QAA

University of Plymouth

December 2009

Annex to the report

Contents

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Plymouth (the University) from 07 December to 11 December 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 the University offers.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

In addition to the two judgements above, the audit team also produced commentaries on the University's arrangements for quality enhancement, collaborative provision, postgraduate research students and published information. These can be found in the report.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

While the Teaching and Learning Strategy, the changes to the Strategic Plan and the work of the Quality Network demonstrate systematic enhancement activity, there was no widespread understanding of how enhancement was articulated and developed throughout the University.

Postgraduate research students

Completion rates have declined when compared to national data and while trends for submission by full-time postgraduate research students have stabilised, those from part-time research students have increased above the recommended norm. The arrangements for postgraduate research students largely reflect the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, although the audit team advised that further work needs to be done.

Published information

The audit team found that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University of Plymouth 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 as being good practice:

- the continuing development of the role of the Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning) has been central to the dissemination of good practice and the development of a coherent approach to the quality of the provision and the management of the security of academic standards (paragraph 27)

- the way in which the work of the Higher Education Learning Partnership (HELP) CETL had contributed to and enhanced the functions of the University of Plymouth Colleges (paragraph 132).

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- ensure that the University's processes for the oversight and management of collaborative arrangements are consistently applied (paragraph 137)

- develop an institutional response to postgraduate research student progression and completion rates and feedback, and strengthen the relationship of the Graduate School with the faculties and the Quality Support Unit to facilitate institutional oversight of the postgraduate research student experience (paragraphs 158 and 167).

It would be desirable for the University to:

- give consideration to the greater involvement of student representation in the University's formal quality assurance processes (paragraph 76).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1   The University of Plymouth (the University), which was awarded University title in 1992, developed through the merger of geographically dispersed institutions: it has recently completed a programme of relocating its provision to the main campus in Plymouth.

2   At the time of the audit, the University had 28,261 undergraduate students of whom 9,284 were part-time and 10,000 located in partner institutions across the south-west of England, and in faculty-based national and international collaborations. There were also 4,026 taught postgraduate students and 528 postgraduate research students. International and Channel Island students form a small percentage of the student body with 1,100 undergraduate, 232 taught postgraduate and 159 research students.

3   The academic structure of the University was reorganised in August 2009 into six discipline-based faculties: Arts, Education, Health, Plymouth Business School, Science and Technology and the College of Medicine and Dentistry. In addition, institutional collaborative partnerships with regional educational providers are organised as a faculty, University of Plymouth Colleges (UPC).

4   The University's vision articulated in its Strategic Plan is 'To be the enterprise University'. The University expresses its mission as: 'Our enterprising approach will further develop our reputation as a world-leading University and our enterprise culture will deliver sustained innovation and international impact. We will use the knowledge we create to transform lives. We will achieve this through world-class research, excellence in teaching and learning, and through our partnerships and collaborations. We will maintain our commitment to driving social inclusion, economic prosperity, and environmental quality in our local community and beyond.

5   The University's corporate plan 2004 to 2009 was reviewed in 2007 and updated in 2008. A new Strategic Plan was produced in 2009. Within the Plan, the Mission is articulated through five strategic ambitions, focused on Through-life Learning, World-class Research, Plymouth and Beyond, Sustainability, and Raising Aspirations.

6   Underpinning the Strategic Plan are a number of academic and support strategies for: Learning and Teaching; Research and Innovation; Enterprise; Human Resources; and Internationalisation. Other strategies developed in the context of the previous Corporate Plan remain valid. These include; Estates; Learning Resources Strategy and Action Plan; and Information and Information Technology Strategy & Implementation Plan 2004 to 2009.

7   The University elected to have the hybrid audit process; as a result, the University's collaborative arrangements fall within the scope of this audit. The audit team visited two of the University's partner organisations in the UK where it met and conducted meetings with staff and students in order to audit the University's collaborative provision. Within the Briefing Paper, the University makes clear that while the large majority of its collaborations are within the region, it is committed to finding ways to increase the number of international collaborations.

The information base for the audit

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

9   The Students' Union produced a student written submission (SWS) setting out the students' views on the accuracy of the information provided to them, the experience of students as learners and their role in quality management.

10   In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the Major review of healthcare programmes, July 2004

- the report of the previous Institutional audit, February 2005

- the report of the Foundation Degree review of Education (Teaching assistants), June 2005

- the report of the Foundation Degree review of Law, July 2005

- the report of the previous collaborative audit, May 2006

- the report of UK collaboration in India, December 2008

- Integrated quality and enhancement Developmental engagement reports produced by QAA since the previous Institutional audit (made available by the University)

- reports produced by other relevant bodies (for example, Ofsted and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs))

- the special Review of research degree programmes 2006

- the institution's internal documents

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

Developments since the last audit

11   The 2005 Institutional audit report found that broad confidence could be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards. It identified several features of good practice in relation to the staff and student intranet portals; the effectiveness of Internal Quality Audit; the partnership between the University and its Students' Union; the work of the Educational Development and Learning Technologies unit; the effectiveness of the SkillsPlus strategy; and the Graduate School support for postgraduate research students. The report identified areas for improvement which are discussed in the paragraphs below.

12   The University was also subject to a collaborative provision audit in 2006; the report found that broad confidence could reasonably be placed both in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards made through

collaborative arrangements and capacity of the University to satisfy itself that the learning opportunities offered to students through its collaborative arrangements are managed effectively and meet its requirements. Good practice was identified in respect of the further education college network, the UPC, as well as areas for improvements which are discussed in the paragraphs below.

13   The University participated in the India Audit of 2008-09 and the report considered that the University was operating the partnership with an appropriate regard for the expectations contained in the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, published by QAA. Again, good practice was identified in addition to the areas for improvement identified in the paragraphs below.

14   The recommendations arising from the audits have resulted in a number of developments being undertaken to address the issues identified. Following the 2005 audit, a Code of Practice on marking was agreed in 2006 and the Assessment Working Group developed new guidelines on the implementation of the University's Assessment Policy and further revised the policy in 2007. The Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC) reviewed the assessment practices, procedures and regulations in November 2007 and made 19 recommendations which, together with the action plan, were incorporated into the Teaching and Learning Strategic Action Plan which is overseen by the Action Planning Group. The plan is reviewed at each TLC meeting and adjustments made if necessary. In addition, the external examiner's report form was revised to seek feedback on the implementation of the policy. Issues raised are identified by the Head of Teaching Quality Information and discussed by the Academic Regulations Sub-Committee and by the Teaching and Learning Committee, respectively. Minutes of both committees confirm that this mechanism worked effectively to deliver more consistent practice across the institution in assessment practice. The University stated that the faculties continue to implement actions to improve feedback to students and examples were provided from a range of minutes to support this; however, the audit team noted that students were still critical of the timeliness and quality of feedback.

15   In the 2008-09 academic session a Directorate of Teaching and Learning was established to monitor action plans arising from the Teaching and Learning Strategy, take forward pertinent aspects of the work of the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) and provide a network for the sharing of practice by the Associate Deans (Teaching & Learning) (ADs(TL)). The ADs(TL) also work directly with Quality Support to ensure consistency across faculties in the implementation of enhancements to quality assurance activities. The audit team found that the Directorate was assiduous in monitoring the action plans and the sharing of practice by the ADs(TL) but following discussions with staff and a review of electronic and other evidence, the audit team formed the view that, overall, the work of the CETLs has not yet been embedded within the institution. The University is currently considering how to manage the work of the CETLs following the end of the external funding for these areas. The one exception was the Higher Education Learning Partnership CETL whose work has clearly informed the work of UPC and is further discussed in the paragraphs below.

16   The University has also simplified its annual programme monitoring process and taken a risk-based approach to module evaluation. It incorporates a review of student progression and completion statistics, external examiners' and Professional, Statutory & Regulatory Bodies' (PSRBs) reports and responses, student feedback in terms of the Student Perception Questionnaire (SPQ) and the National Student Survey (NSS) and a progress report on the previous year's action plan.

17   Since the 2006 collaborative audit, the University of Plymouth Colleges (UPC) Faculty Assessment Manager has prepared summary reports of external examiner comments which are circulated to Colleges and Subject Forum Chairs. Subject cluster meetings now occur within the annual External Examiners' Conference and external examiners are appointed to allied programmes across different partner colleges whenever possible. The student record system (UNITe) has been linked to the Corporate Information Systems database and, in addition to the standard reports provided, detailed reports can now be produced locally.

18   The actions resulting from the 2008-09 India Audit are in the process of being implemented. The Academic Development Committee (ADC), established as a subcommittee of Academic Board in August 2008, has been charged with reviewing all new courses and planned partnerships. This successor to the Institutional Partnerships Committee now has oversight of all planned partnership wherever they are based.

19   Overall, the audit team found that the University had undertaken appropriate steps to address the issues identified by the audit and review procedures.

20   The University carried out a major strategic review in 2008. The resulting academic structures, outlined in paragraph three above, were instituted in August 2009 with executive deans assuming Pro Vice-Chancellor roles with institutional level corporate responsibilities and, similarly, heads of school taking on the roles of associate deans with some cross-faculty responsibilities.

21   A new Students' Union constitution was approved in spring 2009, which saw the establishment of a Student Parliament, where union policies could be discussed and the student experience debated. The chair of the Student Parliament joined the President of the Students' Union on the Board of Governors from September 2009.

