussed them critically with members of the programme team. Aspects of learning, teaching and assessment, and the views of external professionals and employers, were considered. Any elements of flexible and distance learning were discussed with specific reference to the virtual learning environment. The team had difficulty in assessing the depth of discussion by course approval and review teams where the approval process and its outcomes were recorded in the minutes of these teams' meetings rather than evaluative reports.

93 While the approval process appeared to be broadly effective, within the limitations noted above, the University should consider how reports of validation meetings might be made more evaluative and thus serve its approval processes more effectively, not least by enabling it to ensure that both academic standards and quality of learning opportunities are critically reviewed.

94 Approval of programmes may be given subject to conditions and/or recommendations. There are formal procedures for confirming that conditions of approval have been met, and this confirmation is signed off by the chair of the course approval and review team, using a standard form for this purpose. The audit team found evidence that these procedures, and the sign-off process, worked effectively and transparently. Completion of the approval process is reported, with a recommendation for approval, to the Academic Policy Committee.

### **Annual monitoring**

95 The last institutional audit recommended that the effectiveness of annual monitoring should be reviewed. Subsequently, the University decided to devolve the monitoring of 'home' provision to schools with effect from 2005-06 because 'its outcomes are of most benefit' there. The centralised system was retained for all collaborative provision, and for three 'home' courses or subject areas where the previous monitoring process had already found cause for concern. In October 2007, the Academic Policy Committee recorded 'closure...in relation to the University's non-devolved course provision', noting that one of the three problematic programmes would continue under central monitoring until its last students had completed their studies in 2008. The Academic Policy Committee expressed its decisions to devolve (or, in these three cases, not to devolve) the monitoring process in terms of confidence judgments about the school's quality and standards. The audit team concluded that, while a confidence-based process of devolution seemed inherently sound, the apparent lack of clear, published criteria for such confidence judgements was a potential weakness that the University would no doubt wish to address.

96 Schools have their own outline templates for their annual monitoring reports. However, the audit team found that, even within schools, annual monitoring reports for 2005-06 differed significantly. The best examples were substantial reports covering one or more programmes and included elements of critical review, statistical data, external examiners' reports, student feedback,

identification of good practice, and action planning. Some annual monitoring reports gave no details or analysis of student feedback, but their action plans indicated where actions were driven by comments in a staff-student liaison committee. The University describes annual monitoring reports as 'an annual, critical review', but in practice the audit team found that evaluative comment was often limited or even absent. External examiners' reports were not always included or noted. Some annual monitoring reports comprised only an action plan and external examiner's report. Action planning was generally effective, although sometimes more so in recording the completion of past action plans than in forward planning. However, other annual monitoring reports gave little evaluation of actions planned in earlier years. University regulations state that minutes of boards of examiners should be reviewed by schools as part of the annual monitoring process, but the team found little evidence of this. The audit team considered that the variations between annual monitoring reports were so extensive as to limit the effectiveness of monitoring and reporting. The team considered this to be an example where the introduction of clear minimum requirements and a pro forma for annual monitoring reports would help to promote consistency.

97 Reports from schools to the Academic Policy Committee are accompanied by summaries of schools' performance against key performance indicators. These use standard forms and provide comparable data sets for areas such as recruitment, progression and achievement.

98 The Academic Standards Support Unit receives schools' summaries of annual monitoring reports, not the full report. It carried out a review of schools' reports on annual monitoring for campus-based programmes in June 2007. Significant variations in the structure and content of schools' reports were noted without comment. On the basis of examples that it saw, the audit team agreed that the format and level of detail in schools' reports to the Academic Policy Committee was very variable. Nevertheless, the team learned that the Committee considered it had been adequately informed about the outcomes of monitoring in each school, notwithstanding the wide variation between the written reports, because it had also received oral reports.

99 The audit team was also told in a meeting with senior staff that the University had been surprised by the extent of these variations between the patterns of reporting from schools to the Academic Policy Committee. In response it is developing a template for school boards' reports to this Committee on annual monitoring, for use in the next round of these reports, which will be presented to the Academic Policy Committee in a meeting devoted entirely to that purpose in May 2008. The team considered that the use of this template was both necessary and helpful, because it would promote the production of consistent written reports, would provide a more transparent and enduring record of the monitoring process on which the Academic Policy Committee (and the Senate) have placed so much reliance. Nevertheless, as it continues to keep this reporting process under review, the University should consider establishing minimum requirements for consistent, auditable reporting on annual monitoring from school boards to the Academic Policy Committee.

100 The audit team found other areas of variability in the monitoring process. For example, the Academic Policy Committee requires that schools send copies of their 'annual monitoring documentation' to chairs of course approval and review teams, external examiners and student representatives. However, the team found that student representatives do not always receive annual monitoring reports; in consequence they do not always see external examiners reports, since these are included in annual monitoring reports. The Academic Policy Committee itself has recorded a further example of inconsistency: in June 2007 it received a mixture of written and oral reports to the effect that 13 campus-based courses had not been monitored in the previous year. The audit team was told that these 13 courses had been 'reviewed', but that no reports had been produced. While noting this explanation, the team considered that this matter reinforced the impression of an incoherent and inconsistently implemented monitoring process.

101 The audit team also found that annual monitoring reports, and reporting on annual monitoring from schools to the Academic Policy Committee, did not consistently identify good practice at institutional level. Indeed the team was told that these reports were less effective in

this regard since the revised and devolved process had been introduced. This problem seemed to be compounded by a lack of clear guidance, at institutional level, on what the University defines as good practice (see Section 4 below). In addition to schools' reports on their annual monitoring for the previous year, the Academic Policy Committee also receives an annual monitoring review by the associate deans, learning and teaching. The Annual Monitoring Review for 2005-06 was presented at the Academic Policy Committee in September 2007; it comprised a series of bullet points which did not distinguish between matters of good practice and issues of concern. The team was told that greater detail was given to the Committee in an oral presentation, but considered that such reliance on oral reporting left the University without an adequate record of good practice or of issues which should be addressed at institutional level. The Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching meets with individual deans, some of whom choose to be accompanied by their associate dean, learning and teaching, to discuss their schools' reports on annual monitoring and their key performance indicators. The team considered that the University might wish to consider how these oral discussions could continue to serve management purposes and also contribute to the wider sharing of good practice within the institution.

102 Annual monitoring reports have a pivotal role in the University's quality assurance systems, and increasingly in quality enhancement. However, under the new devolved arrangements for annual monitoring of campus-based programmes, the quality and completeness of these reports, particularly those from school boards to the Academic Policy Committee, is very variable. Neither annual monitoring reports nor reports from school boards to the Academic Policy Committee consistently do justice to the richness of monitoring data available. This limits the reporting system's capacity to identify good practice. As it reinforces its use of formal reporting systems the University should expedite its plans to address the variability of reporting.

### **Periodic review**

103 Each course must be periodically reviewed at least once every five years. Reviews, which include course re-approval, may be postponed in exceptional circumstances and only with the approval of the Chair of the Academic Policy Committee. The process of course review is similar to course approval (see above). The unit of review varies between schools and this Committee has asked schools to consider using smaller groupings, preferably those used for annual monitoring, in order to 'ensure a more in-depth consideration of courses under review'.

