

University of East London

March 2010

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 East London (the University) from 22 to 26 March 2010 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. On this occasion the team carried out a hybrid Institutional audit. The hybrid process is used where QAA considers that it is not practicable to consider an institution's collaborative provision as part of standard Institutional audit, or that a separate audit activity focusing solely on this provision is not necessary.

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University has a planned, integrated and strategic approach to quality enhancement which underpins and brings cohesion to a broad range of enhancement activities.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The University has put in place procedures for the management of its postgraduate research programmes which meet the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Published information

Reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes about its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following area as being good practice:

- the University's planned, integrated and strategic approach to quality enhancement, which both underpins and brings cohesion to a broad range of enhancement activities (paragraph 60).

Recommendations for action

The audit team considers it would be advisable for the University to:

- strengthen the institutional-level oversight of external examiner appointment procedures (paragraph 14)
- strengthen the provision, analysis and utilisation of data on student retention and achievement at programme level (paragraph 29)
- strengthen the oversight of postgraduate research degree programmes at both institutional and school levels by improving the quality of its progression and completion data (paragraphs 30, 94-95).

It would be desirable for the University to:

- ensure that all research students who teach and/or assess are formally prepared for these roles (paragraphs 54, 91).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 In its vision statement the University draws attention to a number of distinctive institutional attributes:

- diversity
- inclusiveness
- pedagogic innovation
- employability
- regionality
- engagement with social, cultural and economic development.

Its priorities are:

- continuing to improve the quality of the student experience
- developing its educational portfolio
- supporting research and knowledge exchange
- enhancing the staff experience.

2 Following a period of estate rationalisation the University is now situated on three Campuses. Its main Campus is in Docklands and houses the Schools of Architecture and the Visual Arts; Computing, Information Technology and Engineering; Humanities and Social Sciences; and the Business and Graduate Schools. There are two Campuses in Stratford, which between them are home to the Cass School of Education and the Schools of Health and Bioscience; Law; and Psychology. It employs around 750 academic staff (550 full-time equivalents); its student population is approximately 27,000, of which almost three-quarters are undergraduates, the large majority full-time. The diverse nature of this population is a source of institutional pride: while over four-fifths of campus-based students are from London, over two-thirds are from ethnic minorities and half from social classes traditionally under-represented in higher education.

3 Around one-third of students are studying off-campus in collaborative (23 per cent) or distance learning (11 per cent) programmes. The size and complexity of the University's collaborative provision led to the present audit following the hybrid model. This involved visits to two partner organisations: a National Health Service Trust and a small charitable institution, where meetings were held with managers, teaching staff and students. Evidence accrued in these visits is incorporated in the report and not separately identified.

The information base for the audit

4 The University provided a briefing paper and supporting documentation. The index to the Briefing Paper was referenced to sources of evidence to illustrate the University's approach to managing the security of the academic standards of awards and the quality of its educational provision. The audit team had access to the previous Institutional and Collaborative audit reports (respectively March 2005 and May 2006) and the Review of research degree programmes (July

2006), and was provided with copies of all documents referenced in the Briefing Paper and other documentation requested, in most cases in electronic form. The team received extensive materials in respect of the two partner organisations visited, and acknowledges with gratitude the willing cooperation of those partners. The University of East London Students' Union produced a written submission, setting out students' views on the accuracy of information provided to them, their experience as learners and their role in quality management. The team thanks the Union for its submission.

Developments since the last audit

5 The University's previous Institutional audit identified as features of good practice (in brief):

- the openness of senior managers
- several aspects of staff development and its implementation
- support for part-time staff and students
- the work of learning technology advisers
- student support
- the strategic approach of the skills curriculum
- Skillzone (see paragraph 50).

The audit advised the University to ensure that quality procedures were followed in programme changes and to enhance its monitoring of engagement with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). It indicated the desirability for the University to encourage greater staff awareness of the Academic Infrastructure and to give a higher profile to its Student Charter.

6 Collaborative provision was the subject of a separate audit in 2006. This audit identified as good practice (in brief):

- the development of collaborative provision as an extension of a commitment to widening participation
- the reciprocity of relationships with partner organisation staff
- the integrated approach to staff development
- the oversight of approval conditions.

The audit advised the University to:

- ensure that the monitoring and review of collaborative programmes matched that of approvals
- enhance its evaluation and reflection on the student experience
- assure itself of the student experience during partnership termination.

It was considered desirable for the University to strengthen the development and support of newly-appointed academic link staff.

7 The present audit team confirms that the University has generally built upon the good practice and addressed the recommendations of both audits. Further discussion about the collaborative provision recommendations appears later (see paragraph 65).

8 Significant developments since the previous audits include:

- major estate development

- revised Assessment and Academic Integrity Policies
- a new Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy
- the development of an integrated approach to distance learning and e-learning (see paragraph 43).

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

9 Ultimate responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement, and for setting and managing academic standards, lies with Academic Board, which exercises it largely through a range of committees (including Quality and Standards, and Learning and Teaching). Quality and Standards Committee in turn has four sub-committees: Collaborations Monitoring External Examiners; Validation and Review; and Research Degrees. Much of the responsibility for day-to-day quality management is delegated to academic schools, the boards of which may in turn delegate operational responsibility to subordinate bodies, normally operating at field (clusters of cognate modules) and programme levels. Comment is made later (see paragraph 29) on the role of programmes in what the University terms a fully modular system. The committee structure is supported by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement team, which monitors implementation of, and advises schools on, institutional procedures and requirements.