22   Other developments include: the adoption of the University's enterprise vision in spring 2008 and the development of a new Strategic Plan launched in autumn 2009, both of which were formulated through a Leadership Foundation for Higher Education Change Academy Project and then discussed widely within the University through both the committee structure and the use of open Café Fora and an email postbox which allowed all staff to participate in the development process. Concurrently, the Teaching and Learning Strategy was also reviewed.

23   In 2005 the University was awarded the funding for four CETLs and a further CETL in partnership, and in 2007 the funding for a Centre in Excellence in Teacher Training (CETT). In addition, the University now hosts three national centres in specific subject areas: the National Subject Centre for Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences (GEES), the National Centre for Innovation in Mathematics Teaching; and The Royal Statistical Society Centre for Statistical Education.

24   Developments in collaboration include the establishment of the first affiliate college agreement in 2005-06 for the delivery of University validated degree programmes and an agreement to establish a second affiliate college to provide international students with routes to University programmes in 2009, and a new collaborative agreement with the Britannia Royal Naval College in 2008 whereby the University undertakes the academic delivery of its programmes.

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

25   The Vice-Chancellor, along with the senior management team have managerial and leadership responsibility for meeting University objectives along with ultimate responsibility for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

26   Academic Board is responsible for academic planning, and the alignment of academic aspirations with the corporate resource. Its remit also includes the development, implementation and monitoring of the systems which assure the quality of teaching, learning and research, the maintenance of academic standards and the enhancement of student experience. To fulfil these obligations, it is supported by six subcommittees. The subcommittees have delegated authority and many are supported by their own sub committees. The audit team noted that the Graduate Committee and Research and Innovation Committee had undergone a major overhaul which, together with the change of chair, may have influenced the University's ability to oversee the progress of research students discussed in section 6 below.

27   The University's framework for the delivery of its educational provision is articulated in the Teaching and Learning Strategy, with institutional oversight of strategy residing with the Directorate of Teaching and Learning. The Directorate of Teaching and Learning provides a framework within which ADs(TL) share experiences and further develop the student experience. They work closely with Quality Support and play a key role in developing consistent good practice across the faculties and in the deliberative structures of the University through their memberships of institutional and faculty committees. Following discussions with staff and the review of a range of relevant documentation, the audit team formed the view that the continuing development of the role of the ADs(TL) has been central to the dissemination of good practice and the development of a coherent approach to the quality of the provision and the management of the security of academic standards, and is a feature of good practice (see paragraph 128).

28   The Quality Assurance Handbook, produced by Quality Support, brings together in great detail University procedures governing the management of academic quality and standards, which is largely devolved to faculties, and the roles and responsibilities assigned to all levels of University staff as they relate to the assurance of academic quality assurance. The Deans of Faculty are responsible for ensuring that there are adequate resources available to meet the needs of the teaching and learning provision for providing leadership in academic quality and standards and for oversight of the faculty compliance with the implementation of quality assurance arrangements. The Associate Dean may share the responsibilities for quality assurance for taught and research degree programmes, the level of sharing is decided by the Dean. Discussions with Faculty Deans and ADs(TL) confirmed that the process is well understood and designed to allow for specific requirements of subject areas.

29   The Faculty Business Manager has overarching responsibility for all professional services delivered within the faculty. The Faculty Quality Unit reports directly to the Faculty Registrar, who in turn reports directly to the Faculty Business Manager. There is further delegation to Heads of School in relation to teaching and learning, approval and review, external accreditation, QAA audit and approving research degree programmes.

30   The Graduate School is responsible for the quality assurance of research degree provision and the development of associated policies and procedures. The quality assurance of Research degree proposals and the associated monitoring of progress is the responsibility of the Faculty Boards, supported by the Graduate School. The University Graduate Committee, in conjunction with faculty research committees, oversees the maintenance of quality of the research degree process from proposal, research training, and registration to completion. It also monitors the quality of supervision and examination arrangements.

31   The audit team concluded that the University's recently introduced deliberative and executive structure, on the whole, provides an effective and suitable framework for the institutional management of academic standards and the quality of the learning opportunities. Most roles are clearly articulated and understood by the holders and there are appropriately detailed terms of reference and reporting lines for committees at both institutional and faculty level but there remains further work to be done (see paragraph 166 for further comment).

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

32   Academic Development Committee (ADC), established in 2008, is responsible to Academic Board for the strategic overview of all the University's taught provision, including partnership and postgraduate degrees. ADC undertakes the initial stage of programme approval based on alignment of the proposal with the faculty and institutional priorities, perceived demand and resource issues.

33   Approval of the detailed programme proposal is managed by the Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees (TLCs) following a template set out in the Quality Assurance Handbook. The documentation set includes a full programme specification, and the audit team was able to confirm that this is referenced against QAA's subject benchmark statements, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), and the University's Teaching and Learning Strategy (2009-12). The documentation is reviewed by a panel, specifically constituted by the TLC, which also discusses the programme with the proposing academic team. The panel includes two external peers, approved by the Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) (ADs(TL)), and at least one senior member of staff from outside the proposing faculty, as well as internal representation. The chair is normally an ADTL from outside the Faculty.

34   The Approval Report includes recommendations and any conditions to be met before final approval. On satisfactory resolution of the conditions, the programme is normally signed off by the chair of the approval meeting and approval is reported to the Faculty Board and the University TLC, although the audit team learnt that specific conditions/recommendations sometimes are signed off by the ADTL of the home faculty if this is considered more appropriate, for example where it is related to subject-specific issues. The definitive documentation is then signed off by the Associate Dean who is responsible for notifying all relevant units within the University (timetabling, for example) regarding the new programme.

35   The UPC has established two additional structures concerned with managing the quality of the student experience and academic standards in its collaborative arrangements: Joint Boards of Studies (JBS) and subject fora. The approval process for programmes within the University of Plymouth Colleges (UPC) Faculty is initiated with the initial proposal being considered by the JBS. The approval itself is a three-stage process. The initial meeting with the partner College takes an overview of the programme proposals for the current session and clarifies any logistical issues, along with consideration of panel membership and the nominations of the external advisers. Following approval from ADC, the Stage 1 meeting is scheduled, with the QA Director for the College in the chair and an Associate Dean from UPC in attendance, to consider the approval documentation and confirm nomination of external examiners to the University. Following initial approval, any conditions must be met and signed off by the College QA Director.

36   The Stage 2 meeting, which is similar in format to the University approvals meetings, is chaired by a senior member of staff outside UPC and the panel includes the two external advisers, one of whom is academic and one normally from a relevant industry or profession. The meeting report, along with any conditions for approval, is produced by Quality Support. The panel must also identify the typology of the collaboration, which is entered in the University's Register of Collaborative Provision.

37   Faculties have the delegated authority to approve all changes to modules and programmes except for those involving exceptions to University regulations, changes to award title, changes affecting students' programmes in the current academic year and changes affecting progression routes from the Foundation Degrees. The faculty offices are responsible for maintaining current approved versions of all programme documentation. Faculty approval requires consideration by the programme committees of the programme documentation and rationale for the changes. Where the changes may impact on other programmes, these require the approval of the respective Associate Deans. The process also requires independent, external scrutiny of changes to the programme aims and learning outcomes, normally by an external examiner, and confirmation that the programme mapping of learning outcomes is not affected. Changes relating to award title require assurance from the current external examiner that the new title is appropriate and consonant with the programme specifications. The ADTL is charged with determining whether the new programme is sufficiently close to its predecessor to be approved at faculty level or if a full programme approval is required, informed by a log of previous minor changes to the programme.

38   In 2008-09 the University introduced a revised Annual Programme Monitoring (APM) process 'intended to provide an annual health check on the quality, standards and relevance of all the University's taught programmes of study' with a more comprehensive review every three years. Full review is also triggered, on recommendation of the ADTL, where module pass rates fall below a specific threshold. The audit team was informed that the revised process was introduced to reduce the administrative burden on academic schools.

39   The annual process involves review of a basic data set including student progression and completion statistics (provided by the Corporate Information System), as was recommended in the 2006 collaborative audit, external examiners' and Professional Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) reports and responses, student feedback in terms of the Student Perception Questionnaire and the National Student Survey (NSS) and a progress report on the previous year's action plan. A full review includes additional information including programme committee minutes, and admissions and destinations data. The APM is undertaken by the Programme Committee, which is attended by student representatives, and the minutes set out an action plan along with any aspects of good practice. The outcomes are considered by the Faculty Learning and Teaching Comittee (FTLC) and the ADTL prepares an overview report of all the faculty's APMs for Faculty Board which considers any recommendations for action at faculty level, collates good practice and identifies any programmes for which a full review has been undertaken. The team considered that these reports were comprehensive and provided effective evaluative overviews of the programmes. The reports of the ADTLs and faculty boards are considered by the TLC. For programmes delivered by partner colleges, the process is similar, with the ADTL of UPC preparing the report, and the Joint Boards of Studies acting as the faculty subcommittees.

40   All programmes are required to undergo review every five years. This is normally undertaken on a school basis, thereby encompassing a range of programmes. The review process has the overarching remit to consider the coherence and relevance of the programme portfolio, academic standards and student achievement, the quality of the student learning experience and opportunities for enhancement. Prior to the review, the subject team is required to produce a self-evaluation document and provide a core set of documentation, including the following: programme specifications; student handbooks; external examiners' reports; APM action plans, student progression and achievement data; a range of student feedback, including the NSS and Student Perception Questionaire data; the school staff development plan; minutes of the FLTC; and the Faculty Plan.