104 The University's procedures for periodic review include a pattern for the critical appraisal document, and the audit team found that this pattern has been used effectively by departments and programme teams to produce comprehensive, thorough and self-evaluative documents, some of which included extensive mapping of programme outcomes against the FHEQ qualification descriptors. Review meetings between the course approval and review team and the programme team included very thorough scrutinies of learning, teaching and assessment, student support, and the admissions and induction processes. Review reports were detailed and evaluative. The fulfilment of conditions of approval was signed off by the course approval and review team's chair. The audit team concluded that the periodic review process worked effectively and as intended by the University.

105 Procedures are in place for permitted changes, or modifications, to programmes or modules. These changes are approved by course approval and review teams and signed off by the chairs of the course approval and review teams. The Academic Policy Committee has recently restricted the number and frequency of permitted changes to the module/course catalogue. The audit team found that this process also worked as intended.

106 About 70 per cent of the University's provision is linked to professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). PSRB reviews and accreditations, which are managed by the Academic Standards Support Unit, may be carried out conjointly with internal periodic reviews. The combining of University and PSRB reviews was noted as a feature of good practice in the last institutional audit. The audit team found examples demonstrating that, where PSRBs and internal

reviews did not coincide, PSRB accreditation reports were considered, and actions taken in response to their recommendations were reviewed, in subsequent internal periodic reviews. One such report has commended the School's responsiveness to recommendations in its earlier review reports.

107 The University expects that all PSRB review or accreditation reports will be sent to the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching, and the audit team was told that this was so. Reports and recommendations are addressed through internal periodic review, and the team found examples of this. The team was also told that the University expects annual monitoring reports to follow up actions from PSRB reviews, but saw no examples of this. Outcomes of these reviews and accreditations are reported to the Academic Policy Committee, but this key Committee does not receive PSRB reports and recommendations, nor reports on progress in addressing these recommendations. In view of the University's high level of engagement with PSRBs, it might wish to review the mechanisms through which it ensures that timely and effective responses are made to PSRBs following their review or accreditation visits.

108 The University states that employers contribute to quality assurance through membership of advisory boards and course management teams, 'direct participation' in course reviews, and other unspecified involvements in course development. The audit team found that the views of external professionals and employers were considered in the programme approval and review process.

109 The audit team concluded that the University's processes for the approval and periodic review of programmes were broadly sound and generally contributed effectively to the management of learning opportunities, although the reporting of approval meetings and of PSRB reviews at institutional level should be made more consistent, effective and transparent. The recently devolved process for annual monitoring of campus-based provision was potentially sound and effective but lacked consistency in its reporting at school and institutional levels. Noting the areas of incoherence and inconsistency reported above, the University is advised to specify clear minimum requirements for schools' management of academic quality and standards, and reinforce the use of formal reporting systems to demonstrate fulfilment of these requirements.

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

110 All schools use evaluation questionnaires for modules and stages of their programmes, and the institution expects that the results of these surveys will be used in annual monitoring and course review. Annual monitoring reports are expected to include action plans which address issues raised in feedback from students.

111 The audit team found that the University's policies and procedures for the unit evaluation questionnaire were not always clearly expressed in the Quality Assurance Handbook. For example, the relevant section of the Quality Assurance Handbook states that all students should receive a questionnaire for each module studied, but the next page qualifies this by stating that each module should be 'sampled at least once in every two years'. The team considered that the University would do well to clarify the minimum requirements for these surveys in future.

112 The audit team found that, in practice, the design of unit evaluation questionnaires varied across schools, as University policy permits. Responsibility for implementing the standard unit evaluation questionnaire has also been devolved to departments; some survey modules in alternate years, and others do so every year. Most departments provide students with hard-copy questionnaires, but some have delivered them online. The team found evidence that the participation of distance-learning students in questionnaire surveys was very limited, possibly because they were not available online.

113 The stage evaluation questionnaire contains questions on the programme, the learning experience, student services, and central learning resource provision. Departments are responsible for delivering the stage evaluation questionnaire in the latter part of the second semester of the academic year. One department has noted that stage evaluation questionnaires were 'unavailable' or 'misaid' for a cohort of students in two successive years, but action did not appear to have been taken at a senior level. The team was told of difficulties in identifying individual programmes within stage evaluation questionnaire results, but it was unclear why this was so, since it had been given access to programme-specific examples of stage evaluation questionnaire data.

114 The audit team was told that the institution derives information from student feedback via the annual monitoring process, but it found that data derived from student evaluations were very inconsistently used in annual monitoring reports. In some cases, results were summarised in graphs but there was little or no analysis or evaluative comment. However, action plans frequently included actions specified as responses to student feedback. Annual monitoring reports are expected to include 'a list of units sampled, or a description of the method chosen for sampling, coupled with a statement that this sampling has been carried out', and a summary of actions taken in response to feedback, but few annual monitoring reports seen by the team did all these things, and some did none of them.

115 The University recognises that it needs to do more to 'maximise participation' in student surveys and 'avoid duplication of effort'. The audit team found that the Learning and Teaching Sub-Committee has recommended that the University implement its questionnaire surveys online, and considered that this would be advantageous, not least in facilitating greater participation by distance-learning students. The institution is reviewing its many other student surveys, which include a first-year experience survey, a leaver questionnaire, surveys on diversity issues, and a biennial student satisfaction survey, with the intention of rationalising them. The team felt that this review was timely.

116 The audit team found that students' views of the effectiveness of evaluation surveys varied considerably: some were markedly more positive than others. The unit evaluation questionnaire attracted criticism for its timing, and some students felt that it made little difference. Some urged implementation of the unit evaluation questionnaire online. Students are informed of responses to their feedback through staff-student liaison committee minutes, and some departments also do this through their websites. The team heard positive accounts of changes made (for example, in module design) in response to student feedback; however, it also became aware that responses were sometimes limited or ineffective.

117 The University encourages its students to participate in the National Student Survey, and has noted that its students' National Student Survey response rates have been higher than the national average in some subjects. On the basis of National Student Survey scores, the University has concluded that students are generally satisfied with their courses, as internal surveys also indicate.

118 National Student Survey results are reported directly to Learning And Teaching Sub-Committee and Academic Policy Committee, and indirectly to Senate and Council. The lowest National Student Survey scores are in assessment, and the University has addressed this by examining ways of accelerating feedback on coursework assignments, including the use of formative assessment. National Student Survey results for each school are discussed between the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching and individual deans. These discussions in 2007 focused particularly on high-scoring areas, so that good practice could be identified and used for enhancement. The audit team learned that the University has compared National Student Survey data with those available from its internal stage evaluation questionnaire surveys, and has found no major discrepancies. So far, the University has reviewed National Student Survey data primarily at institutional level but, from 2008 onwards, additional codings will be used to extract data at programme level.

119 The audit team found that student evaluation questionnaires, and the data derived from them, made a variable contribution to the management of learning opportunities, and that there was scope for improvements, as detailed above. The University's policies and requirements for these questionnaire surveys were not always clear, nor were they consistently carried out. In particular, annual monitoring reports did not do justice to the richness of information which the University's many student surveys could provide. The team urges the University to establish clear minimum requirements for student evaluation surveys, and ensure consistent reporting through the annual monitoring process.

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

120 The University values student representation at all levels. Student representatives sit on the Council, Senate, Academic Policy Committee, Learning And Teaching Sub-Committee and working groups. The Learning And Teaching Sub-Committee has a standing agenda item for contributions by students' representatives; the audit team found that students have used this to raise a range of issues on matters including term dates and course representation, and that in consequence the Learning And Teaching Sub-Committee has made recommendations for action to the Academic Policy Committee. Students met by the team believed that their representation on institutional-level committees was effective.

