

University of Derby

November 2009

Annex to the report

Contents

Introduction	3
Outcomes of the Institutional audit	3
Institutional approach to quality enhancement	3
Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students	3
Published information	3
Features of good practice	3
Recommendations for action	4
Section 1: Introduction and background	4
The institution and its mission	4
The information base for the audit	5
Developments since the last audit	5
Institutional framework for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities	7
Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards	10
Approval, monitoring and review of award standards	10
External examiners	11
Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points	12
Assessment policies and regulations	13
Management information - statistics	14
Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities	16
Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points	16
Approval, monitoring and review of programmes	16
Monitoring and review of programmes	16
Management information - feedback from students	17
Role of students in quality assurance	17
Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities	19
Other modes of study	20

Resources for learning	21
Admissions policy	22
Student support	23
Staff support (including staff development)	25
Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement	27
Section 5: Collaborative arrangements	28
Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students	28
Section 7: Published information	32

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Derby from November 23-27 2009 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the University of Derby 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.

As the University of Derby will be subject to a separate audit of its collaborative provision, these judgements do not apply to that provision.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit found the University's commitment to enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities evident in the structures and processes of management and embedded in the inclusive, open and reflective culture of the institution

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The University is actively growing its research activity from a modest base while being mindful that the environment for postgraduate research students, and their associated experience, meet the precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the comprehensive and integrated planning and quality processes which guide the priorities and actions of the University at institutional and faculty level (paragraph 19)
- the development of a culture of inclusivity, openness and self-reflection which underpins the successful operation of the University's quality assurance and quality enhancement processes (paragraph 37)
- the work of the External Examiner Sub-Committee and development of the database of external examiners (paragraph 57)
- the development of a closer working relationship between the University Executive and the Students' Union (paragraph 96)
- the well thought-out approach to the University's engagement with employers (paragraph 110)

- the use of management information such as attendance and assignment submission data to target student support (paragraph 126)

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- take further steps to increase the effective participation of students at all levels of the deliberative structure (paragraph 98)
- ensure the consistent application of the policy that all postgraduate research students who teach receive appropriate training (paragraph 160)

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- establish an effective system for appointing, supporting and guiding student members of periodic review panels (paragraph 89)
- ensure that external examiner reports are routinely shared with relevant student representatives (paragraph 97)
- expedite the inclusion of Foundation Degree and postgraduate taught students in the University's new PDP model (paragraph 124)
- ensure all student handbooks contain the University's required core information (paragraph 169)
- accelerate implementation of the University's decision to produce readily accessible programme specifications (paragraph 170)

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 The origins of the University can be traced back to 1851 when the Diocesan Institution for the Training of School Mistresses was created. Within 20 years two other major elements came into being: the Derby School of Art and the Derby School of Science. The merger of Derby College of Art and Technology with Bishop Lonsdale College of Education in 1977 led to Derby Lonsdale College and a further merger with Matlock College of Higher Education in 1983 led to the creation of Derbyshire College of Higher Education. It became a University in 1993.

2 In 1998 the University merged with High Peak College at Buxton becoming the first university to offer both further and higher education. This enabled the University to realise its aim of becoming the largest provider of post-secondary education in Derbyshire. The further education provision is mainly provided by the School of Further Education within the Faculty known as the University of Derby Buxton. The mission of the University is 'to be the learner's first choice university for quality and opportunity'.

3 The University's Governing Council (GC) has ultimate responsibility for the University's mission and activities. The University's Executive comprises the Vice-Chancellor and the PVCs. The full Corporate Management Team (CMT) consists of the Executive and deans and directors.

4 The Corporate Plan 2009-2014 sets out five core values to which the University subscribes: quality, valuing people, customer focus, challenge and innovation, opportunity and openness. It states that 'the learner is placed at the heart of everything that we do, offering choices that match students' expectations and supporting them in achieving their aspirations and ambitions'. Eight core strategies underpin the Corporate Plan: Academic development, Learning,

teaching and assessment, Student experience, Target markets & progression, Employer engagement, Internationalisation and Research. Business Unit Plans detail how each operating unit (faculty/school/division) contributes to delivering the Corporate Plan.

5 There are approximately 3500 students studying further education programmes, mostly at the Buxton campus. The University has committed itself to developing programmes that facilitate students studying while continuing in the workplace. In this regard the University of Derby Corporate is considered below.

6 In 2008-09 the University had 18949 students (14963 FTEs) of whom 11904 were full time and 3931 were part time undergraduates, 540 full time and 2433 part time postgraduate taught students. There were 74 full time and 67 part time postgraduate research students. The University employed 2604 staff of whom 415 were full time academic staff, 162 part time and 460 hourly paid.

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.

8 The University of Derby Students' Union (UDSU) produced a Student Written Submission (SWS) setting out the students' views on the accuracy of information provided to them, the experience of students as learners and their role in quality management.

9 In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the previous institutional audit (2005) and collaborative provision audit (2006)
- the postgraduate special review of research awards
- reports of reviews by QAA at the subject level since the previous institutional audit
- a selection of reports produced by other relevant bodies (for example, Ofsted and professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs))
- a wide range of the University's internal documents
- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.

Developments since the last audit

10 The Institutional audit in 2005 contained three advisable recommendations. Firstly, the report advised the University to 'establish clear mechanisms for ensuring that students follow a coherent programme within the Open Credit Scheme'. This area of provision has now been incorporated into the Lifelong Learning Scheme whose procedures ensure that students now follow clearly defined programmes of study. Secondly, the University was advised to 'create a higher level of consistency in the degree of critical analysis in the University's internal review reports'. Since 2005 the University has redesigned its processes of annual and periodic monitoring and made significant changes to the system of academic governance intended, amongst other things, to improve the quality of reporting. The Briefing Paper stated that variability was still present in the quality of reports produced for the annual monitoring cycle and further actions were being taken. Thirdly the University was advised to 'embed further and ensure more consistent application of the University's assessment requirements'. The audit team saw evidence that this has been addressed effectively through actions taken by the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee's Assessment Working Group and staff development activities.

11 The 2005 report also identified a number of areas that it would be desirable for the University to take action. The report recommended 'developing further staff awareness of the University's quality assurance procedures, in particular in respect of periodic programme review'. The Governance Review and subsequent staff development activities were intended to address this. The staff who met the Audit Team expressed a clear understanding of quality assurance processes and procedures. A second area for action sought to achieve further clarity regarding the nature of the academic deliberative systems and their links to executive and management functions. Following the 2005 audit, the University commissioned the Governance Review which made changes to the committee structure and reporting arrangements. The Briefing Paper noted that occasional problems still arise and these were addressed in the New Committee Structure: Implementation Review 2008-09 (Implementation Review 2008-09). The overall impact of the changes in governance has been to create a structure where the deliberative and executive wings work together effectively. An example of the strength of the new structure, discussed later in the report, are the well integrated processes of academic and resource review and planning achieved through closer working of committees and those with managerial and executive responsibilities. The audit team considered the comprehensive and integrated planning and quality processes which guide the priorities and actions of the University at institutional and faculty level to be a feature of good practice (see paragraphs 32, 34, 43, 46 and 80 for examples).

12 The third area for possible action concerned e-learning and recommended 'moving to a more centrally coordinated approach to the provision, utilisation, and quality assurance of e-learning, with a greater emphasis on pedagogical considerations'. In the period since 2005, Derby has audited its e-learning provision and established a number of groups, posts and procedures to ensure coordination and effective quality assurance of all e-learning provision. Finally, the report identified 'taking action to address the variability of student participation in the formal representative processes at school level, and to enhance the effectiveness of the Campus Forum'.

13 Overall, the audit team considered that in the majority of cases the actions taken have been effective. In two areas, the consistency of internal reports and student participation in formal committees, the University has identified the need for further action. The audit team noted the apparent intractability of the problem of student participation and recommended that the University gives it further attention (see paragraph 89).

14 The 2005 audit report commended five aspects of University's management of quality and standards. The first area of commendation was 'the high level of staff commitment to student support, in particular at programme and module level'. The audit team confirmed the University's continued commitment to providing high levels of student support supplemented by extensive informal systems and open-door policies. Initiatives such as the Get Ahead induction for disabled students were noted (see paragraph 127).

15 The second feature of good practice was, 'the retention strategy: its development, implementation and review with the full engagement of staff and students'. Structural changes that have been made have facilitated the continuing focus on retention issues, in particular the establishment of the Student Support and Information Services Department (SSIS) and the development of the Student Experience Strategy Group (SESG). The audit team noted initiatives such as new policies on attendance recording that help the University to take targeted preventative action in order to help students identified as at risk (see paragraph 126).

16 The third feature of good practice was, 'the University's regional agenda as evidenced in particular both by student recruitment and by the links with local employers, agencies and practitioners'. In 2008 the University set up a business-to-business unit called University of Derby Corporate (UDC) to strengthen further its regional and employer agenda by acting as an intermediary between the University as provider and the businesses and organisations acquiring its services. The University has also reviewed its Lifelong Learning Scheme and taken other

actions which have resulted in regional contribution and employer engagement remaining institutional strengths (see paragraph 110).

17 Fourthly, 'the Learning Through Work Scheme and its reflective approach to this innovative area of practice'. This area of work has been further strengthened through the establishment of the School of Flexible and Partnership Learning (FPL) where it is now located. The final area of commendation was staff development and high quality support documentation for staff. The audit team found that both these aspects of the University's work remained strengths.

18 The Briefing Paper characterised the period since the 2005 audit as one where it has striven to maintain continuity in management arrangements in the face of external turbulence. Nevertheless, change has occurred, driven partly by environmental factors and also by the desire to increase efficiency and effectiveness. In 2005 the University's academic provision was restructured into four faculties in order to create greater academic focus and a more accountable management structure. A fifth unit was added, Flexible and Partnership Learning (FPL), which brought together the University's flexible and partnership learning activities. Central service departments were also reorganised to create a new department which focuses on student administration and student services (SSIS). The new unit established to manage the employer interface, UDC, was created.

19 The University's has consolidated its estate: seven sites in Derby have been reduced to one campus on three closely located sites. A theatre has been acquired to support theatre arts teaching and to provide conference facilities. The University has invested in upgrading its facilities and has opened new libraries at Buxton Campus and the Britannia Mill site in Derby.

20 University governance and management structures have changed. Pro-Vice Chancellor (PVC) roles have been created from former Deputy Vice Chancellor Roles and other senior roles established. The Governance Review gave rise to a new committee structure which not only involved adjustments to institution-wide bodies but also the establishment of a system of governance at faculty level (see following Section). Faculty Management Boards were created, the purpose of which is to deliver the area's annual business plan and manage its budget. The quality management framework was revised following a process review in 2005-06. As a result of the review new procedures for annual and periodic review were put in place.