41   The review panel is chaired by a representative of the TLC from outside the faculty and normally includes a head of school from outside the faculty, a representative from Quality Support and at least one external adviser, the nominations being approved by the University Secretary and Registrar. The panels do not include student representation but student groups (current and past) are interviewed as part of the review process, as are academic and professional staff and employers. Reviews of UPC provision also include the College Head of Higher Education or the Quality Assurance Manager. Quality Support prepares the review report, along with the panel's agreed conclusions and action points, following which the programme teams are required to produce an action plan that is approved by the Dean. Monitoring of the actions subsequently forms part of the APM.

42   Operational changes are being piloted for 2009-10, and the team was informed that these will include an objective to enable allocation of specific time for consideration of strategic issues such as enhancement, as well as confirming that the normal unit for review would be the school.

43   The audit team was able to conclude that the institution's processes for programme approval, annual monitoring and review are carried out in line with the stated procedures and in accordance with the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*.

External examiners

44   The institutional Briefing Paper sets out the central role played by external examiners, including assuring standards in terms of national benchmarks and comparability with other Higher Education Institutions, ensuring that the assessment process measures student achievement against the intended learning outcomes and is operated equitably and in line with the Assessment Policy. External examiners are appointed for all programmes leading to an award of the University, including those delivered by partner institutions, and take oversight of all assessments contributing to students' final awards. In line with the two-tier assessment board system, external examiners are appointed as subject or award-level examiners; although they are two separate roles, one individual may perform both.

45   Detailed guidelines for the appointment of external examiners, in terms of the attributes and exclusion criteria, are set out in the Quality Assurance Handbook. The Handbook also includes criteria for the appointment of external examiners for Foundation Degree and HND programmes. In the case of UPC, external examiners for cognate Foundation Degrees may be appointed across partner colleges. Nominations of new external examiners are initially considered by the Faculty Boards, signed off by the Dean and forwarded to Quality Support; final approval is by the External Examiners' Sub-Committee, with reporting of the appointment to the Academic Board.

46   The University provides all its new examiners with an induction pack, which sets out their roles, and guidance is also given regarding the provision of subject and programme level materials. There is also an external examiners' website with online copies of the documentation. Recent reports have commented favourably on the provision of information. UPC also operates a mentor system for inexperienced examiners.

47   The reports from the external examiners form part of the document set considered by the programme committees through the APM process, with students in attendance. Action plans are drawn up in response, along with updates on the progress of the previous year's action points. Quality Support prepares an annual summary which is based on a sample of 50 per cent of the reports from each faculty, including any in which causes for concern have been raised. These reports are detailed and are considered by the Academic Regulations Sub-Committee with recommendations and action points being forwarded to TLC. Recent iterations of the external examiner's report form have requested external examiners to comment specifically on the principles of the University's Assessment Policy. In UPC the Assessment Manager produces a summary of all the reports in relation to UPC issues.

48   Following previous criticisms regarding the timeliness and quality of responses, TLC charged the ADTLs with monitoring the processes in their respective faculties. Review of recent reports indicates that the majority of external examiners have commented positively regarding receipt of responses to their previous reports. In addition to the programme level responses, the external examiners also receive a copy of the summary report from Quality Support.

49   The TLC agreed that the external examiners' reports should be shared with the student representatives, with responsibility being devolved to the faculties as to how this should be implemented. Review by the team of the committee structures indicated that this normally occurs as part of the APM reviews by the programme committees, which are attended by student representatives.

50   UPC holds an annual conference for its external examiners, providing an opportunity for generic briefings and also subject-based discussions. In the light of positive feedback from examiners regarding this event, the University agreed in July 2009 to hold an annual conference for all newly appointed external examiners.

51   The audit team was able to conclude that the University makes strong and scrupulous use of independent eternal examiners and operates a robust system for collecting and responding to external examiners' reports and that this is in line with the guidelines of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining.*

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

52   The audit team saw many examples of the way in which the University had taken into account the Academic Infrastructure, published by QAA, in the development of its awards and the maintenance of standards. It has set up a system for scrutinising University procedures and practices as the different sections of the *Code of practice* are published or revised. The University has identified institutional 'leads', each of whom takes responsibility for particular sections of the *Code of practice*. They are expected to comment on proposed changes and to transmit information to other colleagues. One mechanism that has been used is to hold institutional workshops as was the case with constructing the University's responses to the 'Work-based and Placement Learning' section of the *Code*. The University also reviewed its Assessment Policy to align with the revised *Code of practice, Section 6*, and the *Code* was a key driver in establishing a working party to review assessment practices, procedures and regulations.

53   The University uses a similar system to that for the *Code of practice* in considering subject benchmarks. The role of institutional lead is taken by the relevant Head of School. It is their responsibility after consultation with subject staff to develop a corporate response to draft statements. In its publication 'Designing your programmes and modules' it is clear that programme learning outcomes are mapped against subject benchmarks, and this was confirmed in documents supporting both approval and periodic review processes.

54   Programme specifications are used across the institution. Two models are available; either use of a programme specification template or following a set of minimum requirements or headings. Faculties can adopt either approach. It was clear to the audit team that programme specifications are used as an integral part of the curriculum design process.

55   The institution makes use of the FHEQ. It is the responsibility of the University Secretary and Registrar to keep abreast of all developments, and to ensure that they are considered by the Academic Regulations Sub-committee, and then widely disseminated through the institution, with clear information about the action needed.

56   Quality Support keeps a register of all PSRBs with whom the University has a relationship. They are also informed of all visits and reports by PSRBs, and when necessary they make sure institutional action is taken in response. PSRB reports are considered as part of the periodic review process.

57   It was clear to the audit team that the University makes effective use of external expert opinion in programme design and approval. It is also used as part of the periodic review process.

58   From the evidence seen it was clear that the University makes effective and consistent use of the Academic Infrastructure and other relevant external reference points.

Assessment policies and regulations

59   There is an institution-wide set of assessment regulations with a standard pattern of assessment panels and boards. In 2007, the University published its Assessment Policy, taking account of the outcomes of the 2005 QAA audit and the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*, revised in September 2006. This Policy sets out nine core principles of assessment, their relation to other University policies, in particular the regulations, and the locus of responsibility for their implementation. The principles of assessment include the requirements that assessments should be valid, reliable and equitable, as well as including a variety of assessment types with both formative and summative elements. The policy is underpinned by a Code of Practice on marking that sets out procedures for ensuring the reliability of assessment evaluation. Details of the assessment regulations, including plagiarism, are set out in the student handbook and the audit team was informed that students received guidance in the first year in this context.

60   The quality assurance procedures, such as programme approval, are referenced against the assessment policies, and recent iterations of the external examiners' reports have included

commentaries on the implementation of the policy. The standard regulations also apply to the collaborative programmes, with any exceptions to the assessment regulations requiring formal approval by the Academic Regulations Sub-Committee.

Management information - statistics

61   The University operates a Corporate Information System (CIS), which is linked into the student administration system (UNITe) and provides online access to summary data at programme, school and institutional levels. The system is employed in the production of the information feeding into all the key quality assurance processes, namely programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic review. The data is presented in the form of both 'refreshable' reports, which can be updated daily, and 'static' reports, the latter conveying statistical information including external sources such as UCAS and the NSS results. Observation of reports arising from the APM process revealed some concerns regarding the reliability of the CIS data compared with locally-held records and the audit team was informed that the form of presentation was quite complex and not always accessible to academic staff. The team learnt that the University has agreed the appointment of a systems analyst to help ensure the reliability of the data provided and that the University recognises that the system is still evolving.

62   The University is developing its current key performance indicators over the next three years, with a wide-ranging focus derived from the 2009 Strategic Plan, including employability, social enterprise, value-added and civic engagement.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

63   The audit team found clear evidence of widespread engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and other relevant external reference points which inform the University's management of the quality of learning opportunities. The University's approval and review processes have the Academic Infrastructure as a key reference point. It was also apparent to the team that the *Code of practice* and any changes made to it are informing discussion and policy within the institution at all levels.

64   The University engages with a wide range of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) which provide important external benchmarks for a number of discipline areas. This engagement is effective in ensuring that relevant professional standards, curricula and requirements inform programmes of study.

65   The audit team concluded that the University was making careful and consistent use of those elements of the Academic Infrastructure relevant to its stewardship of academic standards.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

66   In programme approval the initial consideration by Academic Development Committed ADC involves the evaluation of market demand both from student and employer perspectives and the resource needs of the new programme, including consideration by Information and Learning Services of the library and ICT resourcing needed to support the new programme. This is followed by the approval event which further reflects on curriculum design and resourcing. The Annual Programme Monitoring (APM) process affords a mechanism for identifying future development of learning opportunities, using a range of information sources including progression data as well as feedback from students and from programme teams.

67   Areas of good practice are also identified through APM. Through the summary reports from the ADTLs, these are brought together across programmes for consideration at faculty level and contribute to the faculty action plans. Institutional-level issues are taken forward to Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC). Periodic review is a further process that enables reflection on

learning opportunities and their management at programme, faculty and institutional levels. This is effected through consideration, inter alia, of the self-evaluation document drafted by the programme team, APMs and the outcomes of meetings with groups of current students and academic staff, as well as alumni and employers.

68   The audit team was able to confirm that the University makes effective use of the processes of programme approval, monitoring and review to assure the provision of learning opportunities in existing and proposed programmes.

Management information - feedback from students

69   The University acquires feedback from students at levels ranging from the individual module, through module reviews, to the institution as a whole through the Student Perception Questionnaire (SPQ), which has been operated for 15 years for undergraduate and taught postgraduate students, and the National Student Survey (NSS). The SPQ has been revised to align it with the NSS and the outcomes of the survey are provided online in a global format as well as sub-divided by faculty, programme and stage.