10 The keys to the maintenance and assurance of academic quality and standards are programme approval and validation, the review and enhancement process (annual monitoring), and academic (periodic) review. The review and enhancement process is conducted at school level and involves contributions from, and analysis of, all programmes within the purview of the school concerned. The ensuing overview report, with an associated action plan (implementation of which is carefully monitored), is sent to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team, which develops an institutional overview report, ultimately for Academic Board. These and other quality management procedures are subject to a system of institution-wide audit, which the University considers contributes significantly to ensuring compliance and consistency in a substantially devolved framework, and which the audit team confirms is fit for purpose.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

External examiners

11 The University appoints external examiners for taught programmes mainly at field level, though each school also has an award external examiner, to confirm the award of credit and the eligibility of students for awards.

12 Appropriate procedures exist for the management of external examiners' appointment, induction, support and reporting, and for the institutional-level monitoring and oversight of their reports and the responses made to them. These procedures are widely available and meet the expectations of the *Code of practice*. The audit team noted that external examiners submit reports on a template designed to ensure consistency and comprehensiveness: any indication of concern in an area central to academic standards necessitates the production and implementation of an action plan. The reports are used constructively in monitoring and review activities, and are available to students through the virtual learning environment.

13 Nevertheless, the audit team noted that school-level inconsistencies in the methods deployed to track external examiner appointments potentially affect the capacity of the External Examiners Subcommittee to assure the University of the exercise of due process. In particular, while the procedures require a nomination form to be signed off by both the dean and the chair of the relevant school quality standing committee, in some schools the absence of any reference to the matter in that committee's minutes suggests that nominations are on occasion submitted to the Subcommittee without formal school approval.

14 In addition, the audit team noted that the External Examiners Subcommittee normally considers nominations by means of email correspondence. While this process is efficiently managed, the Subcommittee's capacity to oversee, monitor, review and enhance school-level activities is limited by the fact that it has met only four times since November 2007 (a particularly significant gap occurring between December 2008 and November 2009), its members relying on detailed monthly updates from the chair. This virtual approach, while clearly economical in terms of time, limits the Subcommittee's capacity to oversee and minute the effectiveness, and in particular timeliness, of school nomination procedures. Hence, for example, two external examinerships for one field lay vacant between September 2008 and April 2009. The team, taking the view that this situation constitutes a potential risk to academic standards, considers it advisable for the University to strengthen the institutional-level oversight of external examiner appointment procedures.

Programme approval, monitoring and review

15 For ease of reference, all matters relating to approval, monitoring and review are considered in this section, whether they relate primarily to academic standards or to assuring the quality of students' learning opportunities.

16 Programme approval involves preliminary proposals being given in-principle consideration by the Corporate Management Team, which, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, heads the University's executive structure. For programmes to be delivered on-campus, detailed validation documents, including programme specifications, are then prepared, and, following school-level scrutiny (which includes comments from two institutionally-approved external advisers), are submitted to Validation and Review Subcommittee which makes recommendations, ultimately to Academic Board, identifying also instances of good practice and issues for consideration. All procedures, including criteria for panel membership, are independent of the proposers and set out in the Quality Manual.

17 The review and enhancement process, conducted at school level, involves the submission of detailed field and programme-level reports from which are derived school-level overview reports identifying general themes and specific concerns; these in turn are considered by Validation and Review Subcommittee. While the audit team found the process generally appropriately scoped and well-conducted, it draws attention later to a significant reservation concerning the use of statistical data (see paragraph 29).

18 Academic review takes place every six years, either at school-level or, in the case of larger or more complex schools, manageable units. A self-evaluation document is considered by a panel consisting of institutional staff external to the area under review, external advisers, and (where appropriate) professional body representatives. The audit team found clear evidence of external expertise being used to help assure academic standards. Students, some of whom transpired in the course of the audit to be less than clear about their role in the process, are not currently involved as panel members (though such membership is planned from the next academic year), but they do meet the panel, as do members of programme teams, recent graduates and employers. Review reports, with conditions or recommendations where applicable, are considered at institutional level, both individually and, for quality enhancement purposes, thematically.

19 Clear procedures exist in respect of programme modification or discontinuation. Responsibility for approving changes involving less than 25 per cent of a programme is devolved to schools; programme suspension or withdrawal involves the submission of a pro forma application to Validation and Review Subcommittee.

20 The audit team, notwithstanding its reservations about the use of statistical information, confirms that programme approval, monitoring and review are generally thorough in design and execution, and contribute to the assurance and management of academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

21 For the sake of convenience, all aspects of institutional engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points are described in this section.

22 The audit team found, from documentary study and discussions with institutional and partner organisation staff, that the University makes effective use of relevant components of the Academic Infrastructure in approval, monitoring and review. It ensures in particular that programme specifications, which were familiar to the students met in the course of the audit, are published in the current format, which is one which it has developed and advanced over time (see also paragraph 99). The University has engaged with European Standards and Guidelines, and prepares diploma supplements for all graduates. It devolves operational responsibility for engagement with PSRBs to schools, which, however, receive significant support from the Quality Assurance and Enhancement team, particularly but not exclusively in the context of panel visits.

23 The audit team confirms that:

- the University is an outward-facing institution which makes consistent use of expert external advice
- existing procedures enable it to assure itself that full account is taken of PSRB requirements and advice
- its use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points contributes to assuring both academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities.

Assessment policies and regulations

24 The University's Assessment Policy reflects a framework which aspires to be student-friendly, transparent and equitable. This Policy marked a shift in approach and presentation, involving, among other things, a new assessment tariff which required amendments to institution-wide module descriptors. Its introduction in 2007 was supported by a training programme and monitoring grids, which have now been extended to all relevant partner organisations. Members of the University's academic staff spoke about the Policy in positive terms, on the main ground that it had encouraged a more imaginative approach to assessment. It received a slightly more mixed, but still predominantly positive, response from partner organisation staff. The audit team confirms that the Policy is:

- clear in design and presentation and accessible through the virtual learning environment
- well-supported by a Good Practice Guide
- understood by the staff whom the team met.