121 The University allows what it describes as 'flexibility in schools' approaches to the student role in quality assurance'. In 2006-07, schools were asked to document their 'methodologies'; they were then 'formalised' and approved by the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching, and will be reviewed and re-approved at three-year intervals. The audit team found that the Senate had required all schools to 'facilitate student participation in all aspects of the course quality assurance process'. It had offered several models for student representation at school level, from which schools must make and formalise choices, which must be signed off by the Students' Union, before approval by the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching. The team learned that the approved methods of representation varied considerably between schools.

122 The audit team was also told that students sit on school boards but this was difficult to confirm because the board minutes available did not identify student members, and no particular agenda items were provided for student matters. However, officers of the Students' Union were present at some meetings. Students' views of their representation at school level were very mixed. Some students who met with the team had little or no awareness of these school-level committees. The team considered that the University might wish to keep the effectiveness of the various arrangements for student representation at school level under review, to ensure their effectiveness.

123 Course representatives sit on staff-student liaison committees, which the University regards as important points of student engagement with staff.

124 The audit team saw evidence that staff-student liaison committees met at varying intervals, sometimes no more than once a year. Some were convened at programme rather than department level. Attendance was also variable. Minutes indicated that meetings were formally conducted, with wide-ranging discussions on matters raised by students, action planning, and extensive reporting on actions taken as a result of previous meetings. The team also found evidence that matters raised by staff-student liaison committees were sometimes discussed at school boards.

125 The team found that students were generally well aware of staff-student liaison committees and of their course representatives. Students generally believed that staff-student liaison committees were useful, but their responses to student comments were sometimes tardy, in some cases as a result of infrequent meetings. Students confirmed that staff-student liaison committee meetings were well conducted, that all representatives had opportunities to speak, and all received minutes. However, not all representatives see annual monitoring reports, or

external examiners' reports. There was no evidence that staff-student liaison committees discussed National Student Survey results. The team also heard that course representatives give feedback from staff-student liaison committees to students in various ways, including emails. The team urges the University to keep the operation of staff-student liaison committees under review, so as to ensure that they work consistently as required in the University's code of good practice.

126 The University seeks to make its student representatives as effective as possible by providing training through the Students' Union. Measures to strengthen the training for course representatives were recently reported to Academic Policy Committee. The Students' Union continues to provide the training; it undertook to monitor attendance and report on it to schools. Academic Policy Committee intends to review the effectiveness of training for course representatives as part of its planned meeting on annual monitoring in May 2008. Students who met with the audit team expressed positive views about the University's efforts to address the training of course representatives.

127 The audit team found that the University had worked with the Students' Union to develop a partnership approach to quality management and enhancement, and that this was affirmed and valued on both sides. For example, Students' Union officers meet regularly and frequently with the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching to discuss matters of common concern, including quality assurance and enhancement matters. The team also found that students were routinely involved by the University in working groups for the planning and development of new capital projects and investments (see section 3.7 below).

128 The last institutional audit recommended that the University should collaborate with the student body to develop 'effective and transparent arrangements for student participation in all appropriate quality assurance processes'. The audit team found that this was indeed the case in many regards, and considered in particular that the University's partnership approach to quality management and enhancement with the Students' Union constituted a feature of good practice. In building upon this strength, the University will wish to monitor its arrangements for student representation on school committees and at staff-student liaison committees, to ensure that these also are consistently effective and transparent.

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

129 The University's Corporate Strategy aims to provide 'learning in a research-active environment', and expects that 'discipline-related research' will inform teaching. The Briefing Paper drew attention to an example of strong collaborative links across schools for this purpose. It has also noted that students engage with research activity in taught postgraduate programmes 'as a matter of course', and also in undergraduate projects and dissertations. The audit team heard from students and staff that this was so. A professional, statutory and regulatory body accreditation panel commended one department for its practice of assigning taught postgraduate students' projects to its research groups, and linking them with employers. The research interests of staff are also reflected in the design of modules in some areas.

130 The University seeks to develop and enhance good practice in learning, teaching and assessment, and uses the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund to support this. The audit team found that schools were invited to bid for this funding on a project basis; bids were reviewed by a group including the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching and the Head of the Teaching Quality Enhancement Group, who is also the Chair of the Learning And Teaching Subcommittee. The Learning And Teaching Sub-Committee monitors these projects through annual reports. Recipients of funding are required to report on their work by giving presentations at the annual Learning and Teaching Conference. The Teaching Quality Enhancement Group plays a leading role in promoting and leading this area of scholarship and research, and draws funding from national bodies such as the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) and Higher Education Academy (HEA) for this purpose.

131 Research and scholarship in learning, teaching and assessment is encouraged, and their outcomes inform enhancement. Examples seen by the audit team included the use of JISC-funded projects to develop e-portfolios. The University is involved in a centre for excellence in teaching and learning project to develop an assessment instrument for placements in all professional contexts. Scholarly activities of academic staff in Learner Support Services had stimulated and informed the development of learner support facilities for first-year students, particularly in a widening participation context, through the Learner Development Unit.

132 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 increasingly contributed positively to the management of learning opportunities.

### **3.6 Other modes of study**

133 The University claims to have been 'pro-active at the forefront of pedagogical delivery through mechanisms such as the virtual learning environment'. An E-Strategy drives e-learning developments, including efforts to promote wider uses of the virtual learning environment. The collaborative provision audit report 2006 commented favourably on the institution's management of its virtual learning environment.

134 E-learning is particularly emphasised at the University, which is seeking to develop and extend this through making wider use of the virtual learning environment in blended learning across all its programmes. The audit team learned that the University requires all its modules to 'have a presence' on the virtual learning environment. Students met by the team had mixed views of the virtual learning environment; some were markedly more favourable than others. They indicated that the use of the virtual learning environment varied greatly between modules; in many cases, the site was used simply as a repository for lecture notes or slides, although others included online audio or video streaming of lectures. One school found that some of its module sites did not contain module guides at the beginning of the 2006-07 academic year. Students reported that online discussions took place on some module sites, and said that these were usually initiated by students rather than staff.

135 The University has very few programmes delivered entirely by distance learning, and they are usually offered as alternative modes of study in groups of taught postgraduate courses. Learning materials generated by campus-based staff are used throughout such provision, irrespective of mode, and all module sites include online streaming of lectures. Some of these distance-learning programmes are supported by tutorial staff at other institutions, in which case the University regards them as collaborative provision and manages them as such.

136 Where programmes are offered in multiple modes of study the University is committed to 'an equivalent standard of learning' across all modes, and it approves, monitors and reviews them together. The audit team found evidence to confirm this, although annual monitoring and periodic review gave little explicit attention to this mode of study. In one example, very little questionnaire feedback was obtained from distance-learning students, but the school's critical appraisal document for a periodic review did not appear to address this. The team considered that the University should encourage more explicit focus and reporting on distance-learning programmes in its procedures for monitoring and periodic review. It also agreed with the University's view that the general use of online questionnaire surveys would facilitate more effective collecting and use of feedback from distance-learning students.

137 Learner Support Services has appointed a Distance Learning Librarian, who offers specific support services to distance-learning students, and receives feedback from them via the virtual learning environment. Assessment committees and boards of examiners also address student performance across all modes. The same external examiners are used 'wherever possible' across all modes of study in a given programme. However, the audit team found that, in such cases, external examiners' reports did not always distinguish between programmes in different modes. The University will wish to give appropriate guidance to its external examiners in this regard.