70   The statistical data produced by Corporate Information Systems, the SPQ and NSS are evaluated against University-wide benchmarks and these are reported through the quality procedures such as the APM, along with the consolidated faculty summary reports and periodic reviews. The audit team noted that evaluations of this data are used to inform the action plans regarding learning opportunities at programme and faculty levels. At institutional level, Quality Support prepares over-arching reports for TLC that have resulted in specific actions, for example in relation to introducing peer observation of assessment and feedback as part of the process of addressing concerns regarding the relatively low scores in the NSS and SPQ in some areas of the University, and which include updates on the implementation of the previous years' action plans and trend overviews. In the same regard, Information and Learning Services also monitor and respond to the statistical data from student feedback, including local feedback in relation to IT and Library provision.

71   The SPQ additionally provides valuable data across University of Plymouth Colleges (UPC) in enabling direct comparison of student perceptions of comparable provisions delivered in different partner colleges, with consideration and specific actions being agreed at the Joint Board of Studies.

72   Feedback information regarding employability is analysed from the Destinations of leavers in Higher Education data at school and institutional level and is linked into the University's employability theme. This led, for example, to the development of the careers management policy and the move of careers support to the Directorate of Teaching & Learning.

Role of students in quality assurance

73   In addition to providing feedback through SPQ and NSS, students have a variety of formal and informal methods of providing feedback. The University operates a student representative system where students or Students' Union sabbatical officers sit on the University's academic committees and on faculty boards and programme committees.

74   Students are involved in annual programme monitoring committees and the Students' Union in appeals and complaints, but students' representatives are not full members of other quality scrutiny processes like new programme approval panels or periodic review panels. At the University level, Students' Union sabbatical officers sit on all the major academic committees, have access to the Vice-Chancellor, and regular meetings with the Dean of Students who acts as a student advocate within the senior management team. In their briefing document the University identified a number of developments prompted by student feedback mechanisms, but the students were less clear about the impact of their feedback at local and University level.

75   Between all the various partners and course arrangements, student engagement mechanisms vary considerably. Some areas have formal student/staff committees with published notes, while other areas take a more informal approach. All courses are required to have a programme committee with student representatives, and students should be represented on faculty boards. However, identification, recruiting and training of student representatives was identified as an ongoing issue by the Students' Union, leaving some areas under-represented. This was confirmed by the students seen by the audit team, who in several cases were not sure who their student representative was. The University might like to consider developing a more formal approach to local student liaison and providing a more consistent approach to supporting the Students' Union in the recruitment of student representatives across the University.

76   While students were positive about their relationship with the University there was variability in terms of student engagement with the various quality processes and the students expressed concern about their effectiveness in the committee structure. The audit team concluded that there is the potential to improve the quality of learning opportunities by greater and more consistent involvement of students in the University's quality processes and decision making. Therefore, the team recommends that it is desirable that the University gives consideration to the greater involvement of student representation in the University's formal quality assurance processes.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

77   The University is committed to the mutually beneficial link between teaching and research, citing it as one of their core values in defining the culture of the University and making it a key theme in their teaching and learning strategy. The University sees research-informed teaching as an encompassing agenda including a curriculum influenced by discipline-specific research and professional practice, with delivery methodologies informed by the latest pedagogic research and the opportunity for students to learn about, acquire and practise research skills. The University recognises that research-informed teaching will have different interpretations in different disciplines and does not seek to impose one model; rather its approach is to develop and build on expertise from within departments, the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) and the sector. As part of the Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (LTHE) Postgraduate Certificate, the University offers an advanced practitioner module which examines the links between research and teaching.

78   The Research-informed Teaching Scheme has also contributed to the development of the Teaching and Learning Strategy and the Research and Innovation Strategy at University level and through the funding of projects at faculty level.

79   The University chose to use its additional Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund funding to support 33 projects spanning both undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision, with the stated intention of introducing measures designed to enrich teaching and students' learning by making more use of research in their discipline/professional field; for example, student research placements. The outcomes of the projects were reported at the VCs' annual Teaching and Learning conference. In setting up the Teaching and Learning Directorate, the University has made one of its key functions the further development the institution's research informed teaching approach, building on relevant aspects of the work of the CETLs.

80   The award of four CETLs, the appointment of 12 National Teaching Fellows, the hosting of the National Subject Centre for Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, the National Centre for Innovation in Mathematics Teaching and the recently announced Royal Statistical Society Centre for Statistical Education combined with the recent success in the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) reflect Plymouth's commitment to and support of research-informed teaching. Students whom the audit team met stated that their programmes were informed by the latest research and helped them develop research skills.

81   The audit team agreed that the University's approach to linking research and scholarly activities with learning opportunities makes an effective contribution to its management of the quality of the students' learning opportunities.

Other modes of study

82   The University has a successful track record of delivering programmes using a wide range of pedagogy to a diverse range of students. Approximately 36 per cent of the University's students are part-time and over 12,000 students annually engage in some form of work-based or placement learning. Consequently, the University has invested heavily in its student portal as a means of communicating with and providing services to students as well asdeveloping technology-enhanced learning opportunities for all students.

83   In addition to the two-year degrees provided by one of its collaborative partners, the University has also been one of the pathfinder pilot institutions for two-year or 'accelerated/ fast track degrees' in Computing and IT and Business Management. Students take established modules from three year degree programmes Autumn and Spring terms but utilise part of the four month summer break for intensive short courses and project work. The University has developed a separate regulatory framework for two-year degrees, but has tried to ensure the framework uses the same quality processes and assessment regulations as the three-year variants as far as possible. The project has been positively received by students and carefully overseen by a steering group, and progress has been regularly monitored by the Teaching and Learning Committee and Academic Board. The University has identified a number of issues involved in the delivery of two-year degrees and has been proactive in developing comprehensive action plans to address both the academic and student experience challenges.

Resources for learning

84   The University has made a considerable investment in the development and refurbishment of its estate, including closing several campuses and moving academic departments to Plymouth. The move of the Faculty of Arts from Exeter to Plymouth was particularly problematic for the students, where an initial lack of studio space caused considerable discontent. Most of these issues have now been resolved and according to the latest national student survey 78 per cent of the students report being mostly/definitely satisfied with access to specialist equipment and facilities. The students who spoke to the auditors also reported being satisfied with the teaching facilities, although noting double-booking of space can be a problem.

85   The University has also made considerable investment in ICT and specialist staff to support student learning and the effective management and delivery of programmes. Harnessing and exploiting new technologies to enhance the teaching and learning experience is a key theme in the teaching and learning strategy, with a particular emphasis on facilitating a 'learner centred approach'. The information technology strategy paints a very clear picture of a technology-enhanced learning environment for campus and non campus-based students including all services, information and teaching materials being available remotely, greater use of collaborative working tools including video-conferencing, and the increased use of mobile devices. With the support of the CETLs and funding from the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) the University has gone a long way in piloting these technologies.

86   Students who met the audit team expressed satisfaction with the quality and accessibility of resources. Library and information technology facilities were rated as good, with dedicated information technology support available if needed. The study-skills materials and the student portal were also seen as very useful. The audit team concluded that Information and Learning Services liaison with faculties and the Directorate of Learning and Teaching, combined with representation on key faculty and University committees is effectively helping shape priorities.

87   On the basis of the information provided and talking with staff and students, the audit team found that the University's arrangements for the provision, allocation and management of learning resources were effective in maintaining the quality of the student learning opportunities.

Admissions policy

88   Enquiries in the University are coordinated by the Marketing and Communication Directorate with the central admissions unit located in Governance, Planning and Registry. The operations of a devolved admissions process is overseen effectively by the cross-service enquiries and admission process group. The University accepts all relevant post-16 qualifications for undergraduate courses and details are provided in the prospectus, the University's website and on the UCAS site. The undergraduate admissions policy was updated in March 2007 to reflect the revised section of the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education*, September 2006, and is clear and comprehensive. However, although available within the University on the intranet, the policy is not publicly available via the internet, unlike the postgraduate research admissions policy. The University has committed to taking the 16 to 19 diploma from 2010 and is reviewing its policy to ensure it appropriately reflects the range of post-16 entry qualifications. The admissions process for postgraduate taught provision is mainly through the postgraduate admissions offices. Undergraduate and postgraduate students seen by the audit team were satisfied with the admissions process.

89   The University is committed to sustaining a diverse and mulit-cultural student body and offers a comprehensive service for overseas students through its International Student Advisory Service, including an orientation programme, hall accommodation and free pre-sessional and in-session language courses.

90   In 2007-08, 9.7 per cent of students were registered disabled, almost double the University's HEFCE benchmark. The University encourages students with declared disabilities to contact the University Disability ASSIST Service for individual assessment and support prior to enrolment.

91   The University has a long-standing and successful commitment to widening participation. To maintain and develop widening participation is a key theme in the teaching and learning strategy. The University targets its bursaries at low income families and closely monitors its widening participation Key Performance Indicators through the Equality and Diversity Committee and the WP Strategic Planning and Practitioners Liaison Group. The University undertakes a number of activities to actively encourage participation from under-represented groups in the region. It is the lead institution for the WP Aimhigher Peninsula programme and has signed the Southern Lifelong Learning Network's regional access to HE progression agreement.

92   The audit team formed the view that there was fair, effective and consistent implementation of the admissions policy.