The team also confirms, from documentary study, that the two-tier system of field and award assessment boards operates effectively and consistently.

25 Assessment requirements are clear and explicit. Students who met the audit team, while acknowledging the value of the advance publication of assessment timetables, suggested that the other side of this coin is a degree of inflexibility which can lead to deadline bunching. The audit team was also told that the requirement that assessed work be returned within four working weeks is not invariably met.

26 The audit team, while acknowledging (not least in the context of the University's student-centred policy) student reservations over deadline bunching and delays in the return of assessed work, confirms that current assessment procedures enable the University to assure itself of the academic standards of its awards.

Management information - statistics

27 The University holds data on all students, including those in partner organisations, on what it describes as a sophisticated and integrated record system. Available data includes enrolment numbers, gender, age and ethnicity analysis, entry qualifications, and awards. The system can be interrogated by all staff by either of two web-based reporting tools, in the use of both of which training is offered.

28 The University describes its academic framework as fully modular. Nevertheless, the framework also acknowledges the existence and integrity of programmes, and, in the view of the audit team, the University's approach to student data does not adequately acknowledge the continuing role of programmes in its portfolio. Hence, programme-level statistical data is not readily available and not, therefore, amenable to routine analysis. While basic retention data at programme level can be interrogated by viewing year-on-year cohort information, the modular system and student movement in the course of any academic year limit the utility of this data for programme cohort analysis. In particular, programme-specific retention rates are not published, systemically analysed or necessarily discussed in the review and enhancement process.

29 The institutional approach to awards is based on credit accumulation, and the University claims to have no concept of progression. The audit team noted that, while module completion data is well-used and widely understood (with poorly-performing modules comprehensively scrutinised), programme retention data is in practice assigned lower priority. The lack of routinely available programme-level data led the team to conclude that the University cannot readily and systematically identify programme-specific issues affecting student achievement; for example, whether particular module combinations have different probable outcomes in terms of retention or achievement, and, if so, how such differences might best be addressed. Overall, the team found that the University's use of management information to assure itself of the academic standards of programmes (as opposed to fields) is limited. It is advisable that the University strengthen the analysis and utilisation of data on student retention and achievement at programme level.

30 The institutional-level postgraduate research and taught doctorate statistical data made available to the audit team was not sufficiently detailed for the school-level retention of postgraduate students to be accurately determined by cohort analysis. Nevertheless, the team noted an overview report for academic year 2008-09, urging the University to address, as a matter of urgency, a significant anomaly between centrally-available and school-level data on doctoral completions. Any reliance on incomplete or inaccurate data would inevitably restrict the University's capacity to identify issues potentially impinging on both the quality of learning opportunities and the academic standards of awards. It is advisable for the University to strengthen the oversight of postgraduate research degree programmes at both institutional and school levels by improving the quality of its progression and completion data (see also paragraphs 94-95).

31 Overall, confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

32 All aspects of programme approval, monitoring and review and of institutional engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points were described in Section 2.

Management information (student feedback)

33 As noted above (paragraph 1), the University identifies improving the quality of the student experience as an institutional priority: accordingly, capturing and utilising student feedback are major preoccupations. The main mechanisms for doing so are:

- an institution-wide student satisfaction survey
- module evaluation questionnaires
- comment boxes in public spaces
- the National Student Survey (NSS) (where the University acknowledges that increasing participation remains a challenge)
- the representative system (see paragraph 36).

34 Procedures exist to ensure that findings of significance in feedback surveys are addressed at school level; academic staff members who met the audit team were aware of both these procedures and the survey mechanisms themselves, and confirmed their fitness for purpose.

The role of students in quality assurance

35 Students are represented at all levels of the committee structure, up to and including the Board of Governors. A distinctive feature of the representation system is the Joint Student-Staff Committee, chaired by a member of the Corporate Management Team, the membership of which includes staff and students from each school, Union sabbatical officers, and a Library representative. While the University acknowledges that closing the feedback loop to students also remains a challenge, the minutes of this Committee, which confirm that student issues are consistently followed up, constitute evidence of the seriousness with which the University takes such issues.

36 At institutional level, where representation is through the Students' Union, there is evidence of sound attendance and engagement. At school and programme levels, however, the audit team learnt that the position of representative is seldom fiercely contested, some representatives are nominated not elected, and representatives' attendance at meetings is often poor. The University acknowledges the problem, which it has sought to address by a number of means (including a collaborative project with the Students' Union), none of them wholly successful. While the team found evidence of some school and programme-level representatives contributing constructively to committee deliberations, it learnt from students that in many cases representatives' engagement with their constituents, particularly in respect of closing feedback loops, canvassing student views, and addressing the concerns of part-time students, is limited.

37 The audit team, while finding evidence of student participation in quality management, found less active or enthusiastic engagement, with students without representative functions only variably well-informed about the mechanisms available to them, including their role in the review and enhancement process and the availability of external examiners' and review and enhancement reports. The team concludes that, while institutional structures and procedures enable students to engage fully with quality assurance, the University faces challenges, stemming in part from the demographic profile of its student body, in encouraging them to do so. The University, which acknowledges these challenges, continues to work with the Students' Union, which has developed an online training package, to increase student motivation and involvement in quality assurance.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

38 The University expects all newly appointed academic staff to be research-active and to have, or be working towards, a doctorate. The audit team was informed that the proportion of academic staff holding such an award increased from 26 per cent to 48 per cent in the three years up to the end of academic year 2008-09. In addition to requiring members of staff to

undertake discipline-based research, scholarship and/or knowledge transfer, the University is active in the promotion of pedagogical research, a feature of which has been the facilitation of school and service-level learning and teaching research groups (see paragraph 60) as loci for the discussion and promotion of academic practice.