138 Work-based learning is offered in about 30 per cent of the University's programmes, although the audit team found that this provision was concentrated mainly in two schools, particularly in health-related programmes and Foundation Degrees. Some student dissertations are linked to work-based learning. Specific provision is made for the management of work-based learning in Foundation Degrees, including the appointment of a support tutor and the use of a placement pack. The University is also involved in a centre of excellence for teaching and learning project to develop an assessment instrument for placements in all professional contexts (see Section 3.5 above). The team found that some students were very well supported in finding and fulfilling their placements, although others reported that support was less effective. Link lecturers had been appointed by one school to support its large numbers of placement students. The team considered that the University should consider monitoring the support of work-based learning more closely, and spreading good practice.

139 The audit team concluded that other modes of learning made an increasing contribution to the management of learning opportunities. This contribution was generally effective, although the University should ensure that its systems for the assurance of academic standards and quality work consistently and effectively in this area of rapidly growing importance.

### **3.7 Resources for learning**

140 The University is strongly committed to a student-centred approach to resources and services and has appointed a Director of Student Engagement who, with the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching, oversees a wide range of initiatives. The commitment to a student-centred approach includes a 'far-reaching strategic plan' for the enhancement of its estate including the physical learning environment. Its most recent development is the Richmond Building Atrium which incorporates social learning space and the Hub, a 'one-stop' centre for access to student services (see also Section 3.9 below). Students met by the audit team welcomed these developments with enthusiasm. The team found that the University had brought representatives of the student body into its working groups for the planning and development of all major investments and capital projects such as the Hub. It was currently discussing with students its options for future development of the library.

141 Library and information technology (IT) resources are managed by Learner Support Services, which has been reorganised so as to give what the institution describes as 'better-coordinated service'. Electronic library resources are used to offset any disadvantages caused when the buildings in which students are based, and the library, are on different sites. The University has adapted its library support to take account of its increased distance-learning provision by appointing a Distance Learning Librarian. Students met by the audit team reported that library and IT resources, and arrangements for access to them, were very effective, although some students found the library noisy at times.

142 The University keeps its library and IT services under review through student questionnaire surveys, particularly its stage evaluation questionnaire and periodic student satisfaction surveys. The audit team learned that Learner Support Services was made aware of issues for library and IT resources through the annual monitoring report process and its representatives' presence on school boards (or equivalent committees). Subject librarians also attend staff-student liaison committee meetings and thus obtain direct from student representatives in face-to-face meetings. However, given the variable compilation of annual monitoring reports already noted (see Section 3.2 above), the team found it difficult to see how the present arrangements could reliably provide consistent feedback from stage evaluation questionnaire surveys to Learner Support Services. The University might wish to consider the benefits of sending student survey data relating to library and IT provision directly to Learner Support Services.

143 The audit team found that the University's management of resources for learning made a strong contribution to the learning opportunities offered to students. The team considered that the University's involvement of students in working groups for the planning and development of

capital projects, as part of its strategic and coordinated institutional approach to the development of student engagement and support, constituted a feature of good practice.

### 3.8 Admissions policy

144 The University's Ordinances include a 'framework for admissions'. Entry requirements for all courses, including particular requirements for international students, are published in the Prospectus, on the University's website, and in programme specifications. Admission processes, for all courses and for postgraduate research, are published on the University website. Online application is available for some courses.

145 The University's Head of Admissions oversees the admissions process, links to the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), and the Clearing process, and also gives guidance on entry requirements for new programmes. The International Office supports international student applicants. The audit team found that admissions policies and requirements are reviewed from time to time by Academic Policy Committee, which has recently noted that they have not fully taken into consideration the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education*. However, work is in progress to address this within a set timetable, and consultations are taking place with those responsible for admissions in schools.

146 The University is strongly committed to widening participation, and states that it is 'highly successful' in this regard. The institution's commitment to widening participation, and to meeting the needs of its diverse student body, was noted as a feature of good practice in the last institutional audit. As part of this commitment, the University makes strenuous efforts to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body. Accordingly, it seeks to engage with potential students before they have thought of going into higher education, and to support them through the application process and the transition from school to the University. To this end it has developed strong liaison with schools in the city, a process led by the Head of Access and Widening Participation. This wide-ranging liaison programme includes summer schools, mentorships, a Student Associates Scheme, and the Children's University. In many cases these links are formalised in Compact agreements, through which the University provides a range of activities for potential students including an assessed summer school and an e-portfolio module supported by its own staff and those of the Compact schools. Through its Stepping Stones Project it seeks to encourage more students with vocational qualifications to enter University.

147 As part of its widening participation policy, the University has also invested strongly and effectively in its provision of support for students, particularly in their first year of study. This includes the building of the Hub, the provision of enhanced learner support through the Learner Development Unit, and a very extensive bursary scheme. The provision of student support is considered in more detail in section 3.9 below.

148 The institution publishes a comprehensive annual report on its widening participation programmes. Among the measures of its success in widening participation, the University draws attention to its proportion of students from ethnic minority groups and from low-participation neighbourhoods, which are significantly higher than the national benchmark, and to an award it has received for its commitment to supporting and increasing the number of young people who enter and succeed in higher education after being in care.

149 The audit team concluded that the University's admissions policy and practice contributed effectively to its management of learning opportunities. The team also considered that the University's successful institutional arrangements for widening participation constituted a feature of good practice.

150 The University stated that it has developed its regulations for the accreditation of prior learning using the *Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning*, published by QAA. Some schools make substantial use of accreditation of prior learning, but others less so. Accreditation of prior

learning was managed centrally until 2006-07 when it was devolved to schools. Principles and guidance for schools' management of accreditation of prior learning are published on the intranet. Further regulations for accreditation of prior learning are given in the Quality Assurance Handbook.

151 The audit team was told that, because the present arrangements for accreditation of prior learning were new, their operation had not yet been reviewed; it was also advised that further guidance for schools is planned. The team considered that this further guidance should include clear minimum requirements for schools' management of academic standards in accreditation of prior learning, together with systems for consistent, auditable reporting of the accreditation of prior learning process and its outcomes. The University should also keep this recently devolved process under review, to ensure consistency of practice and decision-making.

### 3.9 Student support

152 The University has adopted a strategic and coordinated institutional approach to the development of student engagement and support. This approach has been coherently planned and has four strands:

- bringing a range of student services, both administrative and support, together under one roof in the Hub and one administrative umbrella in Learner Support Services
- carrying out a review of learner support with a focus on students and their needs, adopting a proactive approach and creating the position of Director of Student Engagement to coordinate activities
- introducing new frameworks for student support covering induction, personal support, employability and classroom behaviour
- setting up local support mechanisms in the University's seven schools.

153 Concerns about retention, progression and engagement have led to a review of how the University provides student support and to structural reforms, including the redesignation of the Dean of Students' role as Director of Student Engagement with a brief to enhance the way the University interacts with its students. Staff felt that the Director of Student Engagement role was very valuable and offered a good way of dealing with student complaints, which tended to involve a number of units within the University, good liaison with schools, helpful support for deans and associate deans, teaching and learning and useful work with the Students' Union to develop its role better to suit the University's student profile.

154 In addition, an annual survey of the first year experience is carried out to inform developments. The First Year Experience Group provides a forum for discussing relevant issues and the Retention Task Team monitors absence and disengagement on a programme basis.