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

21 The current governance structures date from 2008 when the recommendations of the 2006 Internal Audit of Academic Governance were implemented. These arrangements were reviewed by the New Committee Structure: Implementation Review 2008-09 (Implementation Review 2008-09). As a result, Academic Board (AB), chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, is responsible for the quality and standards of Derby's academic provision. It discharges many of its duties through a number of committees and sub-committees. Of central importance to the management of academic standards and quality are University Quality Enhancement Committee (UQEC); the Research and Research Degrees Committee (URRDC); the Regulatory Framework Committee (RFC) which is responsible for programme and assessment regulations; and the Academic Development Committee (ADC) which plays a key role in ensuring that the University's academic provision develops in line with the Corporate Plan. UQEC has a number of sub-committees including the Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee; the External Examining Sub-Committee (EESC); and the Validation Sub-Committee. The latter approves new programmes and recommends at periodic intervals the continuation of existing programmes. The arrangements for the management of postgraduate research students are set out in section 6.

22 The University is structured around five academic units comprising four subject-focused faculties and the School of Flexible and Partnership Learning (FPL). Each unit is headed by a dean

or, in the case of FPL, a director. The four faculties are divided into schools whose heads serve as assistant deans with cross-faculty responsibilities for areas such as research, teaching and learning, and quality assurance. At faculty level there is a common structure of committees. Each faculty and the SFPL have a Quality Enhancement Committee (FQEC) which reports to UQEC. Below this, in the four subject-based faculties, there is a substructure of school Quality Committees (SQC), eleven in total. Programme Committees report to SQCs. Each of the faculties has a Faculty Research and Research Degrees Committee (FRRDC) reporting to URRDC. On the executive side, Faculty Management Boards (FMB) bring together the senior managers at faculty with the University's Executive on a quarterly basis to discuss business and budget issues.

23 The five academic units are supported by central departments including Learning and Information Services (LIS), Student Support and Information Services (SSIS), Quality Enhancement Department (QED) and the Research Office. QED has a broad remit covering academic quality and standards as well as enhancement. Its work covers staff development for learning and teaching and on behalf of UQEC management of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy. The staff in QED come from both academic and professional backgrounds.

24 In addition to the formal committee structure the University has four management and advisory groups which perform a co-ordinating role. The groups are the Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG); the Learning and Teaching Advisory Group (LTAG); the Research Managers Group (RMG); and the Quality Managers Advisory Group (QMAG). These groups involve both academic and professional staff. A fifth important group is the Validation, Audit and Review Standing Panel (VARSP) which brings together academic and support staff whose experience equips them to serve as members of validation and review panels.

25 The University has set up a number of important steering and working groups to take forward specific areas of work. These are high level groups, generally chaired by a PVC and, where appropriate, involving UDSU representatives. Notable amongst these are the Student Experience Strategy Group (SESG) responsible to the University Executive for ensuring that continuous improvement is being made to the student experience; the Internationalisation Steering Group (ISG); and the Workforce Development Group (WDG), responsible for aspects of staff development and organisational learning. Such groups have a specified life-span.

26 The audit team learnt that the New Committee Structure: Implementation Review 2008-09 was established to review reported problems relating to information flows, student participation and balancing quality assurance and quality enhancement agendas. AB is monitoring progress on the achievement of the review's recommendations to address these issues, and received an update report in October 2009.

27 The Briefing Paper stated that the University's quality management arrangements are relatively centralised, particularly in relation to programme approval, periodic review, admissions and some student support services. The University's quality management framework is intended to be enhancement led in that the design and operation of quality management processes should be predicated on the identification of opportunities for continuous improvement. The Briefing Paper stated that progress has been made in establishing an enhancement-led approach through reform of the processes for approval, monitoring and review; mutual accountability through the deliberative structures; the bringing together of responsibilities for both enhancement and assurance under QED; and the establishment of University and faculty QECs. The University's approach to enhancement is discussed in more detail in section 4 of this report. The University's processes and procedures for the management of quality and standards are laid out in eight Quality Management Handbooks which are published in both hardcopy and on the web. The University's quality assurance framework does not separate quality assurance from quality enhancement. Both are led by QED supported by QMAG and LTAG.

28 The Quality Strategy was adopted in 2006. It was intended to be 'both risk-based and enhancement focused'. The audit team learnt that the approach to risk management and

enhancement underpinned the re-design of the University's structures and processes for quality management, and was designed to meet four imperatives. The first of these was that annual monitoring and periodic review should be undertaken using a 'predictive and context-focused' approach. The audit team was told that this implies that such processes are intended to be both forward-looking and sensitive to the external environment. The second requirement was the integration of quality assurance processes with planning and resource allocation processes. The third imperative was the use of quality assurance procedures to manage risk.

29 The fourth imperative was the establishment of a culture which encouraged the identification and management of risk. The audit team learnt that risk assessment tools are employed in a range of quality processes and that proportionality is applied to ensure that they focus where risk to the institution is greatest. Examples seen by the audit team included shortening the cycle of periodic review for programmes where higher risk was identified and using risk assessments to determine the nature and depth of validation events. Staff that met the team described an open and inclusive culture that encouraged reflection and discouraged defensiveness. The team concluded that the University's development of a culture of inclusivity, openness and self-reflection which underpins the successful operation of the University's quality assurance and quality enhancement processes was a feature of good practice. See paragraphs 46, 86, 94, 136 and 159 for specific examples that contribute to this culture.

30 The University's Corporate Plan covering the period 2009- 2014 is based on a set of core strategies including academic development, learning teaching and assessment, the student experience; target markets and progression; employer engagement; internationalisation and research. The implementation of the corporate plan involves a number of operating strategies which link the corporate plan with faculty and service plans. These operational strategies include the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (LTAS) which was approved in its latest form in 2009. The LTAS incorporates objectives designed to deliver flexibility, internationalisation, employability, sustainability, inclusion, independent learning and CPD for academic practice. In setting the University's academic strategy and priorities the LTAS is complemented by the Curriculum Fit for the Future Strategy document which focuses on the development of curricula and delivery modes that provide flexibility to meet student needs. Further detail of the nature and use of these strategies, in particular the LTAS, in managing quality and standards can be found below.

31 Details of the processes of programme approval, monitoring and review can be found in subsequent sections of this report. Programme approval, which includes a risk-based approach that determines the processes employed, involves ADC which looks at the academic and business case for a proposal; and validation panels, comprising both internal and external academic members, reporting through Validation Sub-Committee to UQEC. Re-validation which follows the same process takes place on a five-year cycle. Annual monitoring involves the production of evaluative reports at programme, school, faculty and service level which feed into an institutional level report compiled by QED and presented to UQEC and thence to AB. However the process involves a wide range of committees, groups and executive structures at all levels in the preparation, discussion and response to annual monitoring. Periodic review of areas of academic provision also proceeds on a five-year cycle. Review panels comprising internal and external members and students examine the quality and standards of an area of provision as well as opportunities for enhancement. The outcome of the review is presented in a report that goes to both faculty and UQEC, in the latter case accompanied by a response in the form of an action plan compiled by the relevant faculty. The application of the processes of approval, monitoring and review to non-standard provision such as distance learning is discussed in Section 3.

32 The audit team considered that the University had developed an effective framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. Particular strengths of the University's approach were the comprehensive and integrated approach to planning and quality processes at all levels; and the encouragement of inclusivity, openness and self-reflection in relation to quality assurance and quality enhancement.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

33 The University distinguishes between setting and verification of standards on the one hand and application on the other. Initial validation of programmes and their subsequent annual monitoring, periodic review and revalidation relate to the setting and verification of standards, as does the University's engagement with the Academic Infrastructure. The application and management of academic standards is governed by the University's Quality Strategy and Enhancement Policy, its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and the Academic Regulations. Standards are verified by the University's external examiners.

34 The University's programme approval procedures have assumed a risk-based character since the last audit. The University defines risk as the threat that 'an action or event will adversely affect an organisation's ability to achieve its objectives'. The University's programme development process is rooted in the need to enhance quality, maintain standards and secure the viability of its provision. The frank acknowledgement and assessment of risk is essential in ensuring that ADC and review panels are able to anticipate potential problems and adopt a proactive and enhancement-focused approach to programme approval.

35 Faculties submit an annual Curriculum Development Plan (CDP) and proposed development and validation schedule for approval by ADC. The purpose of the CDP, which is formally linked with the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) (Faculty Supplement) and business planning processes, is to assist faculties in applying a more strategic approach to the development of their provision. The team considered this to be evidence of comprehensive and integrated planning and quality processes which guide the priorities and actions of the University at institutional and faculty level. The Programme approval process is in two stages: development-approval and validation. Programme planners complete a Development Approval Document, which provides an initial assessment of the business and academic risks likely to be incurred in the development and delivery of a programme. The Validation and Approval of Taught Courses Handbook states that the purpose of validation is to ensure that the proposal offers a coherent programme structure appropriate to the name and level of the award and of the subject to be validated. Learning Outcomes are assessed for their clarity and the planned assessment for its engagement with those Outcomes. The programme approval process is monitored by the QED. All reports are considered by the University's Validation Sub-Committee. In the case of what the University calls 'particularly significant developments', the UQEC also considers a proposal for validation.

36 All new proposals must be considered by a validation panel. For programmes of study delivered wholly or partly online or via distributed learning materials, there is a requirement that the validation panel, which should have members familiar with operating and/or validating ODL programmes, review the relevant materials prior to first delivery of the programme. Validation events involving Professional, Statutory Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) may be conducted jointly with the relevant body. The nature and intensity of the approval process is determined by the level and extent of risk demonstrated in the submission. Validations may be paper-based in the case of some awards, such as University Certificates and Diplomas, and also revalidations, as part of the periodic review process where evidence has been submitted that the programme has retained academic currency and that standards and quality have been maintained. QED makes an initial assessment of the risk against specified criteria and ADC determines the level of intensity to be applied. Proposals considered to be of potentially greater risk (for example online and distance-learning) have additional safeguards built in to the process specified in the Validation and Approval Quality Handbook (see Section).

37 In recent years, the University has increased external involvement in its approval and review processes. Validation panels routinely include two members external to the University and are chaired by an academic member of VARSP outside the faculty proposing a new academic

programme. The composition of a Panel team is determined by UQEC.