39 Academic staff provided the audit team with examples of the pedagogical use of their own research and professional practice, confirming also that they draw on such expertise in module and programme development. Some postgraduate students cited the research of named members of staff as a contributory reason for their application.

40 Overall, the University has taken steps towards integrating staff research, scholarly activity and professional engagement, and programme development and delivery.

Other modes of study

41 The University's previous collaborative provision audit report cited as a feature of good practice its 'development of its collaborative provision as an extension of its vision, mission and aspiration for widening participation in, and access to, higher education'. This commitment was emphasised and clarified in the Briefing Paper prepared for the present audit, in the broader context of its extensive distance learning provision.

42 The University's definitions of distance, blended, synchronous and work-based learning, set out in the Quality Manual, are used consistently throughout the documentation seen by the audit team. The University is committed to the development of blended learning in on-campus provision, and the team noted that this has been the subject of discussion in the learning and teaching research groups and that the University increasingly expects all modules to have a presence in the virtual learning environment.

43 The regulatory framework for distance learning is incorporated in the Manual of General Regulations. The virtual learning environment is the principal mechanism for the delivery of distance learning, its managers being centrally involved from the outset in programme design and planning. The audit team, having studied programme documentation, confirms the integrated nature of academic planning from inception to completion.

44 With programmes delivered through flexible and distributed learning subject to the same approval, monitoring and review processes as on-campus programmes, bespoke online learning support available to the students concerned, and students given full access to institutional facilities (in addition to any partner provision), the University is in a position to assure itself of the appropriateness of the quality of learning opportunities for distance learning students.

Resources for learning

45 The University offers library and computing facilities on all three campuses; it drew the audit team's attention to high library usage rates, long opening hours, significant past and planned investment, and the availability of extensive computer facilities, mainly in large open plan clusters. All learning resources are reviewed annually at institutional level, and are included in the student satisfaction and other surveys.

46 Students, while generally satisfied with learning resources and particularly appreciative of the virtual learning environment (views consistent with the findings of the student satisfaction survey), drew attention to problems with noise and disruptive behaviour in one library. The audit team learnt that this problem arose from the architecture and design of the building, and confirms that the University has responded by creating quiet and silent zones, issuing conduct codes, and providing additional staff training and security. It is responding equally positively to concerns about cramped conditions in an older library by investing heavily in a new building, scheduled for completion in 2013.

Admissions policy

47 The University's approach to admissions, which involves acknowledging the legitimacy of a wide range of qualifications, reflects its commitment to providing routes into higher education for non-traditional entrants; students spoke highly to the audit team of the efficiency and effectiveness of the process. The main outcomes of a review of admissions undertaken in the light of the publication of the revised *Section 10* of the *Code of practice* in 2006 were procedural clarifications rather than a change of direction. The Admissions Office collaborates closely with school-level admissions staff (and, where appropriate, the International Office) to ensure uniform understanding of the policy and its implementation.

48 This policy is complemented by a policy on the accreditation of prior learning, revised in academic year 2008-09, which brings together in a single document the criteria for considering applications based on certificated and experiential learning. For the purpose of implementation, each school has an accreditation of experiential learning panel, which advises the assessment board, the decision-making body, on specific cases. Potential candidates are supported by a new website providing both an information portal and application forms (with associated guidance). The audit team saw evidence that the processes required by the policy are effectively implemented.

49 Admissions issues are raised in the course of the review and enhancement process, but, as noted above (see paragraph 29), while detailed discussion takes place at field level, systematic qualitative data analysis is not routinely undertaken at programme or school level.

Student support

50 The University has extensive systems and services to support its diverse student body. These services are available in both Docklands and Stratford. They cover a range of academic, financial, health, employment and personal needs and are designed to be offered in a flexible and student-centred manner. Central student support is provided through specialised units coordinated by the Director of Student Services: all central services have pages on the University's website, and their performance is routinely monitored at senior level. The audit team particularly noted:

- the University's commitment to induction (which includes an introduction to Student Services)
- the Student Charter (a comprehensive statement of entitlements and obligations)
- Skillzone (an integrated service providing employability support in an informal and supportive environment)
- support for students with special needs
- support for international students
- training in English language skills.

Students who met the team were generally appreciative of the services available, while drawing attention also to some difficulties experienced by part-time students in accessing services in the evenings. The team also noted that the students were overall less persuaded than University officers of the value the Student Charter adds to the quality of their experience.

51 All students are assigned a personal tutor (two in the case of those taking joint programmes). Students who met the audit team were aware of the system, and, with some reservations, reported personal tutors, as well as other members of staff, readily accessible. Although personal tutoring arrangements vary across schools, the team confirms that, overall, the system is satisfactory.

52 The University provides comprehensive support in a manner generally appropriate to a diverse student body, and is able, through the review and enhancement process in central services and schools, to maintain an appropriate oversight of this provision.

Staff support (including staff development)

53 The University's staff development programme, aspects of which were identified as a feature of good practice in the University's previous Institutional and Collaborative provision audits, is widely publicised. The provision, which is designed to address the needs of all categories of staff, ranges from the work of the Development Centre (for senior school and service managers) to the Navigator and Springboard programmes for (respectively) male and female staff in non-management roles. In addition, a suite of development events in learning technologies complements the work of the school-based learning technology advisers to ensure functional staff competence.

54 Newly-appointed lecturers lacking two years' prior experience in higher education are normally required to undertake an award-bearing programme on learning and teaching, or, with effect from the present academic year, a more concise and focused lecturers' development programme. This programme is available also to staff with a more limited teaching role, including doctoral students hired as part-time teaching assistants. The audit team learnt, however, that in some cases it is possible for teaching assistants not to take the programme at all, relying on mentoring by experienced members of staff. The team was also informed that it is normal, given the programme's single starting date, for it to run concurrently with teaching. It is desirable that the University ensure that all research students who teach and/or assess are formally prepared for these roles (see also paragraph 91).