Student support

93   The University states in its Institutional Briefing Paper that academic guidance and support is centred within schools. Each school has developed systems of tutorial support, the system being relevant to the needs of the particular discipline. The University reviewed the ways in which it delivers personal support and guidance in 2008-09. It did this by means of commissioning an external audit on 'Valuing Students'. That report noted that there was a lack of consistency across the institution in the approach adopted. In some parts of the University students were not allocated personal tutors. Although some students were unaware who their personal tutor was, all students met by the audit team were appreciative of the ease with which they could communicate with academic staff and their responsiveness to any queries. The report also notes that some personal tutors had received no training for undertaking the role. The University has recently reaffirmed in an action plan that all students should have the benefit of personal tutoring, and that the typical roles performed by such tutors be reiterated to academic staff.

94   Academic guidance and support from academic teams within schools is supplemented by a number of specialist services. Those related to academic learning, skills and employability include provision from the Learning Development Team. The University has developed a Skills

Plus policy which provides a framework for discipline mediated approaches to the development of skills, personal development planning and employability. As part of this policy tutors work with the Careers Service to develop employability and career management skills within courses. This is achieved using a number of different ways, including curriculum embedded content, specific careers development modules and career management days. Students met by the audit team were aware of these services and appreciative of what they offered.

95   The University is developing the means by which it supports its students through initiatives such as recently purchasing licences for PebblePad to support personal development planning across the whole institution. There have also been developments in relation to the integration of industrial placement and work experience into programmes.

96   The University has a clear sense of the diversity of its student population and has strong experience of working with mature students and those from non-traditional backgrounds. From the evidence seen by the audit team and from its meetings with students it is clear that the University has arrangements in place to deal with different categories of students. It has a particularly well established approach to policies related to students with disabilities for which it has gained a high local profile. As an established assessment centre, the University offers independent needs assessments and advice for students referred under the Disabled Student's Allowances scheme throughout the South West.

Staff support (including staff development)

97   The University has a comprehensive set of staff development policies, procedures and guidance covering staff appointment, induction, appraisal and promotion. It also offers extensive staff development opportunities designed to meet the needs of different groups of staff at various levels and experience within the organisation. The University commits to spending at least 1 per cent of its total staffing budget on staff development.

98   The University offers a Higher Education Academy accredited course (LTHE), which provides eligibility to become a registered practitioner of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The course is well designed; it offers core and optional modules and participants can chose their options depending on their role, responsibilities or interests. Of particular note is a module on Higher Education in Further Education Contexts which can be studied using a blended learning approach based at Plymouth or at a partner college site. The completion time is flexible between one and three years and successful completion of the programme gives participants 60 M level credits towards a Masters in Education. The University also runs a General Teaching Associates course aimed at part-time lecturers and research students. Successful completion of the course leads to a University Certificate, which with further work provides eligibility to become an associate registered practitioner of the HEA.

99   Generic training, focusing on skills development, management and leadership is provided by the Organisational Development Team located in Human Resources. Particular emphasis has in 2009-10 been placed on supporting the strategic plan and three programmes have been developed to increase staff capabilities in terms of 'enterprise enabling leadership' across the organisation. Staff development focused on teaching and learning is also widely available and provided by the Educational Development and Technology-Enhanced Learning teams within the Teaching and Learning Directorate, supported by faculty-based learning technologists and the Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning). The Teaching and Learning Directorate provides a wide range of activities and materials including good practice guides, online courses, mentoring, workshops and conferences. It has representation on Faculty and University learning and teaching committees, which is considered an effective way for the directorate to remain responsive to faculty needs. Faculties and professional services Directorates also have budgets to support staff in attending external courses and events.

100   The University has a clearly articulated and supported induction and probation policy for all staff. It requires six-monthly interviews and completion of the LTHE course within three years

for permanent academic staff new to teaching. The generic policy for peer review of activities that support learning and assessment determines the threshold requirements for review and leaves the faculties free to develop locally-devised procedures to support their discipline mix. All staff are expected to participate in the annual appraisal scheme which reviews individual performance, identifies personal development needs and sets objectives aligned to the University strategic plan.

101   Staff are generally very positive about the level of support provided. A review of a sample of University and faculty committee agendas suggests, however, little formal review or evaluation of the effectiveness of staff support mechanisms occurs and the University might like to consider this matter further.

102   The audit team concluded that confidence can be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Management information - quality enhancement

103   In 2007, the University reviewed its Teaching and Learning Strategy, one strand of which was to focus on a more deliberate approach to enhancement building on the innovations in a range of areas, namely Educational Development and Learning Technologies (EDaLT), Skills Plus and Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) which had arisen from the previous strategy but not all the elements of which had been brought together in a coherent enhancement process. The Briefing Paper identifies that the untimely demise of the Vice-Chancellor in January 2007 and the departure of the deputy VCs had resulted in limited progress through the interregnum. Following the appointment of the current Vice-Chancellor, there was a further consideration of enhancement of quality which resulted in a number of themes being incorporated within the University's mission and values and its overarching enterprise direction. The University identified the most important of these as: teaching and learning, research and innovation, internationalisation and human resources.

104   The Strategic Plan and the Teaching and Learning Strategy are identified as the key drivers for quality enhancement within the University through the core values of the former and the key themes of the latter. The 10 themes are considered to be designed to build upon current strengths and good practice while at the same time identifying areas for development. Primary responsibility for the delivery of the themes lies with the Directorate of Teaching and Learning.

105   The Briefing Paper identified a number of initiatives at institutional level to enhance the quality of the provision. These include: internal auditors undertaking strategic audits in areas such as international partnerships, employability and valuing students; the creation of the Directorate of Teaching and Learning; the Quality Network; University Conferences; and the University Teaching Fellowship Scheme.

106   The University also recognised the need to develop the underlying structures to deliver continuous improvement through the use of management information for both strategic planning and quality assurance, citing the responsibilities of programme teams to adopt an evidence-based approach to monitoring which allows the development of local examples of enhancement and good practice.

Good practice

107   The University does not subscribe to a single definition of good practice believing that it will vary with the context, preferring to leave each faculty to develop its own exemplars which are discussed at programme committee which have student membership, thus allowing students to engage in the enhancement process.

108   The University identifies the five CETLs as examples of enhancement initiatives. However, the audit team found that, with the exception of the Higher Education Learning Partnership (HELP) CETL, the work of the centres had not been widely embedded within the University at the time of the audit and the manner in which the work of the CETLs would be taken forward was uncertain. However, there were individual examples of projects and developments such as Labplus, the Critical Thinking Study Guide, the mobile learning project and the University's own sustainability policy and action plan which clearly demonstrate that there are specific areas where the work has resulted in enhanced practice and the potential for further developments.

109   The University has also seen developments in a number of areas related to teaching and learning themes such as Geography Dragon's Den which required students to develop and defend a business plan for a new product or service. Arising from this experience and with the support of the Careers Service staff, students have gone on to win the national student enterprise competition, Flux, in 2007 and 2008 and gained second place in 2009. There has also been inter-University collaboration at Plymouth and York between students who had to produce a book for those studying similar degrees which required students to support each other and critique and edit each other's work in a format which reflected the process in the real world.

110   The Quality Network, which is a staff development forum for those engaged in quality assurance, also provides a facility for the promotion of enhancement themes across the University. The biannual meetings have recently included presentations by external and internal speakers on quality enhancement as well as other topics such as QAA's Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER), NSS and e-learning and blended learning.

111   Particular examples of enhancements arising from the outcomes of the annual programme monitoring process, the Student Perceptions Questionnaire, internal audits and direct complaints to programme teams were also noted by the audit team.

112   When enhancement was raised at meetings with staff and students not directly involved in the range of projects or with a quality remit, it elicited little response. No examples or comments were forthcoming, nor was the audit team able to discern an institution-wide approach, leading the team to the conclusion that the enhancement processes within the University were not as widely embedded or understood as the University believed. It would urge the University to consider how the wide range of innovative activities undertaken by groups within the University can be publicised and capitalised on more extensively.

Staff development and reward

113   The University holds conferences to disseminate initiatives and enhancements in Teaching and Learning, e-learning, Placement Learning and Research and Enterprise and provides a range of staff development opportunities for staff who are newly appointed to a post. In addition, generic events are organised by the Staff Development Services (SDS).

114   Teaching Fellowship Awards are also provided by the University to facilitate staff seeking to undertake developmental activity in the area of learning and teaching and to encourage engagement in personal and professional development as part of the funding package. All holders of the award join the network of teaching fellows which has biannual formal meetings.

115   The University operates a Teaching Fellowship scheme. It has also published criteria for the promotion of staff which have recently been amended to include criteria for the presentation of a portfolio of evidence to enable the promotion up to professorial level of outstanding achievements in teaching and learning. The University also has criteria for the award of additional increments.

116   The audit team concluded that the development of the teaching and learning strategy and the range of enhancement initiatives which have emerged demonstrate a commitment to the enhancement of quality by the institution. However, it would encourage the University to ensure that it communicates its strategy and outcomes more systematically across the institution.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

117   As part of the hybrid audit process, the University's collaborative arrangements fall within the scope of this audit. The audit team visited two of the University's partner organisations in the UK where it met and conducted meetings with staff and students. Students that the team met were from a representative sample of collaborative provision arrangements including non University of Plymouth Colleges collaborations.

118   The University has a wide-ranging set of collaborative arrangements. It sees collaborative provision as an integral part of its activities, key to its mission, and with important synergies across the institution. The majority of its arrangements are managed through University of Plymouth Colleges (UPC), a faculty within the University, which was set up six years ago to indicate the extent to which regional collaboration was central to the University's mission. It now consists of 18 associated partner institutions including Royal Naval establishments and a private provider of IT training, as well as regional colleges throughout the South West.