155 The Hub, a one-stop shop for student services, includes financial and information services, Registry, the International Office, cashiers and accommodation. From its meetings with students, it was clear to the audit team that students valued the Hub and appreciated having a one stop shop; they also praised the Learner Development Unit. The Unit runs a variety of sessions on study skills twice a week and the semester 1 2007-08 offering included 20 different events. In addition it offers one-to-one support and online resources, as well as sessions put on at the request of schools. The Unit monitors which schools student users come from and is able to identify hot spots and feed this back to schools.

156 The University's Disability Equality Scheme stresses the institution's commitment to equality of treatment, linked to its core value of 'confronting inequality, celebrating diversity'. This is delivered by the Disability Office, located in Learner Support Services, which offers a range of services from assessments to arranging for adjustments to be made and support to be offered in liaison with external agencies. Applicants who declare a disability on their UCAS form are invited to contact the Disability Office to discuss their needs and the support available.

157 Career Development Services is part of Learner Support Services. Its mission is to 'provide an integrated range of quality, career-focused services which meet the needs of our clients in the most effective way'. Career Development Services offer students guidance, events, workshops, information, accredited and assessed career and personal development modules and registers of vacancies. In the meetings with students, views of the Careers Service were more positive than in the student written submission, although a minority of students felt that their programme could do more to increase awareness of the industry that most of its graduates would be entering. Based on the Higher Education Statistics Agency data, graduate employability is relatively strong. However, the institution acknowledges that the data are skewed by the large number of students on health profession courses, and that performance in other areas is less strong. Deans have therefore been asked to explore the issues in courses identified as having less satisfactory employment destinations. The situation is also exacerbated by University of Bradford graduates' lack of mobility; 69 per cent of graduates are employed in Yorkshire and 32 per cent in the Bradford postcode area, which is unable to generate sufficient graduate-level jobs. To improve the situation an employability strategy is under development and the audit team saw evidence of this policy being implemented in one school.

158 International students are supported by the International Office. It provides an Enrolment Booklet for International Students, a Pick Me Up Service from the airport and the railway station, an information point at the beginning of the academic year and a programme of social activities. Its webpages also provide useful pre and post-arrival information. The international students who met the audit team praised its work. The Language Unit provides preparatory courses, as well as in-session English courses which are free to users.

159 Student representatives confirmed that everyone had a personal tutor, but the audit team found widely varying views of how well the system operated. The University has undertaken a review of the Personal Support Framework and a statement of good practice has been produced, setting out the responsibilities of personal support tutors and students, and the support and recognition to be provided to these tutors. Senate agreed that the new framework be approved and implemented with effect from 2007-08, with a review before 2008-09. The new framework requires each school to have a clear policy which sets out how the system will operate and what the responsibilities of the school, the personal support tutor and the student are. This leaves schools with some latitude to decide how the system should operate, but with a clear responsibility to monitor how it operates. Stage evaluation questionnaires include a question about personal tutorial support, enabling the general position to be monitored through annual monitoring. Some schools also have year tutors as an additional line of student support, but there is no institutional requirement to do so.

160 The University has implemented a framework for students' personal development planning, but awareness of this was patchy among students who met with the audit team. However, the team did see examples of personal development planning being rolled out and used on programmes. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy devotes a section to personal development planning and sets out three models of how it might operate, allowing schools to make their own choice.

161 Work continues on the development of a framework for the induction of students, with implementation scheduled for 2008-09. Students felt they had generally had a good induction and there was some awareness of the implementation of the University's policy that induction should be an ongoing process rather than a short period at the beginning of the academic year. Staff stressed that the new policy was still at an early stage in being rolled out.

162 Overall, the audit team considers that the University has effective arrangements for the management of student support and has adopted a strategic and coordinated approach to the development of student engagement and support, which the team identified as a feature of good practice.

### 3.10 Staff support (including staff development)

163 The University obtained Investors in People (IiP) status in 2002 and has aligned its Human Resource Strategy more closely with the core business objectives of the University. One of the 20 key performance indicators used in the University's balanced scorecard is retention of IiP status. It runs a staff satisfaction survey every few years and makes the results available to staff.

164 The key human resources aims of the Corporate Strategy relate to enhancing leadership and management capacity, equipping staff to work with colleagues and students from multicultural backgrounds, rewarding excellence, harmonising the main terms and conditions of employment and ensuring that decision-making structures and processes are effective and efficient. The Strategy also included a review of the promotion criteria, including recognition and reward of individual excellence in teaching and learning effectiveness.

165 The University supports staff in the provision of high-quality learning opportunities through its regular quality assurance processes, as well as peer support, training and education and its revised performance review scheme. The University identifies the Course Approval and Review Panel and the role Teaching Quality Enhancement Group staff play in course approval and review as key mechanisms for staff support. Teaching Quality Enhancement Group provides the Learning Support Seminar Series, as well as undertaking consultancy and project work with staff in schools. Data showed that Teaching Quality Enhancement Group had run 60 events in 2006-07 involving 2,108 participant hours.

166 Mentoring arrangements are in place to support new members of staff as part of probationary arrangements. New academic staff also have to undertake the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice (recognised by HEA), unless they can demonstrate an equivalent qualification or experience, but completion rates have been poor and a review is under way. This has clarified the workload allowance for participants and will make completion of the programme a condition for successful completion of probation. There is also induction training for new staff and a two-day orientation event every September for those new to teaching. Staff new to teaching get 75 per cent of a normal workload in order to allow them time to prepare and establish their careers. A staff handbook for new staff is available online and is reviewed annually.

167 The University has a very high number of hourly-paid academic staff (1,315), who in principle have the same staff development and support opportunities as full-time staff. They are covered by performance review, are members of academic committees and can attend development events. There is considerable variation in their roles, from a few hours a year to considerable contributions.

168 PhD students who teach are supposed to receive mandatory training in teaching, but the audit team found that in some schools other forms of preparation for the role were favoured. The University will wish to keep its arrangements for preparing PhD students to teach under review.

169 There is a different version of the staff handbook for managers. A staff development programme is offered by People Development covering a range of topics from research support to personal professional development and IT. Schools also provide their own context-specific training in learning and teaching practices.

170 The University has recently introduced a revised performance review method for staff, which is in the early stages of implementation, starting from the top downwards. A key aim of the process is to identify staff development needs.

171 Workload allowances for managerial roles are made on a school-by-school basis, but it was made clear to the audit team that there was the flexibility to review the adequacy of the allowances in the light of experience. Work is ongoing to develop an institution-wide approach to workload management. Issues of succession planning are clearly being addressed and training

and development is designed to help develop the leaders of tomorrow without presuming that the succession is predetermined or non-competitive.

172 The University generally offers good support to its academic staff, has suitable arrangements in place to support academics new to teaching and offers a range of good quality staff development opportunities which contribute to the effectiveness of its management of the quality of learning opportunities.

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

173 The University has a holistic approach to learning opportunities and the educational experience which also encompasses enhancement. Institutional strategies are seen as key to guiding enhancement. The revised Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and associated strategies (E-Strategy, EcoVersity) have led to the first school learning, teaching and assessment plans (2006-07). The Briefing Paper stated that the University has moved away from a prescriptive methodology and recognised that different approaches to enhancement can be appropriate in different disciplines and therefore it has developed institutional frameworks within which schools can develop their local pedagogy.

174 It was clear to the audit team that the institution sees quality assurance and quality enhancement as being interlinked. The latest Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy has specifically incorporated quality assurance in learning and teaching alongside the existing elements related to enhancement thus reinforcing the linkages. Reviewing the guidelines for the production of school learning, teaching and assessment plans, it was apparent to the team that these also covered a range of issues including school regulations and guidance, school structures as well as the actions the school is taking in response to the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy.