55 The University has comprehensive policies for staff recruitment, appointment, induction, probation and promotion, and procedures to oversee their implementation; staff responsibilities relating to these functions are largely addressed in the staff development programme. The audit team found that the integration of institutional priorities and personal development ambitions, and centrally and locally-delivered staff development, supports the institutional commitment to enhancing the staff experience (see paragraph 1). The team, noting also the re-achievement of the Investors in People standard, confirms that the University's approach to staff development is well-conceived and appropriate to an institution which describes itself as a learning community in the widest sense.

56 At the time of the audit a revised peer review of teaching policy had been newly approved: its aims include increased staff engagement and delivering a more inclusive and enhancement-oriented approach. It would be premature to comment further, though it is noteworthy that the University has responded decisively to a problem of variable participation in, and enthusiasm for, the system currently operating.

57 The University awards teaching fellowships for specific projects, disseminating the results by various means, formal and informal, including lunchtime discussion forums and annual learning and teaching conferences.

58 The audit team confirms that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the learning opportunities available to its students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

59 The University regards quality enhancement as central to its educational philosophy and practice, and aims to provide reliable and demonstrable improvements in the quality of learning opportunities. Its success in doing so is monitored through the review and enhancement process and annual quality enhancement report, and overseen by Learning and Teaching Committee and Quality and Standards Committee.

60 The audit team confirms that quality enhancement underpins and brings cohesion to a range of institutional activities which are of themselves valuable though not necessarily distinctive. In particular the team noted:

- the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, which encourages the promotion of good practice and championship of enhancement and innovation
- the Pathfinder programme project on e-learning practice, resulting in a framework for future action; a staff development needs analysis tool; a suite of change management activities; and case studies of good practice
- the learning and teaching research group system (see paragraph 38), under which schools and services apply to institute such a group to bring together cognate researchers to contribute to improving students' learning opportunities
- the learning enhancement opportunities system, introduced to fund internal projects evaluating an aspect of learning, teaching or assessment with transferable potential
- the development of the role of leaders in learning and teaching, placed in all schools to lead enhancement activities and support the implementation of institutional policies
- the thoughtful and creative way in which student academic difficulties have been addressed, notably poor literacy levels (by extending language skills support), poor referencing skills (by a quiz and the possible introduction of a common approach), and plagiarism (by an Academic Integrity Policy and quiz)
- the annual Field and Programme Leaders' Event, to facilitate enhancement in areas which include retention, employer engagement and inclusive practice
- open discussion forums on all campuses
- targeted training events and discussion forums for programme leaders, quality leaders, collaborative programme administrators and officers serving school committees
- the institutional-level partner enhancement review system in collaborative provision (see paragraph 74), which monitors the effectiveness of existing procedures in the light of experience, identifying areas where remedial action is necessary or enhancement possible.

The University's planned, integrated and strategic approach to quality enhancement, which both underpins and brings cohesion to a broad range of enhancement activities, is a feature of good practice.

61 The review and enhancement process, involving in particular an institutional overview report prepared by the Validation and Review Subcommittee, identifies common themes, areas of good practice for dissemination and matters for consideration by Academic Board (normally deriving from external examiners' reports). Academic Board in turn institutes and monitors remedial action. The audit team, having studied relevant documentation for campus-based and collaborative programmes, found the process a useful vehicle for embedding enhancement in quality management. In particular, convincing evidence was found of enhancement arising from external examiners' comments, both individually and as synthesised in the annual external examiner overview report.

62 The audit team found that the University has a planned, integrated and strategic approach to quality enhancement, which underpins and brings cohesion to a broad range of enhancement activities.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

The University's approach to managing its collaborative arrangements

63 In spite of having, as yet, no overarching collaborative strategy, the University is heavily involved in collaborative provision. Its development of such provision as an extension of its widening participation agenda was identified as a feature of good practice in its collaborative provision audit (see paragraph 6). Its continuing commitment is evidenced in its International Strategy, the International Office Annual Plan, and school-level partnership strategies, which are required to articulate with the International Strategy and which offer evidence of serious reflection having taken place on current practice and future direction.

64 The University's six models of collaborative partnership (franchise; joint awards; validation; distributed delivery; dual awards; and articulation) are clearly explained in the Quality Manual, as is the manner in which the quality management of collaborative provision articulates with that of on-campus programmes. The audit team examined examples of several partnership categories, both in its visits to partner organisations (see paragraph 3) and in documentary study. As with on-campus provision, operational responsibility for quality and standards rests with Quality and Standards Committee: it discharges this responsibility mainly through the Validation and Review Subcommittee (see paragraph 16) and the Collaborations Monitoring Subcommittee (see paragraph 65).

65 As noted above (see paragraph 6), in its Collaborative provision audit the University was advised to ensure that the monitoring and review of collaborative programmes maintain a level of institutional oversight equivalent to that of approvals, and to put into place procedures for ensuring the quality of the student experience during partnership termination. The University responded by establishing the Collaborations Monitoring Subcommittee (with partner organisation representation), reporting to Quality and Standards Committee and charged, among other things, with overseeing the review and enhancement process for collaborative programmes and considering proposals for termination. The audit team found the Subcommittee a useful addition to the committee structure. The University was also advised to enhance its ability to reflect on the student experience in collaborative programmes: it responded by instituting a model, requiring, as a minimum, the establishment of a programme committee, and module level feedback. The team confirms, from discussions and scrutiny of documentation associated with the review and enhancement process, that students have opportunities to contribute to programme committees either directly or through the representative system.