38 Panel recommendations are discussed by the Validation Sub-Committee, which produces an annual report on overall validation outcomes. The helpful 2007-08 report noted the generally high quality of external involvement in the process, while noting that panels often required revisions to proposals. The report particularly expressed concern that both programme aims and intended learning outcomes were sometimes 'too generic' and 'set at the wrong level, usually too low'. Panels also felt that the quality of documentation presented to validation panels 'is not of a high enough standard' and contains 'silly errors that should not be present'. Generic issues arising from programme development and validation are identified through the University's Annual Monitoring Report. The University has expressed reservations about 'a casual approach to the production of some validation documents' and 'the large number of late submissions' and postponed or rescheduled validation events, particularly at the Buxton Campus. Validation teams had also given a large number of conditional approvals to proposals when the process would have been better served in the longer term by referral, so that programme teams could give more detailed attention to the demands of the process.

39 QED runs workshops for VARSP members who act as panel chairs. A new guide to Programme Design, part of the University's Handbook on quality matters, provides specific guidance to programme leaders and others. It states that a key 'driver' in programme development is the Academic Infrastructure linked, as appropriate, to PSRB requirements reflecting 'The norms and expectations of the wider academic or professional community'.

40 The audit team examined documentation from a number of programme approval and revalidation exercises. It judged that both processes were managed thoroughly in accordance with the University's published procedures. The team also confirmed that appropriate consideration had been given to the academic standards expected of programmes approved under the University's procedures. Arrangements for monitoring and review of programmes are discussed in Section 3.2.

External examiners

41 External examiners are appointed for a period of four years, with the possibility of a one-year extension. The External Examiners' Handbook indicates that appointees should have good subject knowledge and relevant academic and/or professional experience either as an internal assessor or as an external examiner at an appropriate level. Their principal responsibilities are to verify that the University's standards are appropriate to the awards for which they have responsibility, to make comparisons of student performance at the University compared with that seen in similar types of programme offered at the same level elsewhere and to assist the University in ensuring that the assessment process is valid and fair.

42 The briefing paper stated that previous methods of appointment 'could place undue reliance on the judgements made by individuals' and thus not be entirely consistent with Section Four of the QAA Code of Practice. Reports read by the team stated that some SQECs were failing adequately to discuss external examiner nominations and that FQECs did not always receive nominations for consideration and endorsement. To overcome these types of issues the University established EESC reporting to UQEC. The Sub-Committee considers all nominations for external examiners and makes a formal recommendation to UQEC. In its study of documentation, the audit team found consideration of nominees to be rigorous. A number of recommendations were referred back, on grounds of the nominee's inadequate qualifications, experience or otherwise.

43 The University has also been concerned about the presence of 'reciprocal appointments' of external examiners noting that it is 'using a lot of External Examiners from the same institutions' with consequential risk to its securing an appropriately wide range of examiner experience. To meet such difficulties, the External Examining Sub-Committee makes use of a new and purpose-designed external examiner database which enables the University to compare its external

examiner appointments with those held by the University's own staff and also to analyse the range of institutions from which its own external examiners are drawn.

44 New external examiners receive a personalised induction pack which includes a copy of University regulations, copies of previous external examiner reports and the programme's responses to them. A personalised half- or full-day induction is also offered by the relevant faculty or school. The External Examiners' Handbook specifies the range of information and issues which should be covered in induction sessions.

45 The University holds an annual External Examiners' Forum intended to update examiners on developments within the University and consult on proposals and other matters, both local and national, which relate to their role. The Forum includes a session at which external examiners meet staff from faculty and programme teams under their purview. Attendance at the Forum has been good and feedback from external examiners on it favourable.

46 External examiners produce their annual reports on a University-designed template. The audit team read a number of reports and confirmed that external examiners judged the University's academic standards to be secure and, in the great majority of cases, that the procedures followed at Assessment and Progression Boards were appropriate and consistent with the University's regulations.

47 External examiner reports are received by the Quality Enhancement Department and distributed to the Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching, Learning & Scholarship), the relevant Faculty Quality Manager and to programme leaders. In meetings, the team learned that the Pro-Vice Chancellor reads every report and makes observations on each of them before the report is considered at Programme level.

48 At University level, detailed consideration of external examiner reports is undertaken by the EESC which produces an overview report for UQEC. QMAG also examines these reports both as part of its scrutiny of school level operations and also to provide evidence for the University's Annual Monitoring Report. The University's most recent Annual Monitoring Report notes that external examiners had expressed fewer concerns about assessment board arrangements than in previous years, although a few difficulties remained in some schools. It also noted that, in response to external examiner comment, action had since been taken 'to improve the accuracy and completeness of the data available to assessment boards'. The audit team noted that Faculty Annual reports reflected on external examiner reports and, where concerns had been expressed, as for example on the application of subject benchmarks or internal moderation processes, explained what action had been taken.

49 In summary, the audit team noted the scrupulous attention paid to external examiner reports at all levels, and the mechanisms put in place to act on their recommendations. It wishes to draw particular attention, as a feature of good practice, to the work of the External Examiner Sub-Committee and the development of the database of external examiners.

50 The team considered that the University's management of the external examiner system provided evidence of the culture of inclusivity, openness and self-reflection which underpins the successful operation of the University's quality assurance and quality enhancement processes.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

51 The briefing paper stated that the University exercises its degree awarding powers in line with the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure. Programme designers are required to consider the Framework for higher education qualifications, Subject Benchmark Statements and the QAA Code of Practice in the proposals which they make for validation.

52 QED maintains oversight of the University's engagement with sections of the Code of Practice. Post holders at senior level have designated responsibility both for monitoring any

changes in the Code and also for ensuring that the University's policies and procedures reflect its precepts. Appropriate University level committees receive confirmation annually that current policy, procedures and practice continue to conform with the relevant Sections.

53 The briefing paper stated that the FHEQ had informed the award and credit-level descriptors published in its Academic Regulations. The periodic review process investigates how programmes demonstrate compatibility with the FHEQ, whose precepts also informed the recent development of the newly introduced Integrated Masters' Programmes. In its study of recent periodic reviews, although it found the process otherwise sound, the audit team found that review panels made only limited explicit reference to engagement with the Academic Infrastructure as a whole in their reports.

54 The Regulatory Framework Committee and the AB receive regular reports from the Chairman of the UK credit forum on national developments both in the UK and in the EU. The audit team saw evidence that the University has ensured that its credit-based programmes accord with the advice contained in the HE Credit Framework for England.

55 At programme level, the pro-forma for annual monitoring reports requires teams to review their curricula against published subject benchmark statements, where available. Validation and periodic review panels are also required to consider alignment of curricula both with these statements and PSRB requirements. In its examination of programme AMRs, however, the audit team noted that specific references to benchmark statements were limited both in number and in scope.

56 The University highly values its relationship with PSRBs. Accreditation adds value to its academic awards and engagement with PSRBs is seen as vital to the management of professional standards. Tensions between PSRB accreditation requirements and the standards of the University's academic awards are mitigated in a number of ways. The University has recently developed a Code of Practice for staff with PSRB responsibilities, which requires relevant subject areas to nominate a suitably experienced member of staff to have responsibility for liaising with each of its PSRBs. It encourages PSRB representatives to sit as external representatives on validation panels. PSRB reports are routinely considered by programme teams and also by both the relevant faculty and University Quality Enhancement Committees.

57 The audit team considered that the University's use of the Academic Infrastructure and of other external reference points was in general effective and made a valuable contribution to the University's capacity to monitor and maintain academic standards.

Assessment policies and regulations

58 Academic Regulations: Rights, Responsibilities and Regulations for Students on Taught Programmes 2009/10 (popularly known as the 3 Rs) include the University's assessment regulations. AB is responsible for maintaining these regulations and for their publication. AB must approve any changes to them, acting on the advice of the Regulatory Frameworks Committee, chaired by the Registrar. Oversight of the documents are the responsibility of the Registrar and the Director of Quality Enhancement, who may delegate operational responsibility for review and updating to appropriate University officers. Postgraduate research regulations are kept under review by URRDC.

59 The SWS suggested 'a lack of consistency at a number of crucial points in the assessment procedure' with 'wildly conflicting expectations dependant on their teachers'. Grading was also stated to be 'an area of confusion for some students'. To meet such concerns, the audit team learnt that the University has recently amended its grading scales and descriptors for both undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes. More extensive and explicit descriptors have been published as part of its Assessment Regulations. The University believes that it has made 'clear progress in the development of the assessment policy', although it acknowledges the need for further work related to staff development and the wider dissemination of good practice.

60 In a recent report the University recognises that there is 'no cohesive package of staff development specifically on assessment'. It has recently amended its staff induction process to include specific guidance on assessment strategies and alignment with learning outcomes.

61 In meetings, the audit team learnt that students were aware of the learning outcomes pertaining to their programmes of study and that they appreciated the guidance provided by the amended grading scales.

62 The audit team learned that the University was embarking on a wide-ranging review of its assessment policy. In the interim, and to deal with what it acknowledges as a pressing problem, it has published a plagiarism policy, supplemented by implementation materials. The plagiarism policy had not been in effect long enough for the audit team to judge its effectiveness. However, it noted both that the policy was research-based and the University's recognition that the avoidance of plagiarism was an activity which should engage staff as much as students.

63 Summative assessment is subject both to internal moderation and external scrutiny. The briefing paper stressed the importance of formative assessment, although the Assessment Regulations indicate only that 'formative assessment, particularly at early levels of degree development, can usefully form part of the assessment package for a programme'. In its scrutiny of documentation, the audit team found favourable reference to the assessment strategies employed in a number of programmes and to the use of formative assessment in a number of programmes although practice was variable. The audit team also noted that some programme leaders acknowledged the need both for more formative assessment and also of 'too many assessments of a similar likeness'.

64 In its scrutiny of AMRs, periodic review and other documentation, the audit team was able to confirm that a wide variety of forms of assessment were in place in many programmes and schools. It also noted the number of programmes having an assessment strategy which relied very heavily, if not exclusively, on coursework, albeit of different types.

65 The University has recently decided that anonymous marking 'should, as a general principle, be adopted by faculties and collaborative partners, wherever it is appropriate, feasible and practical' with an expectation that anonymous assessment be 'required for all credit-bearing examinations'. It acknowledges the need for exceptions in special circumstances, although these should be rare. At the time of the audit visit the policy had not been implemented across the University.

66 The University operates a two-tier system of assessment boards. Module results are first approved by Subject Assessment Boards. These are then considered, as appropriate, by Progress Boards. The latter operate as appropriate for Undergraduate Qualification, for Professional Qualification, where programmes must meet the requirements of a professional body) and for Postgraduate Qualifications. Progress Boards consider overall profiles of grades for progression or formal award. Progress Boards are not empowered to alter grades or results. Exceptional circumstance claims are referred to a purpose-built University Assessment Board. AB delegates to Professional Qualification and Postgraduate Boards the power to ratify progression and award decisions.