175 In discussion with a range of staff, the audit team heard enhancement described variously as continuous improvement, responding to changing circumstances, rectifying problems, making step-changes, and building on a culture of sharing good practice. Although the team considered that a devolved approach brings certain advantages and that tailoring initiatives to local circumstances is appropriate, it noted that the varying understandings of enhancement noted above were not being brought together within the University and that there was a risk that an overall strategic approach to enhancement might be lost.

176 The University stated that it had an evidence-based approach to change, with the use of pilot projects to test and refine initiatives. The audit team saw examples of how this approach worked in practice including the piloting, evaluation and roll out of Pebblepad® as the University's personal development planning platform. This has been overseen by the Learning And Teaching Sub-Committee, with funding from the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund, and its roll out is now being supported by the Teaching Quality Enhancement Group with both training and dissemination events at which participants could share practice. Another example that the team explored was the review of student engagement, which resulted in concerted action at institutional level (see Section 3.9). Some of these developments have been funded through Learning, Teaching and Assessment project funding (Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund) and supported by the Teaching Quality Enhancement Group. Both these examples demonstrated to the team that the University was capable of a strategic and coordinated institutional approach to enhancement. However, the team considered that this approach was not being taken comprehensively and consistently.

177 The audit team heard that the University was intending to develop a quality enhancement strategy although this was still at an early stage of conception and that the investment in learning and teaching had been given a higher profile. The team found these developments to be positive and encourages the University to take this opportunity to articulate more clearly its understanding

of enhancement and how it relates to assurance; identify the key enhancement themes; and, building on its own good practice, develop an overarching and systematic approach to implementation.

#### **4.1 Management information - quality enhancement**

178 The University's approach to management information is multilayered. At institutional level the University has introduced a balanced scorecard method for performance management. A number of the high-level measures relate to enhancement, either directly or indirectly, including achieving targets in the student satisfaction survey, achieving a target place in the Times Higher Education Supplement's league table, implementing the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and delivering the E-Strategy. The audit team noted the quality of information and rigorous analysis in the executive summary of the Balanced Scorecard report and associated reports for each key measure for the year 2006-07. The team was also told that the balanced scorecards for school key performance indicators, which had been produced for the first time this academic year, had been helpful in ensuring that staff were more aware of the University's priorities and in enhancing their understanding of the planning process. The team also noted the work to review the monitoring information and data provision to support learning and teaching which will inform the school level reporting through the balanced scorecard and the more general plans to embed the approach further at all levels. The team considered the developing use of the balanced scorecard approach to align central plans with school plans and with performance management to be a feature of good practice.

179 The University collects and assembles data from a wide variety of sources and at many levels which it states it uses to inform enhancement, including student feedback through staff-student liaison committees, module and programme evaluation questionnaires, the National Student Survey results and external examiners' reports. The audit team found evidence that in some cases there was a link between this information and enhancement, for instance responding to the weak area of assessment and feedback in the National Student Survey resulted in Teaching Quality Enhancement Group developing workshops and a list of resources which drew together material both from within the University and from HEA. However, in other cases the link was less clear. For instance, it was less apparent that the summary of the external examiners' reports produced by Academic Standards Support Unit could be used to inform enhancement and it was noted that the external examiners' report form used in the 2006-07 academic year did not explicitly ask for comment on areas of particular strength or distinctive features. In relation to other student surveys, the University was aware of their current limitations and had recently established a working group to review and coordinate the way in which these surveys are used. The team considered this to be a positive development and encourages the University to take a strategic overview of the information and data which are required to develop, support and review the emerging University quality enhancement strategy.

#### **4.2 Good practice**

180 During the audit, the team heard much of the culture of continuous improvement. Staff described many opportunities where they could share good practice. Examples included discussions at school boards and University working parties while many others occurred in less formal situations such as the monthly meetings between the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching, associate deans, teaching and learning, Teaching Quality Enhancement Group and others. The team noted this balance between the formal and informal, which built on the collegiate culture of the institution, but considered that opportunities to record and disseminate good practice more widely and systematically were being missed.

181 The Briefing Paper also noted specific mechanisms to identify and capture good practice including the National Student Survey, external examiners' reports and annual monitoring reports. The audit team noted the discussion of these items in various committee meetings but

could find little evidence that good practice was being formally captured in a way which could be disseminated to a wider audience. For instance, the associate deans, teaching and learning had made a presentation on the Annual Monitoring Exercise 2005-06 at the start of the September Academic Policy Committee meeting. Appended to the minutes was a list of bullet points identified as 'worthy of University-wide consideration' but it was unclear to the team how these could be systematically disseminated, given the limited recorded information available.

182 Engagement with external initiatives is in part based on senior staff playing key roles in national organisations and bringing this experience to their work within the University. The audit team heard how a number of academic staff have brought their knowledge of external developments back into the University, for instance by sharing their experience with colleagues at meetings. However, the team was again not convinced that there were mechanisms for systematically capturing and sharing this knowledge more widely.

183 The Teaching Quality Enhancement Group plays a valuable role in disseminating good practice and supporting curriculum development initiatives and has taken the lead in a number of externally funded projects particularly from HEA and JISC. The learning support seminars and the annual Conference on Learning, Teaching and Assessment, coordinated by the Teaching Quality Enhancement Group were key mechanisms for dissemination and sharing of good practice. The audit team found these events covered a wide range of learning and teaching issues, were well attended and valued by staff. A number of presentations and other resources were made available following the conference on the Teaching Quality Enhancement Group website. The team considered these to be potentially useful in achieving deeper and wider dissemination and encourages the Teaching Quality Enhancement Group to expand these types of resources.

184 In capturing internal good practice, the Teaching Quality Enhancement Group has used both annual monitoring and periodic review as an opportunity to learn about local initiatives and developments. The audit team considered the involvement of Teaching Quality Enhancement Group on course approval and review teams to be an effective mechanism for capturing good practice. However, the team also heard that the recent devolution of annual reporting to schools (see above Section 3.2) was making it more difficult for Teaching Quality Enhancement Group to fulfil this role.

185 It was clear to the audit team that good practice was being shared across the institution but that this was often by means of peer interactions including participation in committees, working groups, the Course Approval and Review Panel and the learning support seminars. It was less clear how good practice was being captured in a way and with a level of detail which could then be shared widely. Although the team acknowledges that the current approach can be effective for those who are well engaged with the learning and teaching agenda, it considered that a more structured approach would be beneficial. It would, therefore, be desirable for the University to consider means for the systematic capture and dissemination of good practice across the institution.

### **4.3 Staff development and reward**

186 Staff development related to enhancement is a primary aim of Teaching Quality Enhancement Group which runs both the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice, accredited by HEA, and a learning support seminar series for staff. Additionally the Teaching Quality Enhancement Group offers consultancy, project support and guidance on obtaining HEA practitioner status as well as tailored training for individual schools. Issues related to the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice have been dealt with earlier (see above Section 3.10) and the audit team was encouraged that completion of this programme will become a condition of the satisfactory completion of probation for new staff who do not hold an equivalent qualification or experience.