119   Much of the provision is of Foundation Degrees, which means that students have access to locally provided programmes and the opportunity of progression to higher levels of study in the University. In 2008-09 there were 7,797 students registered with UPC, of whom 2,537 were part time. This represents 62 per cent of the University's collaborative numbers (collaborative students form 24 per cent of the total student numbers of the University). The character of UPC is different from the other faculties in that it has no specific disciplinary focus. It does, however, have strong links with the other faculties in relation to curricular development, progression to top-up programmes and the network of subject forums.

120   In addition there is a wide range of other collaborative arrangements managed for academic and strategic reasons in the other faculties. These include partnerships with the NHS, local education authorities, schools and further and higher education colleges; contracted out and articulation agreements with regional private organisations and educational providers in Europe and the Far East and an institutional accreditation arrangement with University College Falmouth with regard to residual provision of the former Dartington College of Arts. The University provides joint degrees with the University of Exeter in the Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry. In 2006 the University made an affiliation agreement with a private institution, which provides undergraduate and postgraduate programmes leading to Plymouth awards.

121   The most recent developments include extending the delivery of the European International Master's programme within the Faculty of Education and a formal agreement to jointly deliver a range of final-year honours degree programmes with the Hong Kong University School of Professional and Continuing Education.

122   The University has had a sustained record of successful partnerships. One of its Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) is designed to support Higher Education Learning Partnerships. The University was chosen by HEFCE to pilot the early form of the national programme of Foundation Degrees. The Faculty of Education was awarded Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training status for its post-compulsory provision in 2007 and A-provider status for its Qualified Teacher Status provision in 2008.

123   The University uses the same processes of approval, programme and module modification, programme monitoring and periodic review for all its programmes, including those delivered through collaborative arrangements. They are also subject to the University's institution wide academic regulations. The principles and procedures are set out in three key documents, namely the University's Quality Assurance Handbook, the Academic Regulations and the Research Degrees Regulations and Procedures. All provide detailed guidance on their application to collaborative provision. The University's approach to managing the quality of its collaborative provision has been designed to allow sufficient flexibility appropriate to the variety of provision, while ensuring consistency with the external academic framework. The University

has produced a detailed typology of partnerships and programmes which clearly outlines the differing roles and responsibilities of faculties and partners in all the quality assurance processes. The recent introduction of the Academic Development Committee enables the University to maintain oversight of programme development, programme closure and new partnerships across the whole institution. However, mechanisms for the ongoing monitoring of collaborative agreements following their approval were less clear. In one long-standing collaboration, a formal memorandum of understanding had expired in 2008 and did not fully encompass the nature of the provision as it had developed over time. The audit team was informed that this agreement was currently under renegotiation. In another collaboration, a clause stating that there would be an interim review of the agreement in 2009 had not been observed. The team was able to confirm that the Committee enabled the University to have an oversight of its collaborative provision, although while the strategic rationale for the UPC collaborations was articulated in meetings with the team, the overall strategy for collaboration was less discernible. The University has a detailed set of policies with regard to approving new overseas partner organisations but the objectives of some of the other partnerships were less clear, except in terms of subject links.

124   The University acknowledges the growth of 'transnational' study and indicates that there are two key aspects that should underpin the process of approval. These are quality assurance and business opportunity. Proposals for international developments have to be discussed with the relevant Dean and additional guidance is available from Quality Support. When a partnership approval is required the Faculty has to provide the ADC with a full business plan. The University, normally through its International Development Office, will undertake due diligence processes. After ADC initial approval there will have to be a meeting of a full Partnership Approval Panel to discuss the detail of the proposal. If the panel recommend to ADC that a partnership be established this has to be approved by the Academic Board (via ADC). Once approved, a written and legally binding memorandum of agreement setting out the rights and obligations of the parties has to be signed by both parties. The audit team saw evidence of the application of these processes and concluded that they were rigorous.

125   External reference points are used by the University in the same way for collaborative programmes as for the rest of its provision. Owing to the nature of some of the collaborative programmes particular refinements have been introduced to allow for the type of programme. This includes the requirement for new Foundation Degree proposals to demonstrate employment sector engagement on the template for such proposals. External examiners for Foundation Degrees are required to comment on work-based learning in their reports.

126   Not all sectors have established accreditation procedures but in those that have, the approval of new programmes will be in alignment with professional body requirements. There is a particularly strong relationship in the partnership provisions in Health and Education which are designed to meet the requirements of the professional bodies and are subject to review by them and their agencies.

127   The University has fully aligned the approval, monitoring and review of quality across all its provision. This means that in all the faculties the collaborative programmes are treated in the same way as all other programmes. The audit team saw ample evidence that this was the case. An important role to make sure that these processes are carried out is that of the liaison tutor, appointed by the University to manage the partnership. However, in both the two non UPC collaborations investigated by the team as part of the hybrid audit methodology some issues were identified in relation to the management of formal legal agreements and the application of policy regarding the assessment of teaching staff training needs following appointment. In one arrangement there were also issues relating to the monitoring of publicity materials. During one partner visit, inconsistencies and inaccuracies detected by the team on the partner's website were changed during the visit and an advertisement in the national press offering higher education provision made no mention of the University. The team is of the view that its needs to ensure that the University's processes for the oversight and management of collaborative arrangements are consistently applied (see paragraphs 123, 134 and 135).

128   UPC conducts its annual monitoring of all its programmes through its Joint Boards of Studies (JBS) system which means that there are action plans at programme, college and UPC level. Good practice resulting from this process is disseminated at both college and UPC level. The audit team agreed that the thoroughness and consistency of the way in which University of Plymouth Colleges Faculty applied the University's policies and processes were sound and that its non University of Plymouth Colleges collaborations could benefit from adopting similar practices (see paragraph 135).

129   As well as institutional processes six of the UPC partner colleges have undergone IQER Developmental engagements. The good practice and recommendations delivered from the process have been collected and shared with external examiners and other colleges. The audit team noted the positive way in which UPC was managing this process.

130   Partners are required to have equivalent forms of student representation to those provided in the University itself. Students that the audit team met, from a representative sample of collaborative provision arrangements including non UPC collaborations, confirmed that there were mechanisms in place to ensure their voice was heard and that note was taken of their views and appropriate action was taken whenever possible. The University's Students' Union has been active in promoting strong relationships with partner institutions, particularly with those within UPC.

131   The University has comprehensive data of admission, progression and completion which is extensively used in annual programme monitoring. These are used across all programmes including all those provided in collaborative arrangements. Particular regard has been paid in UPC to recruitment to programmes and in cases where recruitment has been poor, programmes have been withdrawn. There is also monitoring of the progression rate to top-up programmes from Foundation Degrees.

132   The University has enhanced many aspects of its collaborative provision in UPC through the work of the Higher Education Learning Partnership CETL (HELP CETL). This has taken several forms and has strengthened the way in which higher education is supported in further education colleges. The CETL's strategy was built on the premise that there should be recognition and reward for those who contributed to the development of the UPC partnership. This has resulted in the establishment of annual fellowships and other awards for staff in further education in order to enhance their opportunities for professional development. It has also seen the development of joint research and other scholarly activity across the network. The audit team agreed that the way in which the work of the HELP CETL had contributed to and enhanced the functions of the UPCs is an example of good practice. The team formed the view that this example of good practice could inform the University's efforts to further embed the work of other CETLs.

133   The approaches noted above are supported by work to create and develop technologically supported subject-based and thematic communities of practice. This has resulted in strong regional networks of staff in different colleges as well as the University. Most recently the University has been involved in two projects, UsPaCe and UPlaCe, the former, with three partners, supports Foundation Degree students while undertaking work-based learning, the latter is establishing a repository of learning materials accessible across the whole network. All of these activities have reinforced the staff development activities as well as strengthening the programmes being run.

134   While the staff support within UPC was well developed and systematically applied with access to the staff portal, a system of University registered teachers and an active CPD section, the availability of staff development and its consistent application to other partners in the other faculties was less clearly defined. For some partners it has been acknowledged that the partner will develop relevant staff development for themselves while keeping the University informed, for others the University has made activities and programmes available. It was unclear how thoroughly this is monitored. In particular the audit team found examples of where University

policy was not being applied as required. One example being the requirement for staff in partner institutions to be approved and, where inexperienced, being provided with an appropriate training programme.

135   In view of the large number of collaborative partners the University has developed mechanisms for ensuring that publicity about its courses are approved for publication. The University also monitors the use that is made of both published and electronic material. The system within UPC, whereby all promotional material is submitted to the UPC Marketing and Communications Co-ordinator for approval and submission works well, and once again illustrates the effectiveness of the management of collaborative provision undertaken through UPC. Similar procedures exist for all other collaborative partners through the other faculties. However, the audit team formed the view that this was not so rigorous and less consistently applied (see paragraphs 127 and 134 above).

136   The University has a very large and diverse set of arrangements for collaborative provision. This provision is a very important part of the University's overall mission. This is reflected in the recently approved Teaching and Learning Strategy where two specific themes are related to developing collaborative provision, namely developing an internationalised approach including international collaboration, and maintaining and developing the commitment to widening participation, particularly through the work of UPC. The former is reinforced in the Internationalisation Strategy, which has also been recently approved, where one of the key themes is to develop a proactive and strategic approach to partnership development. In view of its scale and importance the University has developed strong policies to support collaborative activity. This is seen in particular in the development of UPC, which provides clear management of the regional provision in its 18 partners. The concept of the University as 'hub' and the partners as 'rim' has been an important aspect in its success. Across the other faculties the type of collaborative provision is varied. In the faculties, ie Arts, Science and Technology and Plymouth Business School, the scale of student numbers is quite small and includes articulation agreements, contracted out, outreach and research arrangements with educational providers in Europe and the Far East. In addition, the Plymouth Business School has an affiliation agreement with a private UK institution with quite significant student numbers. In the two other faculties, education and health partnerships are very much related to the professional activities with the NHS and post-compulsory education and training. This wide range of activity is subject to the University's policies and processes and is the responsibility of the relevant faculty. The audit team found examples of where these procedures were not as rigorously applied as intended.