67 The audit team found both the University's Assessment Policy, which is kept under close review, and its Regulations to be effective, although student representatives considered that processes available for complaints and appeals could be articulated more accessibly. The team also concurred with the University's own judgment that arrangements for assessment boards and consistency in marking standards were improving in most schools.

Management information - statistics

68 Overall responsibility for developing and managing the student record system lies with Student Support and Information Services. Council, the key committees at University level and Faculty Management Boards are all supplied with regular, statistically-based overviews.

69 The briefing paper stated that there had been a significant improvement in the provision of statistical data at all levels. It supports programme annual monitoring, including retention reports at University, faculty and school levels. The University stated that it needs to rationalise the number of statistical reports it issues. The audit team was told that during 2009-10, a standardised set of statistical tables is being introduced with the intention of providing a more consistent means of presenting data and a more rigorous approach to the analysis of statistical information.

70 The University's student record system integrates student admissions, enrolment, assessment and the generation of awards with the collection of fees, financial management, the production of HESA returns and the University's performance indicators. The audit team heard that the system is designed to be accessible to all staff and students. Furthermore, it learnt that the implementation of the Online Student Academic Information System would enable staff to access reports for the student record system, including statistical reports at module, programme, school and University levels.

71 The audit team learned that responsibility for in-putting marks for assessment boards had recently been transferred from faculties to module leaders. It is a responsibility of Pre-Boards to check these data for accuracy.

72 The audit team concluded that, while appropriate information systems were now in place to ensure accuracy of data presented to examination boards and for other purposes, considerable variations of practice at programme level were encountered, both in the use, and in the perceived value, of the system. One recent Periodic Review noted a lack of consistency in the presentation of data and statistics in annual monitoring and made a University-level recommendation related on the issue. Some Programme Leaders noted a recent improvement in the recording of marks due to staff now being familiar with the system.

73 EESC recently noted inaccuracies in, and in some cases absence of, relevant statistical material presented to both undergraduate and postgraduate boards in some schools. One programme leader commented that it is presently impossible to conduct statistical analysis using the system, which has been highlighted previously. The audit team considered that the University will want to work toward ensuring greater consistency of practice.

74 The audit team recognised that the process of assimilating, and effectively using, the data system at programme and school levels was not yet complete. It agreed with the evidence from one faculty which concluded that 'The use and analysis of statistical data at School level was variable and in many cases weak'. The University will wish to continue to monitor the progress being made in this area. The audit team concluded, however, that effective use of statistical data and management information is being made at University level.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

75 Arrangements for the approval of programmes are considered in Section 2.

Monitoring and review of programmes

76 The Briefing Paper stated that revisions in 2007-08 to the 'annual monitoring procedure were built upon the premise of mutual accountability between programme teams, managers and central departments'. Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) are now expected to be 'forward-looking', 'content focused' and should identify potential risks to the quality, standards and viability of the University's provision. They also distinguish between different modes of delivery and analyse data to compare standards on each programme as delivered on-campus, off-campus, collaborative, online and distributed learning. The monitoring cycle commences in September with programme level reports and there follows School and Scheme reports (December), faculty reports (January), central departments (end of February) and an institutional Annual Monitoring Report (March) which is produced by QED.

77 AMRs, while providing assurance that issues identified in previous reports had been adequately addressed, are now expected to place greater emphasis on factors which could impact future provision. They should promote what is called 'enhancement and preventive (rather than merely remedial) action' and be approved by programme committees. The audit team evaluated the revised process at the end of its second year of operation. It found that, as required, AMRs often identified market risks associated with a changing student profile. AMRs were also detailed, generally evaluative and made appropriate use of statistical data. However, the team noted that some reports remained less forward-looking and risk-focused than the University's new process expected.. The team considered that the outputs of the annual monitoring process itself were generally detailed and robust. It did, however, accept the University's own view that integrating the evidence from this process into a risk-based strategy would need further consideration and development.

78 The University's 2009 Annual Monitoring Report indicated that most schools and faculties had taken timely and appropriate action in response to the previous year's Enhancement Plans. It was also noted that the quality of reports, although variable, was much higher than in the first year of operation of the new process. The University Quality Enhancement Committee (UQEC) had, however, noted that some faculty reports offered little critical comment on institutional risk factors. In consequence, their Enhancement Plans gave little indication of the action required from other parts of the University. Departmental reports generally noted accountability to faculties and programme teams, although noting the reports sometimes contained instances of defensiveness and of failure to address the specific issues raised at an earlier stage of the annual monitoring cycle.

79 Periodic review, which normally takes place once within a five-year cycle, is characterised as 'the process through which the University assures itself of the maintenance of academic standards and quality of its...provision'. The University's recently revised procedure aims to align periodic review more closely with the objectives of annual monitoring and is required to focus on enhancing the quality of the student learning experience. It notes a greater emphasis on strategic context and on consideration of how subjects and schools engage with both the internal and external (market or regulatory) environment and the impact on future provision. As such, the audit team concluded that it provides an opportunity for subject teams to think strategically about their provision and to review their longer-term plans and objectives.

80 Periodic reviews are coordinated by QED and chaired by a senior member of staff drawn from a faculty not subject to the Review and must include two or more external members with 'current or recent experience, knowledge and understanding of higher education provision'. One student union sabbatical officer, or a student nominee, should sit on the Review Panel, which normally comprises eight or nine members. Meetings with students are an integral element in the review process.

81 At the time of the audit visit, four periodic reviews had been conducted. The audit team examined the processes and outcomes of two of these in detail. Reviews follow a fixed pattern which leads to the identification of features of good practice for dissemination across the faculty and also to recommendations listed in separate categories for attention at subject, faculty and University level. The team noted that the process was thorough and had substantial external involvement. However, it noted that student presence on the review panels was not consistent and that students received no preparation for their role. The team considered it desirable that the University establish an effective system for appointing, supporting and guiding student members of periodic review panels.

82 The audit team found that the University's arrangements for annual monitoring and periodic review were effective in maintaining the quality of the students' learning opportunities. In its emphasis on strategic issues and its detailed follow-up processes, the team also found that these arrangements were likely to enhance the learning experience.

Management information - feedback from students

83 Procedures for gaining feedback at module and programme levels have recently been revised. At module level, the 3Rs states that 'feedback will be achieved by the use of dialogue which will be face-to-face for on-campus students' and gained by email or similar means for students on distributed learning programmes. Some schools had reported that feedback from the latter type of students was difficult to collect. At programme level, students are asked to complete two standardised questionnaires, the first to capture the student experience during the early weeks of the study; the second, completed near the end of the academic year, is closely linked in design to questions asked in the National Student Survey concerning teaching and learning, assessment and learning resources. They feed into the analysis provided by programme AMRs. In its scrutiny of documentation, the audit team found that some programmes had reinstated module evaluation questionnaires and that, at school level, uncertainty remained as to what constituted 'the minimum criteria' for feedback leading to 'good quality reporting'.

84 Outcomes of the National Student Survey are analysed in QED which produces a detailed briefing report for both UQEC and Academic Board. This Report notes general trends and also analyses key findings at subject level.

85 The audit team concluded that the University uses feedback appropriately to assure itself of the quality of its provision and to identify enhancement. In meetings, students were appreciative of the accessibility of most academic staff and also of the range of effective, informal means available to them to express opinions and to argue for change.

Role of students in quality assurance

86 The briefing paper explained that student membership of University committees was reviewed as part of the 2006 Internal Audit of Academic Governance because of concern about a number of matters, including confusion about the role of programme committees, difficulty in obtaining a full complement of representatives, student members frequently invited by staff rather than elected, limited training and no direct contact with The University of Derby's Student Union (UDSU). In expressing considerable concern about the effectiveness of student representation, this exemplified the University's open and self critical approach to the management of quality. One result of the review was the revision of the constitution of programme committees and provision for student membership in the composition of those

committees at faculty and institutional levels with direct responsibility for oversight of the student learning experience. The composition of programme committees now requires at least one student representative from each stage, and additional representation for students of any collaborative partner. Arrangements for postgraduate research student representation are covered in Section 6.

87 Although the right of student representation is now comprehensive at all levels the University recognises that take-up has been poor. The 2009 New Committee Structure Implementation Review still found variability at programme level; only half of school committees had secured student representation and this was even more marked at faculty and institutional levels. Under the new arrangements the composition of UQEC includes one student representative from each faculty/SFPL in addition to a Students' Union sabbatical officer. The Review noted that none of the student representative positions on UQEC were filled during 2008-09.

88 The University is aware of its limited success in engaging students in its committee structures and is attempting to address this. The Student Experience Strategy 2009-2012 identifies the establishment of an effective student voice as vital to the enhancement of the student experience, whilst also accepting that further work is needed to strengthen the student representation system. The New Committee Structure Implementation Review recommended that the University and UDSU should jointly consider the issues of vacancies at all levels of the committee structure and the introduction of a clear election process for all University and faculty committees (including programme committees). AB deferred a decision on this pending further discussion during 2009-10. Some action has already been taken, as Faculty Student Liaison Officers and the Student Experience Team, working with UDSU and programme leaders, have recently been allotted an extended role to promote and support the representation system. The University is also strongly supporting UDSU's sustained commitment to strengthen the student representative system, resulting in a series of joint initiatives. Since 2008 UDSU has organised training for an increasing proportion of elected representatives, enhanced by a dedicated post of Academic Representation Coordinator. The audit team heard that this is considered to be a very successful initiative, with attendance increasing year on year, providing an opportunity for representatives to hold the Vice Chancellor and members of the University executive to account. The University's executive and UDSU sabbatical officers both confirmed to the audit team the continuation of the close mutual engagement commented on in the previous audit report. This stable working relationship is now formalised by monthly management liaison meetings between the two executives. UDSU has also worked with the Vice-Chancellor on its 'Dear John' campaign, encouraging direct communication by students. UDSU considers that response to its concerns across the body of academic staff generally is, however, less consistent. The development of this closer working relationship between the University Executive and the Students' Union is identified by the audit team as a feature of good practice.