66 A memorandum of cooperation signed on behalf of the University and the partner organisation is required: such memoranda, which are reviewed triennially, specify the respective responsibilities of the signatories. The audit team confirms that they meet all relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*. Responsibility for managing all aspects of partnership establishment lies with the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team, which also maintains the partnership database. Once established, operational responsibility for managing the partnership passes to the school concerned, where it is normally assigned to academic link tutors and link administrators, supported by a committee structure and relevant guidelines and procedures. The team learned from partner organisation staff that the system is effective, well-regarded. It is supplemented by links with the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team, Student Services and the managers of the online support system, and by institutional and school-level committee membership and attendance at staff development events.

67 One variation to these procedures exists. The nature of the University's association with a large National Health Service Trust (through which it offers programmes to over 800 students) is such that it approved the institution of the Trust's own quality management structure (on all elements of which, however, it has *ex officio* representation). In some respects the University regards the Trust as akin to a school: hence it is subject to academic review, and its procedures

are required to be approved by the University prior to implementation. Over time the University has devolved responsibility for:

- consideration of minor programme modifications
- nomination of external examiners and external advisers for academic review
- initial approval of new programme proposals (prior to University determination)
- setting procedures and a timetable for the consideration of review and enhancement process reports
- preparation of an overview review and enhancement report.

The Trust also has its own versions, approved by the University, of the modular academic framework, assessment policy and postgraduate research degree regulations. Assessment boards are held at the Trust and chaired by Trust staff, all of whom have been trained by the University. The audit team considers this devolution appropriately conceived and responsibly managed.

68 The audit team confirms that the University has in place a comprehensive framework for the management of the quality and standards and learning opportunities relating to its collaborative provision.

External examiners and assessment in collaborative provision

69 Procedures for the appointment, induction and reporting of external examiners largely replicate those for on-campus provision. Where possible a common examiner is appointed to oversee identical or cognate modules offered in multiple locations: the audit team found evidence of such examiners commenting on student performance on modules and programmes delivered across centres, thereby being in a position to comment individually on each centre. Results are considered at the relevant field board, which, other than in the case of the Trust, is chaired by a senior member of University staff, with external examiners in attendance; school award boards confirm awards for all relevant students.

70 The University's Assessment Policy applies to all models of collaboration other than articulation. The University currently only has one partnership where a language other than English is used, and, in accordance with requirements, that arrangement is overseen by a bilingual external examiner. Other than in the case of the Trust, transcripts and diploma supplements are provided by the University: diploma supplements scrutinised by the audit team specify place of study and language of instruction.

71 Staff from partner organisations informed the audit team that they understand and are confident in implementing the University's assessment requirements and procedures. Students were equally clear about assessment criteria, which are readily available, and most were content with the timeliness and usefulness of markers' feedback.

Approval, monitoring and review of collaborative arrangements

72 Approval arrangements distinguish between the approval of a partner organisation and of programmes, though in both cases the criteria involved emphasise the integrity of academic quality and standards, requiring evidence that the candidate organisation is of appropriate standing and not prepared to place quality and standards at risk for financial gain. Approval of a candidate organisation takes the form of due diligence, a procedure overseen from different perspectives by the Secretary and Registrar and the Chief Management Accountant, both acting on behalf of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic), who signs off the process, once completed.

73 Programme approval events for collaborative and distance learning provision are preceded by planning meetings, at which major issues for consideration are identified. Particular attention is given to the consideration of the curricula vitae of staff appointed to teach. The events,

involving an appropriately constituted panel containing two institutionally-approved external advisers, are organised by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team and normally held at the partner organisation. Validation and Review Subcommittee oversees the process, including monitoring the fulfilment of any conditions; responses to recommendations are identified in the review and enhancement process. Partner organisation staff confirmed to the audit team that the approval process is well-understood, and that appropriate support is offered. The team, while noting one procedural deviation wherein a programme approval was made conditional on completion of the approval of the prospective overseas partner concerned, concluded that the University conducts both partner and programme approval activities in an appropriately professional manner.

74 As noted above (see paragraph 60), at the end of the first year of a partnership, a partner enhancement review monitors the effectiveness of existing procedures in the light of experience, and identifies areas where remedial action is necessary or enhancement possible. On the basis of documentary study, the audit team confirms that the process is supportive but incisive, and contributes both to assuring and enhancing the operational integrity of the collaboration.

75 The review and enhancement process for collaborative partnerships broadly mirrors that for on-campus provision, subject largely to such necessary modifications as involving partner organisation staff and ensuring that reports are reviewed by the Collaborations Monitoring Subcommittee. The University has identified a number of challenges currently being addressed, and the audit team, which agrees that meeting them would enhance the process, particularly notes that some review and enhancement reports largely replicate the previous year's report: this should, however, be addressed in the Validation and Review Subcommittee's triennial review. The team confirms the satisfactory nature of the process as a whole, which is aided by partner organisation involvement; in particular the Collaborations Monitoring Subcommittee takes a very active approach to reviews, and these are valued by partner organisations.

76 Collaborative review of partnerships, which takes place quinquennially and procedurally broadly follows that of academic review (see paragraph 18), incorporates review of both the partnership itself and all programmes offered by the organisation concerned. The audit team found that, generally, the process operates in accordance with expectations. Nevertheless, it concurs with the University's acknowledgement that the system is not as yet fully embedded, and notes in particular that a condition relating to strengthening the moderation of assessments prior to them being sent to external examiners appeared in both the 2004 and 2009 collaborative reviews of one overseas partner in spite of ostensibly having been resolved in the 2004 action plan. The University is strongly encouraged to review its procedures to minimise the likelihood of such a situation recurring.

77 Overall, the audit team concludes that the University's systems for the approval, monitoring and review of its collaborative partnerships and programmes are appropriate, and meet the expectations of the *Code of practice*.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

78 The University's requirements for meeting the expectations of external reference points match those for on-campus provision, and the same quality management procedures are in operation. The audit team confirms, from documentary study and from visits to partner organisations, that such organisations are conversant with, and consistently address, the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points.

