

The University of Bedfordshire

November 2009

Annex to the report

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Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Bedfordshire (the University) from 30 November to 4 December 2009 to carry out a hybrid 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 Bedfordshire is that:

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University has adopted a strategic approach to quality enhancement which is clearly outlined in its Quality Handbook. The University views quality enhancement as a whole-university activity which is embedded in routine quality assurance processes such as course approval, monitoring and review. The Education Strategy and its sub-strategies all support quality enhancement through incremental change and development. Overall, it was evident that the University was taking a systematic and strategic approach to enhancing the quality of the student experience across and at all levels of the institution.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The audit found that, overall, the University had sound institutional arrangements for its postgraduate research students. The research environment and postgraduate research student experience mostly meet the expectations of the section of the Code of practice on postgraduate research programmes.

Published information

The audit found that reliance could 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.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the planning and management of the merger with another institution and the structured exploitation of the resultant strategic enhancement opportunities (paragraph 8 and 86)
- the use of course journals to support quality assurance and enhancement (paragraph 19)
- the contribution of the BREO virtual learning environment to the management of learning opportunities in both home and collaborative provision (paragraph 66)
- the high quality training and support materials provided by the Teaching and Learning Directorate to promote quality enhancement (paragraph 84).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- review the current approach to summary reporting on matters of academic standards to secure sound assurance that no significant issue is overlooked (paragraph 21)
- clarify the relationship between individual fields' interpretations of the University's 16-point marking scheme and general requirements for the fulfilment of learning outcomes (paragraph 41)
- implement consistently the requirements for training and support for postgraduate research students who teach and who conduct assessment (paragraph 120)

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- review and clarify the regulations governing the treatment of students in borderline award categories so that the requirements are clearly understood and observed consistently by staff and examiners (paragraph 42)
- ensure that all students be provided with accurate timetables at the start of the academic year (paragraph 68)
- expedite the development of the international strategy to guide the development of international collaborative activity (paragraph 93)
- define expectations for link tutor visits to partner institutions overseas and amend its documentation accordingly (paragraph 102)
- draw on existing good practice to develop a structured approach to the development of staff in partner organisations. (paragraph 107)
- appraise the effectiveness of processes for managing the accuracy of information, including publicity and student recruitment material, about the University's provision provided by partner institutions outside the FE partner network (paragraph 128).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 The University of Bedfordshire was established in August 2006, following the merger between the Bedford Campus of De Montfort University and the University of Luton, which had been established in July 1993, under the Further and Higher Education Act (1992). The new University operates across two main campuses, at Luton and Bedford, plus three other sites at Putteridge Bury, Butterfield Park and Buckinghamshire.

2 The University's mission is to 'create a vibrant, multicultural learning community, enabling people to transform their lives by participating in excellent, innovative education, scholarship and research'. The University's vision, as defined in its Strategic Plan, is 'of a world where all are able to benefit from transformational experiences'. Both the vision and mission are supported by the University's values of: 'access, scholarship, partnership, innovation, respect, employability'.

3 HESA returns for 2008-09 record a student population of 19,552 students (15,571 full-time equivalents (FTE)). At the time of the audit, the University employed approximately 1,900 staff and had a total of 17,503 students comprising 13,129 at the University (10,536 full-time: 2593 part-time); 1,513 in further education partner colleges (652 full-time: 861 part-time); 1,925 within other UK partner organisations (536 full-time: 1,389 part-time); and 936 in overseas

partner institutions (388 full-time: 548 part-time). Student numbers routinely change within-year because of different recruitment and graduation cycles in overseas partner institutions.

The information base for the audit

4 The University provided a briefing paper and supporting documentation, including that related to the sampling trails selected by the team. The index to the briefing paper referred 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 University supplied hard copy of all documents referenced in the briefing paper and also arranged access to its intranet. The audit team received extensive materials about the collaborative partners visited as part of the audit and is grateful for the willing cooperation of those organisations.

5 The Students' Union produced a student written submission 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. The audit team thanks the Union for its submission, to which members made repeated reference in the course of their enquiries.

6 In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the Institutional audit of the University of Luton (April 2005)
- reports produced by other relevant bodies (for example, OfSTED and professional, statutory or regulatory bodies)
- the institution's internal documents
- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.

Developments since the last audit

7 The previous Institutional audit of the University of Luton, undertaken in May 2005, found that limited 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. The University of Luton responded to the findings of the previous audit and QAA signed off the audit as complete in July 2007.

6 The new University of Bedfordshire has taken good note of the recommendations made to the University of Luton and continues to make systematic efforts to promote good practice in light of them. Discipline support plans and the centralised system of dealing with extenuating circumstances, were identified as features of good practice in the previous audit and continue to be noteworthy strengths of the merged institution.