137   As a consequence, the audit team formed the view that it is advisable for the University to ensure that the its processes for the oversight and management of collaborative arrangements are consistently applied.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

138   The institution has awarded higher degrees since 1968 and a Graduate School was established in 2003, responsible for the quality assurance of research degree provision and the development and enhancement of appropriate policies and procedures. These include a comprehensive logbook and skills programme for postgraduate research students, and recently updated regulations for all research degrees. The Research Degrees Handbook governs all research degree programmes, in conjunction with University and faculty procedures.

139   The Graduate School has executive responsibility for postgraduate research students and operates through a central office with administrators in each faculty. Following a recent review, research administration will become more centralised to reduce duplication and to standardise admissions procedures. Further streamlining of procedures is planned with the investment of dedicated software designed to track, record and monitor the progress of postgraduate researchers.

140   The current headcount for postgraduate research students in 2009-10 is 528, distributed in five faculties. There are plans to double the numbers of postgraduate researchers by 2015. The introduction in 2008 of professional doctorates (DBA, DPA and EdD) will contribute to this expansion, as will a new Research Master's (Res M) route from 2009-10.

141   The profile of research at the University was increased with the positive outcome of the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). An increase in staff full-time equivalents submitted (from 226.1 in 2001 to 391.7 in 2008) generated an increase in Quality Related (QR) research income from £2.3 million to £9 million. The University plans to focus QR funds to 3* and 4* research groups and to allocate some funds for pump priming new research initiatives. A strategic investment of QR funds into an additional 40 postgraduate research studentships per year was proposed by the Graduate Committee. The University is in the process of updating key performance indicators for research.

142   As part of the Internationalisation Strategy, an increasing number of postgraduate research students are based at a 'PGR Node'. Currently there are 35 research students at three nodes in Zurich, Milan and Darmstadt; an agreement has been signed with Bordeaux, although no students have yet been registered on this node. Further international nodes are currently under consideration. In each case, the Director of Studies is a member of academic staff employed at the node institution but also holds a contract and honorarium with the University of Plymouth. The Head of the Graduate School visits each node to provide relevant staff development. Other members of the supervisory team are academic staff based at Plymouth. Each node is governed by a formal Memorandum of Understanding approved by the Graduate Committee and the Academic Development Committee and becomes an integrated part of a research group, centre or institute. All research students at the node follow the same procedures as all other research students based at Plymouth.

143   There have also been additions to the postgraduate student nodes through the Planetary Collegium and the Network Research Group both regionally at the Schumacher College and in Munich and Rome. The Great Western Research Alliance has also seen growth through the installation of an Access Grid Node which facilitates simultaneous seminars and workshops at Plymouth, Bath, Bristol, Exeter and University of the West of England.

144   The Research Student's Logbook ensures a consistent application of University regulations and its use provides a central oversight of postgraduate research student progress. It is a comprehensive document to assist postgraduate research students throughout their research programme at the University. It provides a detailed guide and record of progress, formalising meetings with supervisors, noting individual progress with key skills development and identifying major monitoring and reporting milestones.

The research environment

145   All research active staff belong to research groups of cognate disciplines and common research interests. Postgraduate research students are assigned to the research group of their supervisory team. Each research group coordinates regular discussion and seminar sessions. This develops critical analytical skills of research, preparing postgraduate research students to deliver their findings to external conferences and meetings both nationally and internationally.

146   The Research and Innovation Committee meets each term and is responsible to Academic Board for the strategic furtherance of research and innovation activity within the University. It is chaired by a Deputy or Pro-Vice-Chancellor. There has been a Vice-Chancellor's Research and Innovation Conference in each of the last three years. The committee has formulated a new Research and Innovation Strategy for the University following the success of the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise and has debated the priority research areas for the investment of QR funds. Research groups are being clustered to form larger, strategically coherent Research Centres or Institutes. Each Centre will have a Head, reporting to a Dean of Faculty, while a Director of a

Research Institute will report to a Steering Committee. At the time of the audit, eight proposals for Research Centres had been approved by the Senior Management Team, to be known as the Centres for Research in Robotics and Neural Systems; Humanities, Music and the Performing Arts; Law and Criminal Justice; Coastal and Ocean Science and Engineering; Marine Biology and Ecology; Health and Environmental Statistics; Brain, Cognition and Behaviour; and Security, Communication and Networks.

147   The research environment is supported by investment in infrastructure and a commitment to research-informed teaching. As a result of an increase in the numbers of staff entered into the RAE, the number of postgraduate research students per full-time equivalent staff has diminished in recent years, although absolute numbers of postgraduate research students continue to grow. Faculties are encouraged to develop a research strategy to specifically target growth in numbers of postgraduate research students.

Selection, admission and induction

148   A comprehensive selection, admission and induction process is evident. Key features include standard procedures, regularly reviewed by the Graduate Committee; all candidates are interviewed, either face-to-face or by electronic means; admissions decisions involve at least two trained active researchers; supervisory, resource and budget arrangements are confirmed by the Dean of Faculty; and a formal letter. The administration of postgraduate research students is currently devolved to the faculties. A Postgraduate Administrators Group, attended by Faculty and Graduate School staff, meets every six weeks to resolve ongoing operational issues.

149   All postgraduate research students are required to attend an induction session, held bi-annually. An induction within the academic discipline takes place in the Faculty and within the research group. Students are encouraged to document their progress in their comprehensive Logbook and are prompted to do so by research administrators at strategic milestones. Postgraduate research students confirmed their satisfaction with these processes based on their personal experiences.

Supervision of research students

150   All postgraduate research students have at least two members of academic staff in their supervisory teams. The Director of Studies will have previous supervisory experience to completion. A supervisor from industry, a research node or a collaborative institution may also be a member of the team. All research active staff are expected to supervise research students, up to a maximum of eight for a Director of Studies. An annual research plan is discussed and agreed with the leader of the research group at the annual appraisal.

151   The Research Student Logbook codifies the supervisory meeting arrangements at a minimum of four formal meetings each year. The Logbook provides guidance, valuable milestones and prompts for discussion with the postgraduate research students. Staff are allocated 30 days of contact time each year to their postgraduate research students. The roles and responsibilities of each member of the supervisory team are detailed in the Research Degrees Handbook. All new or inexperienced supervisors are required to attend Good Postgraduate Research Supervisory Practice sessions. New academic staff commented on the value of the training courses for new supervisors.

Progress and review arrangements

152   The progress of each postgraduate research student is monitored against an agreed timetable on both a formal and informal basis. Key aspects of formal monitoring include the confirmation of project title and approach (six months); annual monitoring; confirmation of route, including where appropriate transfer from MPhil to PhD (15 to 18 months); appointment of examiners; thesis submission and completion.

Development of research and other skills

153   Each postgraduate research student undertakes an annual training needs analysis with their supervisory team and embarks on a programme of skills training. Training in research methodology focused to the specific discipline is undertaken at the research group or faculty level. The Research Skills Development Programme is organised by the Graduate School and addresses the UK Research Council's statement on skills training for postgraduate research students. The 2009-10 programme offered over 120 sessions as half or whole day workshops on the Plymouth campus and students are able to book online. The sessions aim to broaden generic and personal transferable skills of the individual and include an introduction to PebblePad, an electronic means for recording a portfolio of evidence and skills developed during the research programme. These sessions also enable postgraduates from different disciplines to network and share research experiences. Engagement by the postgraduate research students and contract researchers with the skills programme is high, with over 1,505 places attended in 2008-09, an increase of 81 per cent from 2007-08. In addition, attendance by supervisors on the good supervisory practice sessions rose by 24 per cent in 2008-09.

154   Postgraduate research students may also participate in regional GradSchools and other events delivered via VITAE, the national organisation for the personal, professional and career development of doctoral researchers and research staff in higher education institutions and research institutes. The Research Student's Logbook provides a record of skills training, which are also recorded in the final thesis. The postgraduate research students met by the audit team had found the Logbook and skills training very helpful. They had received appropriate training prior to teaching or demonstrating to undergraduates.

Feedback mechanisms

155   Arrangements to obtain and act upon feedback from the postgraduate research students are in place. Key features include, at the individual level, direct communication with the supervisory team and faculty administrators; the completion of student satisfaction questionnaires after generic skills programme sessions organised by the Graduate School; individual submissions to the national Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and through the annual monitoring process. Student feedback at the institutional level is achieved through faculty level representation on Graduate Committee and on Research Degrees Committees.

156   The University has entered into PRES each year since 2007. The outcome of PRES 2008 was noted in the June 2008 meeting of the Graduate Committee, suggesting areas for improvement, including careers development and improving opportunities for postgraduate researchers to get involved in teaching. The low response rate (21 per cent) was also noted. The minutes, however, do not refer to action planning, either by the faculties or by the Graduate School. The response rate to PRES 2009 declined further to 16 per cent. Of the 80 respondents, while 88.7 per cent rated their research experience positively, and 80.6 per cent considered that they were on schedule to complete, 11.3 per cent considered that they were not supported to develop their research skills and 15.3 per cent indicated that there were inadequate opportunities to develop transferable skills. Furthermore, 18.7 per cent negatively rated their supervisory support and guidance and 26.6 per cent negatively rated their involvement in the research culture of their department.