Student support and involvement in quality management

79 The University enrolls all collaborative provision students on its student administration system. Link tutors are responsible for ensuring that admissions are conducted in accordance with the criteria specified in the memorandum of cooperation: this procedure is well understood. Partner organisations are required to have a procedure for the accreditation of prior certificated

and experiential learning equivalent to its own; responsibility for overseeing arrangements and awarding credit is devolved to the school assessment board concerned. These arrangements operate satisfactorily.

80 Partner organisations have a range of operational responsibilities. These are detailed in the memorandum of cooperation, supplemented by a suite of internal handbooks and guidelines. These responsibilities are:

- direct support for both staff and students
- the provision of student handbooks and related information, a requirement audited in the review and enhancement process
- responsibility is for partner organisations to have in place mechanisms for collecting student feedback at module level
- they are required to hold programme committees
- they are obligated to provide specified levels of learning resources, (collaborative provision students are also entitled to access online resources from the University).

In respect of these five requirements, students confirmed to the audit team that:

- direct support services from the partner organisation (and, where appropriate, the University) are readily available
- they had received a range of information both pre and post enrolment, which had been generally accurate and helpful
- they had undergone an appropriate induction
- they had received a range of handbooks, which were again useful
- they know how to access complaints and appeals procedures
- they are invited to comment on each module
- normally access to learning resources, including inter-library loans and online resources, is easily achieved, albeit that not all partner organisations are required to have an on-site library.

81 The audit team learnt from programme representatives in partner organisations that awareness and utilisation of the online training package for student representatives offered through the Student Union are variable (see also paragraph 37). Nevertheless, arrangements are broadly satisfactory, with some students citing issues addressed in programme committees (with consequential actions posted on notice-boards), and others saying that the accessibility of staff means that most issues are addressed quickly but informally.

82 While the audit team encourages the University to monitor the take-up of training for programme representatives, overall the University ensures the provision of appropriate support for students with partner organisations, relevant information, mechanisms for gathering module-level feedback, arrangements for representation, and learning resources.

Staff development

83 The University specifies staff development requirements for partner organisations in the Collaborations Handbook. Such development, responsibility for delivering or overseeing which is largely devolved to schools, often takes place at the partner's premises and, while tailored to individual needs, must include teaching and learning strategies, assessment strategies and requirements, and University policies and procedures. The University also organises institutional-level partner development conferences in support of major policy changes; and partner

organisation staff are invited to the annual teaching, learning and assessment conference. The audit team confirms that appropriate development opportunities are available to (and sometimes required of) partner organisation staff.

84 The University requires partner organisations to institute a system for the peer review of teaching during the first year of a partnership. While the audit team confirms that this requirement is monitored in the course of partner enhancement review, discussions with partner organisation staff showed that not all partners are compliant with it. The team encourages the University to keep this issue under active review.

85 The audit team confirms that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards and quality of learning opportunities in programmes delivered on its behalf by collaborative partners.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

86 The University recruits postgraduate research students to all schools, boosting numbers by the provision of 30 studentships. The audit team found the framework for the quality management of research degree provision appropriate in conception and clearly explained. At institutional level, responsibility for overseeing provision is now vested in Research Degrees Subcommittee, which replaced the Postgraduate Review Subcommittee at the start of the present academic year. This body reports to Quality and Standards Committee, is chaired by the Director of the Graduate School, takes admission, supervision, upgrade and examination decisions, and advises on changes to procedures and regulations. At school level, school research degrees subcommittees monitor the quality of learning opportunities. In each school, day-to-day management responsibility for the individual student's programme is vested in a director of studies; the research degrees leader champions research degrees generally. Research degree students who met the audit team were generally appreciative of the conditions and facilities provided for them, the support structures in existence and the experience and helpfulness of their supervisors.

The career path of research degree students

87 The University has procedures governing the selection, admission, induction, training, supervision, review and examination of postgraduate research students. MPhil/PhD candidates initially apply to the Graduate School (which also provides introductory advice and guidance) for forwarding to the academic school concerned; where a favourable view is taken, a recommendation for registration is made to the University Research Degrees Subcommittee, the jurisdiction of which extends to the research components of professional doctorates but not to other elements of such programmes. Since the audit team noted that in spite of having been considered at school level, a number of these recommendations are neither complete nor accurate and are therefore referred back for further work, the University would find it helpful to improve school-level monitoring.

88 Formally, induction is an institutional-level responsibility, with additional provision for international students; this, however, can be supplemented by school-based provision. Students informed the audit team that school induction sessions are particularly useful, involving as they do introductions to supervisors, more senior students (some of whom provide continuing as well as initial support), procedures, expectations and information sources. They regard the Graduate School as particularly helpful at admission stage. The audit team found arrangements for the selection, admission and induction of research degree students fit for purpose.

89 Supervisory teams are constituted of a director of studies and at least one additional supervisor. Appropriate criteria exist for approval as supervisor and for the collective experience of supervisory teams: they are monitored by Research Degrees Subcommittee. The University recognises supervision as an element in workload allocation, and currently sets the maximum

supervisory load as nine (subject to variation in specified circumstances). This policy, which does not fully address the different levels of demand made of directors of studies and other supervisors, is currently under consideration, though the fact that the University does not specify a minimum frequency for supervisions may reduce the precision with which such differences can be quantified. While the audit team found a small number of instances of non-compliance, in all cases these were detected by Research Degrees Subcommittee and referred back for reconsideration. New supervisors are required to take a day-long staff development programme within six months of commencement, and continuing support is available. Supervisors confirmed the effectiveness of these procedures, and students their general contentment with all aspects of supervision. The team confirms that arrangements for the supervision of research students are satisfactory.