7 The merger between the University of Luton and the Bedford campus of De Montfort University constitutes the most significant development since the last Institutional audit of the University of Luton. The new University of Bedfordshire has adopted a structure comprising four faculties: the Business School; the Faculty of Creative Arts, Technologies and Science; the Faculty of Education and Sport; and the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences. Each faculty is divided into schools or departments/divisions and operates across at least two of the five campuses.

8 Discussions with staff and students and scrutiny of documentary material indicated that both the merger and post-merger integration had been accomplished effectively and efficiently. Efforts have been made to draw on the best from both legacy institutions and elsewhere in the sector, building on identified strengths. Although some discussion in meetings with staff and students suggested to the audit team that more attention might have been paid to some human aspects of the merger, any such problems seem to have been short-lived. The transition from Luton and Bedford legacy regulations to a single University regulatory framework was achieved by the academic year 2008-09. Change was implemented swiftly and smoothly, largely as a result

of systematic and effective communication with both staff and students. Partner institutions were kept informed about the merger process, reporting no adverse impact and a number of benefits. Given the complexity of the operation and its potential for disruption of the student experience, the way in which the University planned and managed the merger, and exploited the strategic enhancement opportunities it provided, is considered a feature of good practice.

9 In 2005, the University of Luton was awarded funding for a HEFCE Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. A new Education Strategy was developed, prompting a curriculum review. CRe8, a template for curriculum development, emerged, comprising five strands: personalised learning; curriculum design; realistic learning; employability and assessment. In a parallel development, the University has embarked upon extensive estates development across its campuses, with the declared intent of providing active social learning spaces, a unified student support service, and facilities providing opportunities to rehearse for professional life.

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

10 Academic Board is the principal academic committee with overall responsibility for academic standards and quality. It has four subcommittees: Teaching Quality and Standards Committee; University Research Committee; University Research Ethics Committee; and the Student Consultative Committee. Each faculty has a faculty academic board (FAB) which delegates to its subcommittee, the Faculty Teaching Quality and Standards Committee authority for oversight of academic standards, quality assurance, and enhancement, both at the University and within collaborative partner institutions.

11 The audit team concluded that the University had adopted an appropriate framework for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

12 The University's procedures for the management of standards are stated in its Quality Assurance Handbook and its Academic Regulations, which are available online. In its briefing paper the University stated that these regulatory documents are informed by the Academic Infrastructure and other external points of reference, which was borne out by evidence seen in the course of the audit. Academic standards are monitored using a range of interlocking procedures and reports, including reports on individual programmes and synoptic reports on the outcomes of University-wide activities such as external examining.

13 It is a principle of the University's arrangements that, at University level, responsibility for the management of processes is structurally separate from responsibility for determining them and monitoring their outcomes. The University Teaching Quality and Standards Committee, chaired by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic), has overall responsibility for ensuring that academic standards are being maintained and the students are provided with proper learning opportunities, and responsibility for approval of procedures and regulations is delegated by the Academic Board to the Teaching Quality and Standards Committee (TQSC). TQSC has equivalent committees in faculties (Faculty Teaching Quality and Standards Committee (FTQSC)) which are responsible to the faculty academic boards. Much of the drafting of procedure is done by the Teaching and Learning Directorate, and procedures are managed at university level by the Quality Directorate of the Registry. Each faculty has a Sub-Dean (Quality Enhancement), who is responsible for ensuring that TQSC's requirements are fulfilled at faculty level. The sub-deans are ex-officio members of TQSC, and provide its most important line of report from the faculties.

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

15 Faculty deans are responsible for determining whether resources for new developments are available. Proposals with resource backing move through successive faculty and university stages of approval. The University stage involves consideration by a panel convened by the Quality Directorate. The panel includes at least one subject specialist external to the University, and, from autumn 2009, at least one student member. The evidence requirements of approval panels are stated in the Quality Assurance Handbook. Panels exercise powers of approval delegated from TQSC. Reports of approvals are not copied to TQSC, but synoptic overviews are prepared annually by the Quality Directorate, covering overall outcomes. Clear definitions and regulations governing changes subsequent to approval are included in the Quality Assurance Handbook, and records of such changes are kept by FTQSCs.

16 An example of the approval process examined in the course of the audit was unusual in that it made use of paperwork required for professional body recognition. The stated requirements of University approval mapped fully and straightforwardly on to the professional body submission, and this seemed to the audit team to be an effective and economical way to manage the requirements of two audiences. The proposers' submission was comprehensive and professional. Membership of the panel matched the specification in the Quality Assurance Handbook, including external requirements. The report of the event showed that the subject benchmarks, the FHEQ and the requirements of the professional body were considered. Recommendations (on this occasion there were no conditions) were followed up within the timeframe specified.