89 Programme committees are described as a key component of the quality assurance system for all taught provision, whatever the mode of delivery. The University recognises that there are particular concerns regarding non traditional provision, which test the general arrangements for student feedback and representation, although there is also evidence of good and innovative practice, for example the use of discussion board forums by the online BSc Psychology programme. Programme committees are required to consider external examiner reports. However, the New Committee Structure Implementation Review noted inconsistencies in the consideration of external examiner reports, a view that was confirmed in a meeting with students. The team learnt that action would be taken to address this and that, from September 2009, as recommended by phase 2 of the HEFCE Review of the Quality Assurance Framework (2006/45), all programme committees would discuss external examiner reports. The team consider it desirable that, in line with HEFCE 2006/45, the University ensures that external examiner reports are routinely shared with relevant student representatives.

90 Despite amending committee constitutions to include provision for student representation the high level of vacancies, particularly at faculty and institutional levels, has remained a longstanding problem. The New Committee Structure Implementation Review and a related paper from the UDSU executive, the final report of the working group to review the Assurance of Teaching Quality (ATQ), and students who met the audit team all made reference to the lack of clarity about the role of student representatives in the University's deliberative structures, particularly at school and faculty levels. Earlier audit reports recommended taking action to address the variability of student participation in representative processes at school level. In supporting the University's latest commitment to strengthen the student voice as a high priority, the audit team advises the University to take further steps to increase the effective participation of students at all levels of the deliberative structure.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

91 The audit team heard that the University considers itself a research informed but teaching led institution, with research and scholarship driving curriculum development. Although research income decreased significantly from 2003-04, the University's modest resources have been used to develop a focused strategy of placing research 'firmly in the role of supporting and enhancing' its teaching. The University's approach is to encourage all research that benefits the student learning experience by developing a deeper understanding at the forefront of the specific subject and improved pedagogy.

92 The University's Curriculum Fit for the Future Strategy emphasises the importance of ensuring that there is an explicit link between curriculum development and research, and that such developments should be informed and underpinned by the research agenda of the University and faculties. This underpinning of teaching by research is reflected in quality management procedures. The Programme Design Handbook identifies the interests, research and scholarly activity of staff as one of the drivers to be considered when developing a programme proposal. Development Approval Documents require reference to the research background of staff and validation panels are expected to consider how staff have drawn upon their research, scholarship or professional activity to inform programme design. Provision at FHEQ level six and above must be supported by appropriate research and scholarly activity. The impact of current research on the content and design of the curriculum is reviewed through programme and school annual monitoring reports. Periodic review briefing papers are expected to include reference to the impact of staff research, scholarship, practice and professional activity on the quality of learning and teaching, and the review panel explores how current and future developments are informed by research/scholarly activity, learning, teaching and assessment, and how these are effectively managed through resource planning, staff development, CPD, quality management and enhancement. From its reading of periodic review final reports the audit team confirmed the effectiveness of this scrutiny, witnessing specific examples where curricula informed by research were recognised and others where further development was recommended.

93 One of the objectives of the revised Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy is an increase in research output that will inspire and inform the curriculum. The briefing paper explained that this is supported by the Teaching Informed by Research (TIR), and the Research Informed Curriculum funds. Both offer comparatively small grants, the former to support mainly pedagogic and the latter subject based research, applicants for both funds being asked to indicate how their proposed research will benefit the student learning experience. The audit team learnt that the outcomes are formally audited, presented at the annual Learning, Teaching and Assessment Conference, and published in the Annual Research Review.

94 From a relatively low threshold at the beginning of the decade, the audit team found that the University has made effective use of limited resources to develop a growing research culture, building on existing strengths, with the clear strategic objectives of promoting curriculum development and enhancing the quality of student learning opportunities.

Other modes of study

95 Developed from its mission to be the learner's first choice for quality and opportunity, and its commitment to widening participation and part-time students, the University has a well established practice of programmes for non-traditional learners through flexible study. The University considers itself to be sector-leading, a flagship for flexible access to HE in the workplace. It defines online and distance-learning as any process of open and flexible learning (paper-based, electronic or by any other audio-visual method) in which the learner is remote in time and place from the tutor. This encompasses programmes delivered solely online, work based learning, placement study, the Lifelong Learning Scheme, and blended and technologically enhanced learning elements within otherwise traditionally-delivered programmes.

96 The University has built on this foundation in a number of ways. In response to the evolving needs and characteristics of the student market it has developed its Curriculum Fit for the Future Strategy, which outlines plans for the development and implementation of a flexible learning curriculum and a flexible approach to its delivery, with particular emphasis on addressing the needs of employers, those currently in work, and the employability of its students. It includes part-time delivery within its flexibility model, considering that the traditional division into full-time, part-time and distance-learning is no longer appropriate. This is also a theme of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2009-2011, which identifies both flexibility and employability as key objectives. The University intends to continue investing in flexible learning provision and technologies to meet employers' and learners' changing needs, and has set ambitious targets for its achievement.

97 The University has taken action to ensure effective oversight of flexible learning through both deliberative and management structures. The Flexible Learning Advisory Group (FLAG) has a strategic and operational remit, reports to UQEC and the Corporate Management Team, and informs the work of both central and faculty committees. It is therefore linked to both deliberative and management structures. SFPL has been established to enhance and develop innovative forms of learning and to oversee the operational management of these activities. It administers the University's Lifelong Learning Scheme, which includes a large number of students on programmes for whom the workplace is an integral element of their study.

98 The opportunities offered by flexible learning are key to one of the Corporate Plan's primary strategic objectives: employer engagement. Following revalidation the primary users of the Lifelong Learning scheme will be students on the Combined Studies Programme (formerly the Open Credit Scheme) and University of Derby Corporate (UDC). One of the reasons for the creation of UDC in 2008 was to act as a broker, using academic excellence as a marketing tool, responding to the needs of employers for bespoke accredited short programmes by commissioning them from academic providers based in the faculties and schools. A network of faculty-based workforce development fellows works closely with academic colleagues and UDC to design higher level learning and teaching that can be flexibly delivered, accessible through AP(E)L, and suitable for workforce development. The University is revising its 2005 policy for work place learning to ensure full reflection of distinct types of delivery and full engagement with the revised Section 9 of the *Code of practice*, with an expected conclusion early in 2010. It is benchmarking progress against its sector comparators and competitors, and aims to increase the number of those undertaking workbased learning through UDC from 200 in 2009 to 4,000 by 2014. The audit team heard that it is currently on target to do so.

99 The University has in place procedures to tackle the challenges presented by flexible modes of study in curriculum design, the assessment of learning, and programme management. It has taken steps to assure the quality of such provision, for example by establishing additional requirements for the design, validation, approval and annual monitoring of online and distributed programmes or modules to ensure that such provision is clearly identified and robustly scrutinised. It has also established guidelines for minimum student expectation of online support. Administrative, operational and quality management issues related to the support of the growing

number of flexible learners are being addressed through an online and distributed learning project, led by the Registrar/Director of SSIS, with FLAG as its steering group. The project has established an online programme leaders' forum for the exchange of best practice. Furthermore, a flexible learning network project ran during 2007-08 to improve institutional communication.

100 Currently approximately 30 programmes across the University may be studied entirely online. Support and advice for online distance learners is provided by a dedicated staff team, in addition to the academic support, forums and discussion groups established by individual programmes. Dedicated distance learning support is also available from Learning and Information Services (LIS) which provides a one-stop service supporting students working off campus, on work placement or e-learning programmes. An additional outcome of the Curriculum Fit for the Future Strategy has been the development of a large number of online and blended learning modules or materials delivered through the University's virtual learning environment for campus-based programmes, including PDP provision for the Joint Honours Scheme. Module leaders for all of the University's taught provision are expected to make a minimum of material available online through the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), and the audit team heard that an increasing number are doing so.

101 Where a programme is proposed to be delivered either wholly or in part via Online Distance Learning (ODL) the Centre for Educational Development and Materials (CEDM) must be consulted during the design process. ODL provision must be explicitly considered by the validation panel, which also receives a report from an experienced internal advisor confirming the quality of operational and technical aspects of implementation and delivery. Following approval, but prior to delivery, ODL materials must be internally reviewed. Annual monitoring distinguishes ODL provision and, in the case of SFPL's activities, these are additionally evaluated by its school report and enhancement plan. UQEC considered the school's most recent report demonstrated insufficient awareness of e-learning or the risks associated with work-based learning, and decided that the school should in future work more closely with QED to ensure full participation in the annual monitoring process, for example by refining the structure of its programme scheme reports.

102 The audit team considered that the University has robust mechanisms in place for the strategic direction and quality management of its flexible learning provision for both work based and online delivery. These give a high priority both to the support and employment opportunities of its students, and to responding to the needs of employers. The effectiveness of those mechanisms is demonstrated at institutional level by the outcomes of the Curriculum Fit for the Future Strategy and the establishment of University of UDC. At operational level it has been addressed through the formation of SFPL to manage aspects of provision perceived to involve potentially higher levels of risk, and by the promotion of enhancement, for example through groups such as FLAG and by the effective deployment of quality management systems exemplified by the rigorous review of the fitness for purpose of the Lifelong Learning Scheme. The University is making progress in reviewing its engagement with section 9 of the *Code of practice*. The well thought out approach to the University's engagement with employers is identified as a feature of good practice.

Resources for learning

103 The development of learning resources is guided by the Learning and Information Services Strategy 2008-2013. Learning resources are centrally managed and integrated through LIS, which provides resources, systems and technology to support the academic and administrative processes of the University. It offers students and staff a range of services: academic library support and liaison; distance-learning support for students working off-campus; and e-learning development. LIS delivers IT systems and support on all teaching sites, including managing the upgrading of IT and learning facilities in lecture theatres and classrooms. The University of Derby electronic library is an online portal to library services. Identification of academic learning

resource requirements is primarily achieved through the processes of programme development and approval, and annual monitoring. LIS staff contribute to validation and review events to ensure appropriate account is taken of library, IT and related provision. LIS also contributes to annual monitoring by submitting its own annual report to UQEC, together with those from other central departments.

104 The University claims to have invested significantly in library, IT and learning technology in recent years, adding new and refurbishing existing libraries, and upgrading IT facilities across all sites. LIS gauges customer satisfaction in a number of ways, through formal mechanisms such as annual monitoring, consultation with staff, by its own student surveys, and from NSS outcomes. The 2007-08 LIS survey of its learning centre users was broadly favourable, however the learning resource satisfaction score for the 2008 NSS was disappointing compared with benchmark group results. Both surveys indicated dissatisfaction with limited availability of key texts and with the Kedleston Road main library site (which was then being refurbished), whilst the very wide spectrum of scores indicates uneven provision across subject areas. LIS submits a detailed report and action plan to UQEC on the NSS outcomes for learning resources which identifies the action taken in response.