187 Examining the learning support seminars scheduled for the current session, it was clear to the audit team that many of these are linked to the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy including e-learning, student support and retention, and education for sustainable development and thereby support enhancement. As outlined earlier, the team heard that these events were well received and well attended although, from the information and statistics the team received, it would be difficult for the University to analyse the depth and breadth of the impact of these seminars. The team noted that the programme was overseen by the Staff Development and Training Subcommittee and that the revised performance review would be also used to identify training needs. Nevertheless, given the role of these seminars in supporting the enhancement agenda, the team felt that the University might benefit from a deeper analysis of the range of staff who attend and the spread of take-up across schools. In this way it could more clearly understand how the enhancement agenda was being supported and disseminated through these staff development events.

188 The Performance Recognition Scheme rewards members of staff who have made an exceptional contribution beyond the norm, while promotion for academic staff is based on role descriptors. The role descriptor for Academic Grade 10, the highest grade in the single spine, places particular emphasis on learning and teaching. The criteria for promotion to Personal Chair include outstanding performance in one or more of the fields of research, knowledge transfer, scholarship and teaching, although candidates are expected to have at least a national reputation in research. The associated role descriptor (academic senior staff) seems to place considerably more emphasis on research.

189 In discussions, the audit team heard that the rewards for learning and teaching had improved in recent years. Examples of staff who had received performance recognition awards and others who had been promoted were offered. The team did note that the action in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy to 'review promotion criteria at all levels to include recognition for proven excellence in supporting student learning' was ongoing. From the evidence seen, the team was content that the University was making progress in ensuring that staff can be appropriately rewarded for their contributions to learning and teaching.

190 The two awards related to learning and teaching: University Learning and Teaching Fellowships, and the Baroness Lockwood Award for Distinguished Teaching have both recently been realigned with the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme. As these schemes are both recent, the audit team could not yet judge their effectiveness. However, the team heard staff speak enthusiastically about the changes and considered the new arrangements, including the 25 per cent reduction in workload for Fellows, and project funding plus an automatic increment for recipients of the Baroness Lockwood Award for Distinguished Teaching, to be significant.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

191 The University will be subject to a separate audit of its collaborative provision.

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

192 The Research Degrees Committee monitors the quality assurance and enhancement of postgraduate research provision. Management of academic standards for research programmes is characterised by shared school and institutional responsibilities. Responsibility for management of quality assurance processes and for advising schools has recently transferred from Graduate Registry to the Academic Standards Support Unit. The other central unit which supports postgraduate research students is the Graduate School, now part of Learner Support Services, which provides research training.

193 The University publishes three codes of practice: for directors of postgraduate research and research supervisors, for research students and for research student examiners. These were identified as good practice by the recent review of research degree provision for being clear and comprehensive. The audit team concurred with this view and considered that they are well aligned to the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

194 The University recognised that there was diversity of practice in relation to postgraduate research provision and undertook a review in order to understand better the procedures employed by schools. The audit team judged that the review addressed many of the key aspects of the *Code of practice*. The team was reassured that the intention was to follow up actions during the current academic year, and the University is encouraged to move towards greater consistency in the practice of supporting and supervising postgraduate students at school level.

## 6.1 The research environment

195 The Research Degrees Committee identified the need to ensure that there is an appropriate research environment within schools. A number of examples of well developed research environments were identified with such features as involvement in seminar series where students are encouraged to submit papers, email networks to discuss methodological issues and external guest speakers specifically invited for PhD students. Students who met with the audit team spoke positively of the support from and involvement with their schools. The team was content that the research environment within many schools was well developed and that the University was taking measures to share best practice.

196 There appeared to be some uncertainty, however, about the role of the Graduate School in providing a supplementary research environment in the institution. The University's review of the Graduate School in 2005-06, while acknowledging its key role in research training, confirmed that the natural home for postgraduate research students was in their home school. Conversely, the report also acknowledged that a central Graduate School can be of benefit where there are a large number of international students who can gain from the opportunity to meet with other similar students and for fostering interdisciplinary work. It was less clear to the audit team that this latter role of the Graduate School was understood. Also the recent relocation meant that there was less dedicated central space to support this. Postgraduate students confirmed that the Graduate School might be an appropriate mechanism for creating a deeper and broader research environment but felt that it was not currently set up to deliver this.

197 The audit team recognised that the recommendations of the Graduate School Review Group were still in progress but encourages the University to clarify the role of the Graduate School and to consider the most appropriate mechanisms for providing an enhanced research environment for postgraduate research students to foster an interdisciplinary research community.

## 6.2 Selection, admission and induction of students

198 The Code of Practice for Directors of Postgraduate Research and Research Supervisors outlines the selection, admission and induction process in detail.

199 The University's postgraduate research review identified that the procedures within schools were in line with the University code despite some local variation. It identified a number of issues for further consideration including clarifying the role and importance of the research proposal in reaching decisions and how to assess the competence of applicants who are not interviewed, especially with regard to their English language. The audit team considered that the application procedures were robust and encourages the University to clarify its policy with regard to the outstanding issues.

200 A postgraduate induction course, run by the Graduate School, takes place twice a year. It is a requirement that all new students attend as soon as possible after enrolment. Additional

induction, relevant to the specific area of research, is provided by supervisors or within departments. The students confirmed to the auditors that induction had taken place both within the Graduate School and within their schools. The audit team considered that variation in the induction experience was appropriate.

### **6.3 Supervision**

201 All research students are supervised by a team comprising at least two supervisors, with one designated 'principal supervisor' who has day-to day responsibility. The supervisory team is expected to meet with the student at least once per year and have access to the notes of all supervisory meetings in order to ensure that the student is receiving clear and appropriate guidance. The allocation of two supervisors, one principal and one secondary or associate supervisor was confirmed by schools in their meetings as part of the postgraduate research review.

202 All new supervisors are required to attend appropriate training in research supervision and experienced supervisors are also encouraged to participate in the biannual research supervision workshop. The audit team saw the current programme for the workshop as well as a list of attendees from the previous year and confirmed that this was embedded in the process.

### **6.4 Progress and review arrangements**

203 The monitoring and reviewing of progress of research students is done through a variety of mechanisms. The initial meeting lays out the process and expectations and is documented and agreed by both parties; subsequent formal supervisory meetings are recorded and a note agreed between the supervisor and the student; a postgraduate research training record is created to record all training received and ideally incorporates a 'Training Needs Analysis'; a formal assessment of progress is undertaken at the end of each year; the principal supervisor makes an annual report on each student, on which the student has the opportunity to comment, through the Director of Postgraduate Research to the Research Degrees Committee with a recommendation as to whether the candidate should continue.

204 The University's postgraduate research review revealed some variation in practice across schools, citing two schools as operating transparent and structured processes while acknowledging that others had less robust systems. The audit team concurs with the recommendation that the University should seek to ensure that a consistent approach is applied to the monitoring of students and the provision of timely feedback in order to ensure equity and fairness.

205 The arrangements for transfer of registrations from MPhil to PhD are normally part of the annual report procedures. Written reports from the student and their supervisor are considered by a panel, consisting of the supervisor and Director of Postgraduate Research and it is recommended that a third person from an appropriate background is also involved. The panel makes a recommendation to the Research Degrees Committee. The University's postgraduate research review found that the majority of schools operated a transfer process broadly in line with these requirements although there were instances where the level of formality was not clear. The audit team noted the work being undertaken to gain greater rigour and consistency in the arrangements for transfer of registration and commended the efforts to spread good practice by Academic Standards Support Unit.

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

206 As well as the induction programme, all students are required to participate in a programme of research-related courses. Some students are enrolled on the modular Social Sciences Research Training Programme. Others participate in both generic and transferable skills training as well as discipline-specific training. Appropriate courses are provided by the Graduate School, within individual schools and departments, and externally.