Annual monitoring

17 The University views annual monitoring as a key process for continuously evaluating and enhancing the quality and standards of the provision for students. Annual monitoring is managed by FTQSCs, which provide overview reports to TQSC.

18 The Quality Directorate reviews and circulates monitoring requirements annually. Course teams are required to reflect upon course delivery in relation to University strategies; teaching, learning and assessment; student support; research underpinning the curriculum; and resourcing. The reports must also include commentaries from external sources, including external examiners; course and unit data; and a narrative review of the operation of units and courses as documented in unit reports, 'course journals', and students' views. Action plans are also required.

19 The 'course journal' is a tool developed from practice at the Bedford campus, and is kept online using the University's virtual learning environment, and maintained throughout the year. It is a table with columns indicating, among other things, events (such as informal meetings with external examiners) and action taken or to be taken. Course journals therefore contribute to both ongoing quality control and retrospective quality assurance. They also provide an effective focus for improving learning opportunities. The course journals are both full and informative, and the team considered that the journals make a positive contribution to the management of quality assurance and enhancement.

20 Examples of annual monitoring included comments on good practice, thus showing that effective use was being made of the procedure to enhance students' learning opportunities. Reports typically included commentary on the progress of the University's academic strategies, as required, but this opportunity was not always fully exploited. In the case of the University strategy for 'research informed teaching', for instance, in some cases staff research activities tended to be merely listed, without demonstrating how research had influenced learning opportunities.

21 The audit confirmed that the views of external examiners, and responses to them, were covered in annual monitoring paperwork, and notified to TQSC through summary reports. The audit team noted instances where very critical comments made by external examiners were glossed in ways that minimised the criticisms, and, on some occasions where there was more

than one external examiner, one or more critical and the other(s) not, the favourable comments only had been reported to TQSC. The team found no case in which an examiner refused to accept a response made at course level; but nonetheless it was difficult to see how TQSC, with incomplete information, was able properly to reassure itself that the approved procedures for setting and maintaining standards had been followed, and to review the effectiveness with which the system was operating. Accordingly, the team considers it advisable that the University review the current approach to summary reporting on matters of academic standards to secure sound assurance that no significant issue is overlooked.

Review

22 Periodic review operates on a five-year cycle with cognate courses grouped together. The process is managed by the Quality Directorate which establishes panels including at least two external members and, from 2009, a student representative. The documentation clearly sets out the requirements and evidence to be included in the review. These include a self-evaluation document, commenting on strengths, good practice and areas that need attention, as well as fit with University education strategies. Faculties are responsible for ensuring that the University's requirements have been met and they may seek external advice on the self-evaluations conducted by the staff teams. Panels have delegated authority from TQSC for re-approval or otherwise of the courses under consideration.

23 The self-evaluation documents seen by the audit team gave effective consideration to the quality of the education experience as well as discussion of strengths, weaknesses, good practices and areas needing attention. Review reports indicated that panels included external members as required by the Quality Assurance Handbook, and took into account the views of students. Review reports also demonstrated proper attention to corporate strategy. For example, in relation to the research informed teaching strategy, one recommendation was to make more explicit the ways in which applied research underpinned the curricula. In response, the course team provided case studies of how research had been used to support learning opportunities. On occasion, external reference points were rather less thoroughly considered. One of the reviews made no mention of the relevant subject benchmark statements. Conditions for the improvement of the provision were clearly identified in reports and were followed up in a timely fashion.

24 Though reports of reviews are formally addressed to TQSC, outcomes only are directly reported to the Committee. The Quality Directorate produces an annual summary review of course approval and review events for TQSC, highlighting issues of concern and examples of good practice for wider dissemination.

25 The procedures for approval, monitoring and review were generally thorough, but summary reports to TQSC did not always reflect fully the evidence on which the procedures were based, and on occasions gave the University an incomplete picture of external views of the academic standards of its provision. Nonetheless, overall, the audit team found that the procedures for approval, monitoring and review of courses made full contributions to the management of academic quality and standards.

External examiners

26 The purposes and functions of external examiners are explained in detail in the University's Quality Handbook, and are typical of UK universities. For taught courses, external examiners are appointed by an External Examiners Appointments Committee of TQSC, and (since 2009) by TQSC's Collaborative Partnerships Committee for all partnerships. External examiners are appointed against criteria specified in the Quality Assurance Handbook, which covers such matters as subject expertise, objectivity and workload (an external examiner is not 'normally' permitted to hold more than one other substantial external examinership in addition to the Bedfordshire appointment).