157   While the briefing paper states that PRES outcomes are fed back to the faculties by the Graduate Committee, the audit team could find no evidence of any action planning in response to this student feedback. The Graduate School Quality Assurance Action Plan for Research Degree Programmes 2009 notes that the results and concerns were circulated 'as appropriate'. It was confirmed to the audit team that there is no PRES action plan. In meetings held by the team, academic staff were unaware of PRES and of any faculty response to it and the postgraduate research students, albeit a small number, were unaware of the process and so stated that they had not had the opportunity to submit a return. In contrast to the value placed by the University

of NSS data, there was no evidence of the use of the PRES feedback within the institution. While the team accepts there may have been analysis of the PRES returns, it could find no evidence of actions as how the Graduate School or faculties responded to any analysis.

158   The audit team noted that while the Quality Support Unit worked closely with the Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning) and with the Director of Teaching and Learning, they had no formal responsibility in relation to research degree students. The University might wish to consider a closer alignment of the Graduate School and the Associate Deans for Research with Quality Support, to ensure a consistent and comprehensive annual response to both NSS and PRES feedback (see paragraph 167).

159   Feedback at the institutional level occurs via faculty representation on Graduate Committee, with each faculty asked to present to the March meeting of the Graduate Committee an overview report on research student progress. This has not been the case in 2009, with one faculty reporting 2008-09 information as late as November 2009. Nonetheless, the audit team noted that 96 per cent of the annual monitoring of the postgraduate research students had met the March 2009 deadline. This forum also provides an opportunity to identify and act upon cross-faculty issues.

160   Both internal and external examiners also have the opportunity to provide feedback on the examination process via the Graduate School. Although relatively few returns have been received, comments are coordinated by the Graduate School and responses noted in the Graduate Committee.

The assessment of research students

161   The award of higher degrees is conferred by the Graduate Committee, a subcommittee of Academic Board. It is chaired by a Deputy or Pro-Vice-Chancellor with responsibility for research, and each faculty is represented by an Associate Dean with research responsibility. Some but not all faculties have a separate Research Committee depending on their experience and prevailing research culture.

162   The supervisory team nominates internal and external examiners and curricula vitae are scrutinised at faculty level, following guidance published in the Research Degrees Handbook. Detailed guidelines regarding the examination process and the responsibilities of all taking part are issued by the Graduate School. The Graduate School provides an internal examiners' briefing session, attendance at which is compulsory for inexperienced examiners or those new to the Plymouth process. The University does not appoint an independent chair for viva voce examinations as a matter of course, but considers each case individually. An independent chair is appointed in 10 to 15 per cent of examinations each year.

Complaints and appeals

163   Candidates for research degrees are informed of complaints and appeals procedures in the Research Degrees Handbook and in a briefing session prior to the viva voce examination. Up to 3 per cent of annual examinations have resulted in internal appeals and one case has been considered by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, which upheld the University's position. The outcomes of all appeals are reported to the Graduate Committee.

Progression and completion rates

164   A paper prepared by the Head of the Graduate School was presented to the Graduate Committee on 26 November 2009 describing postgraduate research student progression and completion rates. A variable postgraduate research student performance was observed from the faculties. In recent years, withdrawal rates have been low (3 to 6 per cent) and good rates of transfer from MPhil to PhD were noted (87 to 96 per cent). Completion rates, however,

have declined when compared to national data and while trends for submission by full-time postgraduate research students have stabilised at around 48 months, those from part-time research students have increased above the recommended norm of 72 months. While the Briefing Paper states that 'the University needs to continue to improve completion rates', the team could find no evidence of plans, either from the Graduate School or from the faculties, as to how this might be achieved. The audit team enquired whether action plans are developed to address the underlying issues relating to completion rates, as part of the annual monitoring and review process. The team, however, was neither offered nor could find evidence of formal minutes from faculty meetings, Graduate Committee or Research and Innovation Committee meetings where this item was discussed. Furthermore, the annual reports from the faculties to the Graduate Committee did not refer to progression and completion rates.

165   The audit team was informed that this issue had been on the agenda of a meeting with the Associate Deans for Research in May 2008, although there are no minutes of this meeting. It was confirmed to the team that no action plans had been made regarding progression and completion rates. The team could therefore find no evidence that the process of annual monitoring and review of postgraduate research student progress was being monitored in the faculties, as required in the Research Degrees Handbook (see paragraph 167).

166   The audit team noted that not every faculty appeared to have a research committee and there was no evidence of a common structure or agenda, terms of reference, nor clarity of reporting lines. Thus, the faculty of Social Sciences and Business operated a Graduate Committee to consider both postgraduate taught and postgraduate research issues, and a Research and Innovation Committee; the Faculty of Education had a Research and Enterprise Committee only; the Faculty of Science a Research Committee; while an equivalent committee in the Faculty of Arts had not met since 2006. Clarification on the matter was requested during the audit visit but was not forthcoming. While the team noted that faculty restructuring was ongoing, it could find no evidence of a consistent interpretation of the regulations noted for annual monitoring in the Research Degrees Handbook, nor a clearly defined role of the Associate Dean, Research (see paragraph 31).

167   The audit team concluded that the current level of oversight of progression and completion statistics had the potential to undermine the quality and standards of the postgraduate research student experience. Consequently, the University is advised to develop an institutional response to postgraduate research student progression and completion rates and feedback and strengthen the relationship of the Graduate School with the faculties and the Quality Support Unit to facilitate institutional oversight of the postgraduate research student experience (see also paragraph 158).

Section 7: Published information

168   The University has a Marketing and Communications Directorate which produces some publicity material but also supports and leads the formulation of the institution's published information for internal and external consumption. Each discipline-based faculty is responsible for the accuracy of its own course, programme, research and subject area and has its own Marketing and Admissions Manager (MAM) who formally checks the accuracy of the proofs within the faculty and the relevant information in the index. General information is signed off by the relevant directorate and by the University Secretary and Registrar. The proofs and formal sign-off materials are held for five years by the Marketing and Communications Directorate. The printed undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses also include links to appropriate areas of the extranet for the most up-to-date information. The faculties update the extranet information directly and are responsible for its accuracy.

169   Partner institutions within University of Plymouth Colleges (UPC) Faculty who submit information on their courses for inclusion in the prospectuses have their submissions checked

by the UPC's Faculty Marketing and Communications Coordinator who makes any amendments and comments before returning copy to the Marketing and Communications Directorate. The Co-ordinator also monitors the printed and electronic promotional materials produced by partner colleges. All partners are subject to the Academic Cooperation Agreement which makes clear that all references to the University's programmes must be approved by the University prior to publication. The partners are also required to comply with the British Council Code of Conduct.

170   The efficacy of the information provided in the prospectuses and extranet is monitored by the Marketing and Communications Directorate via focus groups and surveys and fed back into improving the information provided. Recent additions have included student video clips on University life and the initiation of a social network style offering on the University website.

171   All prospective undergraduate students have access to a range of printed and electronic information including a prospectus, school or faculty specific guides and induction packs, University extranet and through open days and preview day visits.

172   On induction and throughout their programme of studies the student will receive a Student Programme Handbook, referenced web-based information and, for UPC students, the Partner Student Handbook.

173   Research students, whether studying on the University of Plymouth Campus or remotely, receive equivalent information. The graduate administrators compile the pre-entry information and this is reviewed annually by the Postgraduate Administrators' Group. Once registered, the student receives a copy of the Research Degrees Handbook, Process and Procedures for Research Degrees, a copy of the Research Student Logbook and information relating to the faculty or school which is facilitating their research. There is a biannual Graduate School induction where information on support facilities such as learning and information services, online resources and generic skills and safety training is provided.

174   The student written submission confirmed the accuracy of information provided to students both in hard copy and in electronic format. Student representatives who met the team praised the information received at all levels from prospectus to course and module handbook for taught awards and the equivalent research information.

175   The Web Executive Board has a strategic role in web-based developments, supported by three groups having specific responsibilities: external focus (Extranet) intranet focus (INTWeb); and teaching and learning focus (TLweb).

176   The publishing and maintenance of extranet information is a devolved activity with page authors drawn from different staff groups within the faculties and a central web editor within Marketing and Communications. All publishers attend training and refresher courses to maintain their up-to-date knowledge of policies. Guidance is also provided on the intranet.

177   User feedback on web content is obtained through feedback forms, website contacts, usability testing and market research. The outcomes are discussed at an Extranet Forum, chaired by the Web Editor with attendees from faculties and directorates. The forum reports directly to the Web Executive Board.

178   The University's Teaching and Learning Committee was responsible for reviewing HEFCE's requirements for publicly available information. As a result, the University has a register of professional, statutory and regulatory body accreditation, and a Guide to Information to assist those wishing to access the publicly available information.

179   The Unistats website contains information on entry qualifications, progression, degree classification and the National Student Survey. The data quality and completeness is the responsibility of the Governance, Planning and Registry Directorate and tools and standard reports have been developed to allow for the consistent and relevant data analysis for institutional and local applications.

180   From its examination of a range of published material and discussions with students, the audit team was satisfied that reliance can be placed on the accuracy and completeness of information published by the University on the quality of its education provision and the academic standards of its awards but at the time of the audit, a partner's publicity material was out of date and unclear (see paragraph 127).

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