207 The Graduate School has responsibility for the Economic and Social Research Committee-accredited Social Sciences Research Training Programme, leading to the degree of Master in Research Methods (MRes). The audit team found that there had been ongoing difficulties with the resourcing of the programme, resulting in significant student dissatisfaction, which was outlined in the annual monitoring report for the 2005-06 academic year, although the external examiners were complimentary about the students' work and general approach by the course team. Students who met the team confirmed the difficulties and described the problems as unresolved. At the same time the Graduate School Review Group identified difficulties with resourcing and governance and recommended significant changes. Since that time, the Graduate School has moved into Learner Support Services and this has been accompanied by delegation of responsibility for quality assurance matters to the School of Social and International Studies (including annual monitoring). A governance committee for the MRes programme now reports to participating school boards. The team heard that this new arrangement was welcomed by key staff involved in overseeing and managing the programme, and the team encourages the University to keep these arrangements under review to ensure that the student experience on these programmes remains positive and that staff responsible have the appropriate resources to deliver a programme of appropriate quality.

208 In addition, the Graduate School coordinates a series of Short Courses for Research and a spring training week specifically to meet the needs of part-time and external students.

209 Students indicated that these courses had been very helpful and had allowed them to address particular training needs at the appropriate time. The audit team also noted that these courses had been considered as part of the Review of the Graduate School and that there was to be an audit in order to determine the appropriate balance between subject specialist and generic training. The team considered that these short courses were well constructed and filled a broad range of student training requirements. The team commended the University's willingness to develop further and embed these training opportunities while balancing them with the training opportunities offered within schools.

## **6.6 Feedback mechanisms**

210 The Director of Postgraduate Research within a school has the responsibility to ensure feedback mechanisms are in place, including appropriate representation on staff-student liaison committees.

211 The special Review of research degree programmes confirmed that these arrangements were appropriate but noted that the processes were new. The University's postgraduate research review found that in the majority of schools there were a number of opportunities for students to provide feedback including representation on school committees, involvement in staff-student liaison committees, feedback forms during short courses and modules, and comments made during monitoring meetings. Students who met with the audit team confirmed the mechanisms for feedback within their own schools and indicated their broad satisfaction with these processes. It was clear to the team that there was considerable variation in both the mechanisms and place where the postgraduate student voice was represented but the team noted that the University is intending to develop more consistent policy and guidance in this area.

212 The audit team noted that the creation of the Postgraduate Research Forum had been initially discussed in January 2006 by the Research Degrees Committee. The intention was to bring together a diverse group of students across the University to share experience with regard to their research work and identify any generic problems. It was intended that nominated members of the Forum would serve as student representatives on the Research Degrees Committee and that the Committee would receive the minutes of Forum meetings.

213 The audit team found some confusion about the existence and role of the Postgraduate Research Forum. The postgraduate students that met with team were unaware of, or unclear

about, the Forum. Staff, too, variously described it as a formal mechanism for student representation, as an informal group of research students on the Graduate School accredited programme, and as an informal social grouping. Reviewing the Research Degrees Committee minutes, it was not evident that minutes of the Postgraduate Research Forum had been considered at subsequent meetings of the Research Degrees Committee and it was stated that the Committee was still considering options with regard to postgraduate student representation on the Research Degrees Committee. Staff acknowledged that although there had been postgraduate research student representatives on the Research Degrees Committee during the last two academic years, both had now completed their studies and as yet no replacements had been found.

214 Although there are reasonable mechanisms for feedback from postgraduate research students at school level, the audit team considered that these students should have an opportunity to raise issues which are of wider concern, such as the quality of research training and the levels of support. Given the confusion, lack of clarity and the need for continuity, it is desirable that the University ensures consistent representation of postgraduate research students at institutional level.

### **6.7 Assessment**

215 Research degrees are examined by internal and external examiners who are approved by Research Degrees Committee. Following the oral examination, a joint final report from the external and internal examiners is sent to the Committee for formal approval. In reviewing both the agendas and minutes for the Part B confidential business of the Committee, the audit team was satisfied that the Committee was undertaking its responsibilities in these matters.

### **6.8 Representations, complaints and appeals arrangements**

216 Postgraduate research students who seek advice on any difficulty related to the supervision process can contact the Director of Postgraduate Research within a school or, if they wish to discuss the matter outside of their school, are advised to contact the Graduate School. They may be referred on to the head of department, dean of school or Chair of the Research Degrees Committee.

217 The University's postgraduate research review demonstrated that the majority of schools understood these arrangements and that these were made clear to students at induction and in handbooks. The audit team also heard from the students how a particular complaint had been dealt with by the Dean of School taking forward the issue. The process described corresponded with that outlined above and the team considered that this process was effective.

218 Research students can appeal to the Research Degrees Committee following an unsatisfactory report during the programme or failure at the end. Appeals are initially considered by the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching. The special Review of research degree programmes considered these arrangements to be appropriate and satisfactory and in reviewing the agendas and minutes for the confidential business of the Research Degrees Committee, the audit team found no cases had been considered in the last five years. The team was content that arrangements at school level to deal with issues as they arise were working satisfactorily.

## **Section 7: Published information**

219 The accuracy and completeness of published documents is the responsibility of the Head of Marketing and Communications, who in turn reports to the Director of Academic Administration. Marketing and Communications' work is monitored by the External Relations Committee, which reports to the Corporate and Financial Strategy Board. The latter refers any relevant issues to the Academic Policy Committee.

220 The Academic Policy Committee through its quality assurance processes ensures that key information about the programmes is accurate and complete. No information on new courses may be published until Phase 1 approval has been granted.

221 Students who met with the audit team felt that the written information supplied to them in advance of starting their courses was fair and accurate. Students can express their views on the value of published information through staff-student liaison committees and evaluation questionnaires, which are covered by annual monitoring and reported to the Academic Policy Committee.

222 The University regulates internal information about programmes by setting a minimum standard, while leaving schools with considerable freedom to decide what they publish. There is also a database for modules which ensures consistent information and a template for programme specifications, as well as guidance notes. Programme specifications for all programmes are available on the web. The audit team found that students were happy with the material provided for them about their programmes and their modules. The University's module outlines were considered by the team to be rather minimal (see above Section 3.2), but the students valued the fuller module guides supplied to them.

223 The institution has decided to respond to HEFCE's requirement that external examiners' reports be shared with student representatives by continuing its approach of including the review of the reports and the schools' responses in the annual monitoring process. The audit team found that not all the students it met were clear about this process. The University may wish to consider whether students could be offered more opportunities to see the reports.

224 The University operates a publication scheme under the Freedom of Information Act and has a webpage link to publicly available data. This covers the items listed in Annex F of HEFCE's *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase Two Outcomes* and many others. Internal student survey results are not at present available electronically, but the survey review group is considering a new institutional survey, whose results could be used externally and internally. The audit team's overall impression was of an institution which adopted a very open approach to making information available.

225 There is a comprehensive Quality Assurance Handbook available online which sets out clearly the University's procedures and processes. The University also has codes of practice, which are easily accessible from one webpage and are arranged to show clearly which sections of the *Code of practice* they relate to.

226 The audit team did find some inconsistencies in web-based documents. The external examiners' report form on the website did not include key questions about comparability of academic standards (see above Section 2.2). The institution will wish to address these.

227 The University intends to link appropriate sections of the University website to the new Unistats website, which went live in November 2007, and work on this was due to commence in early 2008.

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

**RG358a 04/08**

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ISBN 978 1 84482 817 3

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786