105 The University's IT infrastructure is managed through a regularly updated information systems operating strategy. A VLE is in place, which academic staff are expected to use to provide students with e-learning materials for programmes and modules, for use by both campus-based and remote learners. CEDM has responsibility for the VLE and, together with SFPL staff, it promotes, facilitates and supports technology enhanced learning within faculties, funding the conversion of a wide range of modules into e-supported modes of delivery through the Curriculum Fit for the Future Strategy. The University's MLE, University of Derby Online (UDo), provides more general web-based services for staff and students through an online portal, including students' personal, programme and timetable details, PDP and study resources. The development of a revised and extended version, UDo II, which will have considerably more facilities and interconnectivity with other IT systems, was included in the LIS Strategy, and project work is currently on track, with an anticipated completion date in 2010. Physical resources are dealt with through faculty business plans.

106 The audit team considered that the management and monitoring of learning resources is very well integrated into the University's systems by ensuring that LIS has a role in the planning and quality processes and through committee representation at faculty and institutional levels. The LIS strategy is ambitious but has already achieved considerable progress despite funding challenges, making a significant contribution to the quality of student learning opportunities.

Admissions policy

107 The University's admissions policy was approved in 2007 and revised in 2009. It is normally amended annually to take account of changes in the external environment, and has been equality impact assessed. It is comprehensive, engages with the QAA Code of practice and the recommendations of Supporting Professionalism in Admissions, and complies with the University's policies on disability and on equality and diversity. The University has recently increased its general entry requirements to raise standards, and is currently undertaking a survey of what impact different entry profiles have on retention. Revised regulations and procedures for APL were introduced for 2009-10, aligned with the Guidelines on the accreditation of prior learning. The University no longer has a widening participation strategy. It considers that it has moved to an holistic approach to widening participation which is reflected in the profile of the institution, indicated by its support for the acquisition of higher level learning by a wide range of students through flexible delivery, developing 'graduateness' and employability.

108 Admissions for all undergraduate, non-professional taught postgraduate and online distance-learning programmes from UK applicants are received and processed centrally by the admissions service SSIS, based at Derby and Buxton. Led by the Admissions Manager, it also

offers advice to applicants and current students, and works in close and effective liaison with academic staff, as was confirmed to the audit team. The admissions service is responsible for training programme admission tutors, for example by organising annual sessions and circulating regular update emails.

109 Programmes review their entry requirements annually and communicate them to the admissions section. Applicants who do not meet the criteria are either referred to the programme admissions tutor if borderline or, where possible, offered a suitable alternative. Most taught postgraduate and all online learning applications are handled directly by the relevant faculty or department, decisions being taken by the programme leader or admissions tutor. APL applications are processed and monitored by the Student Record and Fees unit within SSIS. APL assessments are normally undertaken by the programme leader, complying with the University's regulations and any additional programme-specific requirements. Queries are dealt with by faculty coordinators, who also submit an annual report to the Regulatory Framework Committee to ensure institutional oversight.

110 The University's Internationalisation Strategy aims to double the number of campus based overseas students by 2014. Applicants are required to have qualifications and experience comparable to a UK student applying for the same programme. In addition they must demonstrate English language skills equivalent to IELTS 6.0. From 2009 the University has introduced pre-sessional and in-sessional courses in English language support. It also plans a new International Foundation Programme for students who need an extra year of study to prepare for joining an undergraduate programme. The International Office (to be renamed International Recruitment Office) deals with admissions and a newly established International Student Centre has assumed responsibility for ongoing issues such as English language and general welfare needs, acting as a 'one-stop shop' for students, and will also run cultural awareness workshops for staff. Both the international recruitment and support services are now managed by SFPL.

111 The Marketing Department organises University-wide open days, intended primarily for those who have not yet decided to apply. The SWS indicated that the UDSU would welcome greater involvement in the organisation of Open Days. Virtual open days, designed by SFPL, are held for overseas students and those interested in applying for online distance-learning programmes. As part of the application process some programmes also arrange visit days, or interview applicants.

112 The audit team concluded that the University's admissions policy and procedures which are regularly reviewed are fit for purpose, reflect Section 10 of the *Code of practice* and contribute to the University's ability to maintain oversight of academic standards.

Student support

113 The briefing paper stated that the University 'places students at the heart of everything we do.' A number of strategic, policy and operational documents promote this commitment, for example the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, and Curriculum Fit for the Future Strategy. The key institutional statement is the Student Experience Strategy 2009-2012, which evolved from the former retention strategy, and is one of the corporate plan's seven core strategies. The Student Experience Strategy Group develops and funds projects, monitoring progress against an action plan. Performance indicators, including detailed retention reports and NSS scores, inform the Strategy Group's practice and are reviewed at each monthly meeting. The group is not part of the formal deliberative structure, but has a significant role in guiding University policy development relating to the enhancement of the student experience, contributing items to the agendas of appropriate central and faculty committees, in particular UQEC, and FQECs and SQCs, which have a similar remit at faculty and school levels.

114 Integrated student support is primarily provided by SSIS, guided by the SSIS Strategy 2009-2014. Operationally those services are supplied through five units, each with dedicated staff teams located across the campuses: student experience (the career development centre, complaints and appeals, the programme advisory service, the student experience team); student planning and information services (admissions, research, planning and statistics); student systems and operations (systems development, records, fees, assessment, timetabling); student support (the support and advisory service, support centres); and departmental services. The student support team operates central receptions at the four main sites, where students can receive key information, advice and guidance, and also offers specialist professional and advisory services (including health, counselling and disability support). The service works closely with the UDSU advice centre 'The Source.' In addition to SSIS learning support is provided by LIS/Library services, which offers an extensive programme of study skills, including online anti-plagiarism guidance, and a study advisor/student mentor scheme. The most comprehensive overview and analysis of performance delivered by SSIS is provided by the department's annual monitoring report to UQEC, and its evaluation in the institutional overview report submitted to Academic Board. The quality of support for students is tested through analysis of NSS responses and the commissioning of regular 'Feedback' campaigns, which independently gather opinions on specific elements of student life.

115 Programme leaders 'act in all cases as the primary contact for students requiring pastoral or academic support,' as tutorial systems vary from faculty to faculty, the range of mechanisms including personal tutors, year tutors, and academic counsellors, in addition to the programme leader. The effectiveness of local and central student support and guidance arrangements are evaluated at the programme and school reporting stages of the annual monitoring process. Hitherto there has been no standard institutional system for Personal Support and Development Planning (PDP), leading the University to conclude that there has been an 'unacceptable degree of variability in the student experience of employability and PDP within their undergraduate programmes'. In its discussions the audit team heard of examples of excellent pastoral and academic support from staff practising an open door policy, and also of occasional examples where it was less effective. Students spoke extremely highly of the great care, support and guidance they received from academic staff but some considered that a named personal tutor would be especially beneficial for first year students.

116 One of the objectives of the Student Experience Strategy is to support PDP, employability and personal tutors. The University has addressed this by revising its arrangements. Academic Board resolved that, from September 2009, commencing with year 1, all undergraduate programmes including Joint Honours will begin the process of identifying a module at each level which will deliver PDP, career development and personal tutor support, unless professional body requirements dictate that, alternatively, PDP should be embedded in the curriculum. The audit team learnt that the University intends to evaluate the effectiveness of this initiative before extending it to Foundation Degree and taught postgraduate programmes. The team consider it desirable that the University expedites the inclusion of Foundation Degree and taught postgraduate students in its new PDP model.

117 Each faculty and the Joint Honours Scheme has a student liaison officer (SLO) who acts as 'a hub for referral to central services and tutors and a familiar face for support,' provides support by responding to individual student needs, publicising information and is responsible for implementing the faculty's student retention strategy. SLOs meet regularly as a group and work closely with central services and UDSU. To ensure adequate support for students on the cross-institutional Joint Honours scheme, each faculty has an academic counsellor. SFPL also appoints an academic counsellor for each stage of the scheme, and every participating subject appoints a subject leader.

118 Programme committees utilise a range of management information to monitor student performance, including the regular audit of student profiles at specific points during the academic year, both to ensure accuracy and to identify potential difficulties. Attendance

monitoring, submission of coursework, VLE log in and library usage are identified in the Student Experience Strategy as indicators giving early warning of possible lack of engagement, allowing timely intervention and support. The University is currently piloting automated attendance monitoring and assignment submission (including the use of anti-plagiarism software) to enhance its data on individual student performance. Student retention and progression by stage and cohort is reported through the annual monitoring of programmes, and retention reports are regularly issued to faculties. The audit team considered the University's use of management information such as attendance and assignment submission data to target student support, a feature of good practice.

119 Specialist advice and support is directed at particular cohorts or to address specific individual needs. In its web-based publicity the support services distinguish between either full-time undergraduate or part-time and postgraduate students. The disability support unit (based within the SSIS support and advisory service) provides advice and information to prospective and current students, monitoring provision through a support advisory group. Students spoke extremely highly of the quality of support provided for disabled students, both centrally and locally, which the audit team was able to confirm. In particular the Get Ahead period, a week long programme helping disabled students settle in prior to the main induction, is very highly regarded. Formal support plans can be negotiated for students who need assistance to attend or study at the University.

120 The audit team considered that the University has in place an extensive, generally well managed and integrated network of support for students guided by clear strategic objectives and with a strong commitment to the enhancement of the quality of student learning opportunities.

Staff support (including staff development)

121 The University's Recruitment Policy and Procedures document sets out the principles and operational arrangements for the advertising of vacancies and the selection and appointment of staff. Induction comprises corporate and local elements provided by the Organisation and People Development section of HR (OPD) through a central course and by the appointee's line manager. Academic staff are initially appointed for a probationary period, provided with a mentor, and have their performance regularly reviewed as part of the University's development and performance review process (DPR). Full-time staff new to teaching are expected to complete the HEA-accredited Postgraduate Programme in Learning and Teaching in HE (part of the University's CPD Framework) to demonstrate achievement of professional teaching standards. Teaching staff on pro rata contracts are encouraged to participate, although the audit team noted that the University's stated policy was that every person engaged in teaching students, including postgraduate research students (see paragraph 160) should be supported by an appropriate provision of professional development.

122 DPR which has been in place in its current form for five years, is compulsory for full-time staff and optional for associate lecturers. It is an opportunity to discuss individual performance and establish training and development needs. Through a cyclical framework it is intended to balance institutional objectives with personal development, based on a yearly review meeting between the staff member and line manager. OPD, which administers the scheme's documentation and operation, is currently reviewing it to build in more continuous interaction throughout the year. The University's Observation Monitoring and Support of Teaching scheme requires every member of the academic staff to participate on an annual basis. A recent internal survey found that although it occurs fairly widely, compliance is patchy, a significant minority of staff not participating, and that the scheme does not draw on its development potential. Nevertheless the audit team heard that there is some good practice in place. The ATQ report recommended its replacement by a more developmental Professional Practice Review, and the team learnt that a more flexible and innovative scheme is to be introduced at the start of 2010.