27 Most external examiners are appointed for discrete subjects or courses and are associated with specified course units; but there are also scheme-level external examiners for the undergraduate and postgraduate schemes. These arrangements also operate at partner institutions.

28 The University states that in relation to assessment, the role of the external examiner is to moderate grades assigned by internal examiners on the basis of sampling. The arrangements provide that sampling cover grades that are marginal to classes.

29 External examiners are requested to make their reports using a form which invites yes/no answers on a range of matters such as whether or not a sufficient sample was provided for moderation, and also narrative answers on matters like general standard of grading and strengths and weaknesses of students. Some supplement the forms with letters or additional commentary, a facility specifically urged on examiners in the final year of office. External examiners are also asked to comment on alignment to Cre8.

30 All reports are read by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic), faculty deans and the Academic Registrar. They are considered by course and/or field committees, where student representatives have the opportunity to see them. Faculty deans respond to external examiners' reports. Synoptic reports for external examiners' reports as a whole, by scheme, are compiled by the Quality Directorate for consideration by TQSC and by Academic Board.

31 The audit team read a number of external examiners' reports, for both 'home' courses and those taught in partner institutions. Most of these were very thorough, and all were responded to directly by deans of the relevant faculty and on occasions also by course managers. Some reports, especially for courses taught in partnership, were very brief, or did not fulfil the requirements indicated by the forms, but such problems were not always picked up in the responses. There was evidence too that the stated restriction on numbers of other appointments was not always observed for collaborative partners. As noted above (paragraph 21), important matters raised by external examiners were not always fully reported to TQSC. Notwithstanding these issues, the audit team concluded that, in general, the University made strong and scrupulous use of independent external examiners in summative assessment.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

32 The University Quality Handbook requires internal procedures to be written with reference to the relevant sections of the *Code of practice* and to be kept actively under review. Levels of awards are aligned with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and provision is also referenced against subject benchmark statements. Assurance that provision meets academic standards and the required quality of learning experiences as defined by external reference points is a specific requirement at course approval and periodic review. The minutes of the TQSC show that the sections of the *Code of practice* are kept under regular review. They also show that consideration is given to other external benchmarks such as those related to disability. Changes in benchmarks are reported to faculties and departments through the faculty sub-deans for quality who are members of TQSC and who chair the FTQSCs. The Teaching and Learning Directorate has published on its website an excellent guide to mapping external reference points, including the FHEQ, as well as links to subject benchmarks. A monthly newsletter produced by the Director of Learning and Teaching for academic directors also provides information about enhancement changes.

33 The audit team saw examples of external reference points being used at course approval and periodic review events. The Quality Handbook states that the course journals should include evidence of systematic continuous improvement as required by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). The course journals seen by the audit team demonstrated that records of continuous improvement were being kept although they were not specifically related to external reference points.

34 Where possible, courses are submitted for accreditation by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). Documentation provided to the audit team demonstrated a very careful and thorough approach to ensuring that the programmes meet the requirements of professional bodies as a part of programme approval and periodic review procedures. Links with PSRBs are reported through the Quality Directorate, with the Academic Registrar acting as the point of contact and the University maintains a register of such links.

35 Mapping against the framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area is provided in a web-based document produced by the Teaching and Learning Directorate. During the audit, the team confirmed the comment in the briefing paper that the University was not yet in a position to issue a Diploma Supplement although it did issue a transcript. The present plans mean that the first students to be issued with a Diploma Supplement will be those graduating in 2011. The audit team would encourage the University to accelerate work on the production of Diploma supplements so that graduating students can benefit as soon as possible.

36 The view of the audit team is that effective use is made by the institution of the *Code of practice* and other external reference points in its management of academic standards.

Assessment policies and regulations

37 Assessment is one of the five 'strands' in the University's overall curriculum framework, Cre8, which is gradually being brought into place as new courses are approved or courses are reviewed. The University's briefing paper stated that it was fundamental to Cre8 to 'rebalance assessment as an instrument for student learning, complementing its role as a means of measurement and certification'.

38 From the point of view of academic standards, key elements are the adoption of a University-wide credit-rating system based on standard 30-credit units, a common 16 point scale for assessment, and generic criteria corresponding to the scale, which are complemented by locally-devised course-specific criteria. Levels are defined in relation to the FHEQ, and the criteria are derived from those of the South Eastern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer. Assessments are submitted and graded anonymously, except where circumstances prevent. There is a common model for marking and for moderation, described in the Quality Assurance Handbook. Classification is related to the 16-point scale and 'borderlines' are identified in the Regulations.