90 The University, which expresses a strong commitment to supporting research students' personal, professional and career development, has arrangements in place for research skills development. Responsibility for delivering the researcher development programme is shared between the Graduate School and the academic school concerned. While the Graduate School's generic contribution is well-understood and efficiently delivered, the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey shows that not all schools are discharging their responsibility to provide students with a skills audit. The audit team, which was informed that a more formal approach is under discussion, encourages the University to take steps to ensure that this commitment is invariably met.

91 Some postgraduate research students serve as teaching assistants, an arrangement which the University is increasingly formalising. A maximum hourly commitment is now in place, and all teaching assistants with fewer than two years' teaching experience are required as a minimum to take the newly-constituted lecturers' development programme (see paragraph 54). The audit team found that this requirement is not universally enforced. It is therefore desirable for the University to ensure that all research students who teach and/or assess are formally prepared for these roles.

92 Research degree students have opportunities to provide feedback on their experiences, though in practice many issues are resolved informally as they arise. The University has responded constructively to the findings of successive postgraduate research experience surveys; a Postgraduate Research External Advisory Group meets annually to obtain feedback on research degree programmes from external parties.

93 As noted earlier (see paragraph 86), at the start of the present academic year the University replaced its Postgraduate Review Subcommittee with the Research Degrees Subcommittee. Whereas the former reported to Research Committee, the latter reports to Quality and Standards Committee. In discussion with the University the audit team learnt that the rationale for this is to draw on the expertise of the parent committee, to heighten the integration of research degrees with the remainder of its educational portfolio, and to increase the attention paid to research degrees.

94 The Subcommittee's terms of reference include monitoring and evaluating the success of research degree programmes on the basis of relevant data. The audit team confirms that, at its second meeting, it duly considered annual reports from school research degree subcommittees, commenting critically on the absence of data or lack of analysis thereof in three reports and identifying one exemplary report for dissemination. While the predecessor body did not routinely comment on the quality of, or analyse, data contained in school reports, on several occasions it noted concerns about institutional review reports, in particular the accuracy of data (especially on completion rates), the quality of analysis of such data, the omission of data, and the difficulty of obtaining additional accurate data. The team noted, from the minutes of the present Subcommittee's first meeting, that the University had begun responding to these problems by the start of the present academic year, the Graduate School had initiated an analysis of completion data, including the provision of statistical evidence for future consideration, and it considered that the development of a 'culture of completion...must be given time to mature'.

95 At the time of the audit and after five months' existence, the Subcommittee had yet to submit a report to Quality and Standards Committee, in spite of the fact that the Committee's terms of reference had been amended to allow this to be done. Members of staff who met the audit team were unable to describe or analyse any changes resulting from the new reporting line or terms of reference. While the team notes that a presentation on completion timescales, withdrawals and point of withdrawal was made to Academic Board in the month prior to the audit, it is unable to confirm either that the University is in a position to generate routine analysis of statistical data on postgraduate research progression and completion at institutional or school level, or that Quality and Standards Committee is fully apprised of the concerns and uncertainties surrounding this issue. It is advisable that the University strengthen the oversight of postgraduate research degree programmes at both institutional and school levels by improving the quality of its progression and completion data.

96 Formal procedures govern all aspects of the assessment of research students, including the composition of examining committees and complaints and appeals. Students who met the audit team confirmed that information about assessment is clear, and that they are confident of being able to find any necessary additional information when required.

97 Notwithstanding the above recommendation, the University has put in place procedures for the management of its research programmes which meet the expectations of the *Code of practice*.

Section 7: Published information

98 The University publishes extensive information in hard copy and online, aiming to make it timely, accurate, complete and accessible. It identifies four main information sources: the institutional website; programme specifications; prospectuses; and programme leaflets; in addition, all students are provided with a memory stick providing access to a wide variety of information and a handbook, and the Student Charter (see paragraph 50). Centrally-managed sign-off procedures exist for all these categories other than programme leaflets, which are a school responsibility, as are the student-facing web pages produced by schools and services. Guidelines are published to increase consistency, a style guide and related editorial advice are provided, and a Publications Forum has been instituted, to bring together the Publications team and relevant school and service representatives. The team had access to a wide range of published information, which it found clear, current and helpful to students.

99 Consistency of format and accuracy in programme specifications are achieved by the use of bespoke templates for undergraduate, postgraduate and professional doctoral programmes, and for programmes delivered by distance learning. Monitoring programme specifications is a responsibility of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team; they are also scrutinised in programme monitoring and review. The audit team studied a number of programme specifications: these were clearly expressed, accessible to students and consistent in format.

100 For collaborative provision, the University's marketing and communications guidelines for partner organisations are detailed in the memorandum of cooperation and the Collaborations Handbook. The audit team confirms that the University, either through the Corporate Marketing Team or the International Office, monitors all publicity and marketing materials annually prior to approval. The International Office also monitors partner organisations' websites on a monthly basis, aided by in-house staff conversant with the languages concerned.

101 Students who met the audit team commented favourably on the accuracy and accessibility of the information provided, confirming their confidence in being able to locate any necessary information; they especially appreciated the virtual learning environment. While not wholly familiar with the contents of the Student Charter, they confirmed that they had received a copy and know of its online availability. They informed the team that they had received a

handbook for each module, that these contained detailed, accurate and clear information on learning outcomes and assessment, and should they need more information they were confident it would be provided. Although this view was not wholly consistent with the comment in the written submission that more detailed module information would be appreciated, the University plans to address the issue by migrating to a single source for module data at the start of the next academic year.

102 It is confirmed that the externally available information required by the Higher Education Funding Council for England guidelines is published on the University's website and that the Teaching Quality Information on the Unistats website appears accurate and complete.

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

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