123 The University's reward strategy is aligned with the aims of the Corporate Plan, with the objective of recruiting and retaining high calibre staff. Incremental points are available above the senior lecturer scale for those who exceed expectations in the DPR. Procedures for promotion to principal tutor, reader and professor are based on set criteria. Recognition schemes include annual excellence, loyalty and instant recognition awards.

124 The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy is informed by the expectation that staff routinely engage in reflective practice and critical thinking, both in their subject and also in pedagogy. Its action plan seeks to promote HEA and subject centre engagement for both academic and learning support staff. At present over 120 staff are members of the HEA, and the Corporate Plan target aims for 75 percent by 2014. A Learning and Teaching Advisory Group, consisting primarily of senior teaching fellows and QED managers, supports and monitors achievement of the Strategy's objectives. LTAG advises the Director of QED and UQEC, and also manages the University's annual Learning, Teaching and Assessment conference. It was clear to the audit team that one of the most effective instruments of enhancement has been the appointment of teaching and senior teaching fellows, who were given key central and faculty developmental responsibilities in the enhancement of teaching and learning processes. A revised fellowship scheme is now in place. A new cohort of workforce development fellows has also been appointed, whose role is to support employer engagement.

125 The briefing paper described the programme leader as crucial in the management of the University's responsibilities for the quality of its provision and the standards of its awards. The audit team heard that there is a variety of formal and informal support for programme leaders, including twice yearly conferences, online support, networking, and a very comprehensive and useful handbook (now in its 6th edition). In some cases staff teams share programme management. The University has identified the need to reduce the burden placed on programme leaders and has given a high priority to ensuring they have adequate support. QED is currently leading a review of the programme leader role and responsibilities.

126 QED is responsible for the CPD Framework for teaching and learning support staff, which has now been approved by ADC as a validated flexible framework, offering the opportunity to achieve postgraduate awards including MA or PhD in Academic Practice. The Learning Teaching and Assessment Portal is an online resource to allow colleagues who support student learning and achievement to exchange good practice. QED also publishes a comprehensive set of quality handbooks and provides staff development for those responsible for quality management, for example workshops for members of VARSP, and the biannual programme leaders' conferences.

127 In November 2008 UQEC established a working group to review the assurance of teaching quality (ATQ). The final report, submitted in September 2009, linked peer review of teaching, academic induction, staff development, and student feedback and representations, recommending a series of changes which, if adopted, will have a significant impact on teaching quality and how it is enhanced.

128 Staff development needs are identified both 'top-down' from institutional strategic requirements and 'bottom-up' through DPR. They are collated through school reports and faculty business plans, although the University acknowledges that, until recently, there has been inadequate coordination at institutional level, due to the absence of an overarching management structure to oversee its direction. In May 2009 the Director of Human Resources produced an executive report that proposed the establishment of a Strategic Workforce Development Group to agree the University's annual development priorities and to oversee their delivery. The audit team learnt that a Strategic Development Steering Group has now been established, which has agreed workforce development organisational priorities for 2009-10 and to support delivery of the University's core strategic aims. It considered both reports to be frank, astute and timely evaluations, identifying weaknesses and proposing practical solutions. The team concluded that the University offers a rich and varied network of development and training opportunities to

encourage the professional development of its staff. Procedures are regularly reviewed and continuously enhanced.

129 The audit team found that 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. As, the University will be subject to a separate audit of its collaborative provision this judgement does not apply to that provision.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

130 The University's approach to enhancement is set out in its Enhancement Policy which was approved in 2008 by Academic Board (AB). The aim of the Policy is to inform the interpretation and implementation of the Corporate Plan and its associated operating strategies, covering learning, teaching and support. The Enhancement Policy builds on the earlier Quality Strategy which was used, after the 2006 governance review, to develop systems capable of incorporating an enhancement-led approach to quality assurance.

131 The University defines enhancement as 'change leading to improvement in the quality of learning opportunities'. The policy refers both to the learning opportunities available to students and those available to staff. The policy notes that the drivers for enhancement may be both internal and external. It locates responsibility for enhancement at multiple points at multiple levels within the institution. Since the University does not separate quality assurance from quality enhancement, this implies that enhancement activity is pervasive throughout the institution.

132 The audit team found that the University had a clearly defined and widely shared commitment to enhancement across all aspects of academic practice. The University's approach to enhancement is enshrined in the Enhancement Policy and forms part one of the Quality Management Handbook. In order to implement its enhancement objectives it has designed its quality management processes in ways that facilitate the identification and addressing of opportunities to enhance learning opportunities. Responsibility for enhancement has been written into the terms of reference of the AB and key committees including the University Quality Enhancement Committee (UQEC), FQEC, School Quality Committee (SQC); it is also written into the job description of key roles such as Assistant Deans and Faculty Quality Managers as well as being central to the work of co-ordinating groups such as Quality Managers Advisory Group and Learning and Teaching Advisory Group. Quality Enhancement Group plays a critical role in promoting enhancement and has staff dedicated to this area of work.

133 Within this broad approach the University identifies four types of activity that are central to enhancement. The first type of activity is the recognition and reward of good practice at the level of the individual. Examples of this activity include the University's various award schemes; (see paragraph 139) the recognition of good practice through appointment of teaching fellows (see paragraph 137 above); and initiatives such as the annual Learning and Teaching Conference which facilitates the dissemination of good practice; and the Continuing Professional Development Framework for academic and learning support staff.

134 The second form of enhancement activity identified in the Enhancement Policy involves on the one hand action on the outcomes of annual monitoring and periodic review, and on the other, staff development and posts responsible for promoting improved academic practice. The annual monitoring process results in the identification of opportunities for enhancement, proposals and plans at programme, school and faculty level which feed into the institution-wide annual Enhancement Plan. The University plan is agreed and monitored by UQEC. Development of the plan and implementation result from the interaction of Programme Committees, SQC, FQEC, and UQEC, where necessary working in collaboration with other groups at appropriate levels. Periodic review processes result in recommendations for enhancement at subject, faculty and University level. The audit team considered the development and implementation of this

plan a feature of good practice which contributes to the comprehensive and integrated planning and quality processes which guide the priorities and actions of the University at institutional and faculty level.

135 The University has established a number of posts which are critical to its enhancement policy. Faculty Quality Managers are responsible for embedding an enhancement focused approach and ensuring that the Universities strategies for quality and enhancement are implemented locally. Teaching fellows are central to the implementation of the University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and support enhancement in curriculum development and delivery. The University's various advisory groups and forums also provide a support network for those engaged in the enhancement of academic practice.

136 The third form of enhancement activity involves the promotion of innovative practice and transformational change through investment, special projects and staff appointments. The University has invested in its infrastructure including libraries and specialised teaching space. The audit team saw a range of examples of enhancement involving projects and staff appointments which have been discussed above in relation to the institution's management of learning opportunities. TQEF monies have been used to fund a number of enhancement projects and following the cessation of TQEF the initiatives have been reviewed and evaluated.

137 The final form of enhancement activity involves developing institutional climates, structures and systems conducive to learning and good teaching and the promotion of innovative practice. This form of enhancement involves high level activity such as the review and amendment of quality management processes, consideration of levels of resource, and strategic planning. The audit team concluded that the predominant culture within the institution was one of openness and self-reflection which was supportive of enhancement activity.

138 The pervasive nature of enhancement activity within the University makes any judgement of its effectiveness inseparable from the effectiveness of the institution's overall management of quality and standards. The audit team observed a commitment to continuous improvement across the institution and many examples of resulting positive changes. On this basis the team concluded that the University's approach to quality enhancement was both well-designed and effective.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

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

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

140 At the time of the audit visit there were approximately 140 Postgraduate Research (PGR) Students (of whom, 12 were members of staff) and 120 on Postgraduate Professional (PGP) Doctorates, primarily the EdD. In recent years approximately 15 students per year gained a higher degree, primarily doctorates, Research students are split across the faculties as follows: ADT, 30; BCL, 32, EHS, 50 and UDB, 18. Most PGR PhD students are on-campus, but significant numbers are distance-learners, often overseas. Approximately half of PhD students are part-time. A very small number of students are registered on the extended New Route PhD introduced in 2008. University strategy is to significantly increase the number of studentships and PGR numbers during the next five years. The briefing paper stated that the University attaches 'considerable importance on the necessity for a highly effective set of regulations for postgraduate research: the Postgraduate Regulations (2008) and a variety of subsidiary documents and guidance that have been recently updated. The University is seeking to develop its research culture via a variety of funding initiatives and an active approach to the establishment of further research groups'.

141 Research is strategically driven through the Research Operational Strategy 2009-2013. Executive level responsibility for research is held by the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Learning, Teaching and Scholarship who chairs UK Research and Research Degrees Committee (URRDC). Each Faculty also has a Research and Research Degrees Committee (FRRDC) that is accountable to URRDC and reports to faculty management. URRDC papers seen by the team demonstrated active interaction involving open and reflective discussion between the URRDC and its faculty counterparts, with due consideration and reporting at Academic Board. Deliberations are supported by the informative and analytical nature of the Annual Reports for Research

142 URRDC works closely with the Regulatory Framework Committee, for example, in updating the PG regulatory framework. The framework for the quality management of research degrees is defined in The Postgraduate Regulations, (2008) and a variety of subsidiary documents and guidance that have been recently updated. Coinciding with the introduction of these regulations, the University introduced a four-year New Route PhD as an alternative to the traditional three-year PhD. All these documents are readily accessible via the University's Research Website.

143 These revisions to the postgraduate research framework post-date the QAA's Special Review of Research Degree programmes, 2006. The Report provided two matters for further consideration. One involved 'strengthening student feedback mechanisms', a matter that became bound up with the idea of establishing a Graduate School. The other revolved around the 'suitability of the requirement that the Directors of Studies would normally have a doctorate'. The University decided that its existing regulations, emphasising the qualifications and previous successful research experience available in the totality of the supervisory package, were sufficiently robust. Centrally, postgraduate research students are supported via the Research Office, a component of the recently established SSIS, and integral to many postgraduate processes. The Research Office provides relevant development sessions to both supervisors and students in conjunction with QED. Much operational responsibility for the development of research lies with the institutional Head of Research who has counterparts within each faculty by way of Faculty Research Managers. The latter chair the relevant FRRDC and are members of URRDC.

144 URRDC prepares an annual report on research activity for Academic Board. Amongst other matters, these reports contain information regarding the success of PGR students and have, in the recent past, reported on successful actions taken to improve registrations and completion rates. The Head of Research has responsibility for ensuring the institutional approach to postgraduate research programmes reflects the precepts of the QAA's *Code of practice*.

The research environment

145 In 2008 the University completed a Research Review the aim of which was 'to identify ways to strengthen the research environment and make it conducive to researchers at all stages of their careers to be motivated, creative and productive'. Key outcomes were to actively encourage the establishment of new research groups, provide small grants as encouragement to staff to commence research, and to further employ the DPR process. The Head of Research works with Faculty Research Managers to identify potential research groups, for which formal approval is required against a set of criteria. Currently, there are seven groups and three centres, the latter having a higher status and requiring additional formality in their establishment. The audit team was able to confirm progress with this activity.

146 Over recent years the University has organised an annual research conference, the most recent of which in March 2009 discussed what further steps should be taken to improve the research environment. Purpose built office accommodation is now provided for the majority of on-campus PGR students, although it is acknowledged that further space needs to be actively sought. The Research Office manages this facility and is thereby able to liaise closely with students.

Selection, admission and induction of postgraduate research students

147 The University's Research Website is intended to be a key resource for applicants and the audit team considered it to be a comprehensive source of documentation, process information, and associated forms. While all formal correspondence, offers and fees information for potential students is handled by the Research Office, faculty Heads of Research have primary responsibility for admissions. Response times to candidates are monitored through the PGR Student Database and have shown improvements in the recent past. Induction is faculty-based, complemented by a central induction at which entitlements and responsibilities are covered. All students receive a copy of the 'Guide for PGR students' which contains comprehensive descriptions of a wide range of matters from enrolment via supervision to completion. The Guide is supplemented by a Postgraduate Research Student Charter which incorporates the University's code of practice on research. The normal recruitment route is registration onto a MPhil with confirmation of PhD registration after about 18 months. In discussion with students, and by consulting the annual reports on research activity, the team concluded that there had been improvements in the recruitment process and that PGR students were provided with satisfactory induction.

Supervision

148 All PGR students are allocated a supervisory package which includes a Director of Studies, as primary supervisor, and at least a second supervisor. Detailed requirements for such appointments are set out in a document entitled 'The roles of the PGR/PGP Supervisors and Mentors'. This document also sets out the time allowances and appointment load for supervisors. The maximum supervision loads for a Director of Studies is limited to the equivalent of 10 full-time PhD students, but the number of individuals may be many more than 10 if part-time students or second supervisions are involved. The audit team found that a few individual supervisors have a loading at the top end of the maximum, although this load included second supervisions and PGP students. The team was assured that the load was being properly managed so that such supervisors had adequate contact with their students, for example, by using staff whose primary role was research and with no other significant responsibilities. Furthermore, this approach was considered transitional while supervisory capacity was increased.

149 The University is seeking to grow its supervisory capability, in part by establishing a mentoring scheme to bolster supervisory packages where there is limited previous supervisory experience, and also by appointing second supervisors who may be academics from other institutions. Supervisory skills are also developed through other routes: a published guide, development seminars, and online research skills modules. All supervisory packages are set within a recognised research group. The audit team considered that, while limiting the disciplinary range of topic areas on offer, this approach helped ensure a supportive research environment.

Progress and review arrangements

150 Students and their Director of Studies record their regular meetings, the occurrence of which is monitored by the University. Further monitoring of the student is by way of an annual progress report prior to re-enrolment. More formal stages of progression occur at registration, when a student's supervisory package is endorsed by the FRRDC, and at confirmation of the target award (MPhil or PhD). The confirmation process requires both a report and a viva-voce examination; the latter is seen as good preparation for the final examination. These processes are described in the 'Guide for PGR students'. New route PGR students must accrue the required 90 credits of their taught component to progress. The PGR Student Database enables FRRDCs to monitor the progress of individual students.

Development of research and other skills

151 The registration process (post-enrolment) requires that training needs be identified in advance. All PGR students are expected to attend a series of research skills seminars covering, for example, thesis writing, research ethics, and quantitative research. The pattern of attendance is individual to each student and attendance at the selected seminars is monitored. A core set of credit bearing research skills modules, launched in 2008, are followed by students on the New Route PhD. These modules are available in a non-credit bearing form to students following the traditional route. Through considering documents and in discussion with students, the audit team concluded that the research skills seminars were generally useful.

152 University policy is that PGR students who undertake teaching duties must undertake mandatory training which focuses on the practical aspects of teaching in the form of four two-hour seminars. According to the policy, PGR students should limit their teaching and other non-research duties to six hours per week, and are ineligible to teach without training. However, students met by the audit team stated that there were issues of workload and adequate preparation of PGR students who teach, with some receiving no training. A URRDC Report on Professional Development in Teaching 2008 for PGR students noted a variety of problems identified by participants who had undertaken the training. The audit team learnt from senior staff that while there is a robust mechanism for inviting PGR students who will teach to attend the necessary training, there is no mechanism for monitoring take-up by all those who should attend other than through their Director of Studies. Concerns identified in the University PGR Retention Project about PGR students who teach has led to a recent tightening of related policy. The audit team had two concerns regarding the current situation. The first was that individual PGR students own personal development and studies would suffer due to overload and under-preparation. The second concern was for the taught programme students who might be taught by PGR students' who were not adequately prepared for their role. The audit team considered it advisable that the University ensure the consistent application of the policy that all postgraduate research students who teach receive appropriate training.

Feedback mechanisms

153 The briefing paper stated that the annual PGR feedback survey noted that levels of satisfaction were high, but with notable exceptions amongst DL students. A brief summary of results are given in the annual reports on research activity. There are opportunities for PGR representatives to sit on URRDC and FRRDCs, and also to regularly meet the Head of Research. A sample of recent URRDC minutes demonstrated that PGR attendance was irregular with consistent absence of a representative from Buxton and no PGP student. The annual Research Conference is also used as a source of feedback. The team considered that it would be preferable for more consistent feedback from all doctoral constituencies, including those on distance-learning programmes and overseas.

Assessment (including assessment policy, regulations and external examining)

154 Research degree examination and the associated processes are defined in 'The Postgraduate Regulations, 2008 Edition', supported by the guidance documents mentioned earlier. These regulations include criteria for awards that accord with the FHEQ level 8 descriptor. Procedures for complaints and appeals are also dealt with in these documents. The formal documents are supplemented by a more 'student friendly' guidance leaflet, 'Guidance if you wish to make a complaint', available via the research website. The audit team considered that the guidance, although succinct, is comprehensive, and includes reference to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

155 Examiner appointments, normally one internal and one external, are considered against a set of criteria defined in the regulations and formally approved by URRDC on the recommendation of the relevant FRRDC. Recent policy is that viva-voce examinations have a non-

examining chair, appointed by the Research Office from a list of suitably trained nominees. The regulations associated with doctoral assessments are consistent with the precepts of the QAA's *Code of practice, Section 1*. However, the audit team would encourage the University to consider a more explicit statement about the independence of the chair of a viva-voce.

156 The audit team considered that the management of the research environment for postgraduate research students was generally sound. Careful consideration is being given to growing research supervisory capacity commensurate with the maintenance of standards. There team noted weaknesses in the consistency with which feedback is obtained from postgraduate students and the provision of training for students who teach.

Section 7: Published information

157 The University has a distributed model for information provision. Oversight is provided by the Corporate Management Team with particular individuals being responsible for a given area. The University's corporate identity in both print and web-based media is centrally coordinated by the Marketing Department with its own director, who reports to the Pro-vice Chancellor (Development). The University regards its extensive website as the most up-to-date source of information regarding programmes and services, Faculties are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of published information related to programmes. Each faculty has a Marketing Officer as a nominated web officer who is responsible for quality control. Prospectuses are jointly produced between the faculties and Marketing, with the Dean ultimately signing off information as being correct.

158 The provision of information is supported by Student Support and Information Services which contains the central Admissions and Planning & Statistics Teams. Both these teams contribute to the provision of data for the UCAS website, alongside faculties, Marketing, and Quality Enhancement Department (QED). The website is also an important source of pre-enrolment information, in particular, details of induction arrangements, where the Student Experience Team coordinate the work of many bodies. Quantitative information is the responsibility of the Planning and Statistics Unit, who prepare the University's HESA return. This information provides the basis for the information published on Unistats and also performance indicator reports used in a variety of contexts.

159 The Student Experience Team also coordinate the publication of the Student Diary and Handbook, containing a comprehensive and accessible list of information about life at the University. This document is also available online. During the enrolment process students have drawn to their attention the '3Rs' document. Students, in the SWS and in discussions with the audit team, considered this document not to be student friendly', but acknowledged the comprehensive nature of its contents.

160 Notwithstanding the care with which it is prepared, some students met by the audit team did not consider prospectus information accurate and this view was supported in the SWS. However, other students met were satisfied with the accuracy of their prospectus and other information, while being unaware of the concept of programme specifications. As the inaccuracies mentioned related to programme academic content, this was a potentially serious issue. The University will wish to be careful that publicity material fully reflects the current position.

161 The Programme Leaders' Handbook and the 3Rs specifies the contents of a typical handbook. The 3Rs states that 'it is vital that students' attention is drawn to what is available elsewhere particularly regarding appeals and complaints...'. The audit team reviewed a number of programme handbooks, and found varied practice in this regard. Some omitted any such references completely. Omission of such references constitutes a breach of the University's regulations found in the 3Rs and the team was told by senior managers that there was no system

for auditing of the content of programme handbook contents in this regard. Given the importance of conveying full and accurate information to students the team considered it desirable that the University should ensure all student handbooks contain the University's required core information.

162 The programme handbook is considered the main source of programme information for students and as such 'acts as the programme specification'. The audit team learnt that the inclusion of programme specifications is a relatively recent development, and, amongst other things, practical issues of version control led to a revised stance on the preparation and presentation of programme specifications just prior to the audit visit. The current situation is that in the future validation and revalidation events will require the approval of a free-standing programme specification. As these events occur, programme specifications will be appended as discrete publications to the programme handbook, as well as being available via the QED website. The team welcomed this approach to clarity of information provision, but considered that the normal re-validation schedule would lead to a protracted period of time before all students had convenient access to programme specifications. The team considered it desirable for the University to accelerate implementation of its decision to produce readily accessible programme specifications.

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

RG 573a 03/10

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ISBN 978 1 84979 089 5

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786