39 All taught courses operate within a common framework of examination boards at two levels, field and scheme, with standardised procedures. Field boards make decisions on grades, and consider students' overall performance in order to make recommendations to scheme boards. Scheme boards take decisions on classification and credit, for those leaving the University. Scheme boards meet three times a year. In addition, the University has a system of field-level 'Student Attainment Review (StAR) Boards' for monitoring student progress and identifying students at risk of failing or withdrawing. Judgements on the validity of extenuating circumstances relating to delayed or missing assessments are delegated from the examination boards to the University's Corporate Academic Advice and Counselling Service (CAAS). CAAS does not take narrowly academic decisions, but, having assessed the documentary evidence supporting such claims, coordinates support for individual students from academic sources. CAAS is in attendance at StAR boards, and the Head of CAAS is a member of both scheme level examination boards.

40 The University has defined categories of 'Academic Offences' according to nature and seriousness. These definitions are made available electronically. The University makes use of plagiarism detection software. The audit found that the definitions were clearly explained, and that the plagiarism detection software was used properly to inform but not to substitute for academic judgement.

41 The audit team noted, in relation to more than one faculty, that some external examiners expressed surprise at internal markers' interpretation of the pass/fail borderline. The field leaders' response to the external examiners was that course-specific criteria attached to the University's common marking scale left room for a student to pass overall, while not having achieved all stated learning outcomes. The audit team considers it advisable that the University clarify the relationship between individual fields' interpretations of the University's 16-point marking scheme and general requirements for the fulfilment of learning outcomes.

42 There was evidence of some considerable confusion among members of examination boards about how borderline cases were treated. In particular, staff differed as to whether, in making recommendations to scheme boards, field boards took students' individual circumstances into consideration, or merely applied an algorithm with marks as variables. The Regulations are not altogether helpful, since they specify one condition for awarding the higher class, without stating whether it is sufficient or merely necessary. Minutes of examination boards seen by the audit team suggested that, in the undergraduate scheme, the condition operated in practice as an algorithm, a position implied by the minutes of meetings and confirmed to the team in meetings with senior staff of the University. The minutes of the Postgraduate Scheme Board indicated that cases existed where the condition was set aside in the light of individual circumstances, though they appeared rare. In view of the widespread misunderstanding among members of boards, and the over-reliance on the decisions of individual chairs, the team considers it desirable that the University review and clarify the regulations governing the treatment of students in borderline award categories so that the requirements are clearly understood by staff and examiners.

Management information - statistics

43 Data relating to standards is provided by the Quality Directorate and Registry Planning Team at field and at university levels. The scheme boards review statistical evidence about attainment and the information derived from their deliberations is reported to TQSC and the Academic Board.

44 There was much evidence of statistical information being used effectively for summative reports at University level. The Undergraduate Scheme Review Report, for instance, gave comprehensive quantitative information on such matters as nationality and ethnicity of students, modes of attendance, disability and performance, with trend data on classifications, and used the information derived as the basis for action. At other levels there was some evidence of difficulties in the provision in all cases of accurate and timely data on which to base such instruments as annual monitoring reports, but the University's Planning Department was aware of these problems and appeared confident that they could be solved for the forthcoming round of reports.

45 Overall, the audit team concluded that confidence could reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

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

Management information - feedback from students

47 Feedback from students is collected through a Unit Student Perception questionnaire (USP), a Student Experience Questionnaire (SEQ) and the National Student Survey. The SEQ and USP are run from the Office of the Dean of Students. The USP is an online survey, recently introduced at the time of the audit, which was piloted in spring 2009. It contains three standard questions, one of which is contributed by the Students' Union, and also permits departmental questions. At course level, student feedback is collected at student staff consultative committees. Course teams also carry out supplementary surveys to reflect the specific needs of courses or students. Support services survey their users and the Dean of Students prepares an analysis of students' complaints. The views of postgraduate research students are gathered through annual research student monitoring statements which are forwarded to the Research Graduate School and are scrutinised by the relevant Research Institute Director.

48 Notwithstanding concerns expressed in the student written submission about possible survey overload and inconsistencies in access to the results of surveys, the students met by the audit team did not see these as problems. They reported that they were alerted to the results of feedback surveys by email. The audit found that student feedback was handled well through the deliberative processes by staff/student consultative committees, field committees, and Faculty Teaching Quality and Standards Committee (FTQSCs).

49 The arrangements for the contribution of student feedback to monitoring and review are clearly documented. Student feedback on units forms a part of the annual unit report form and is dealt with in the course journal, both of which contribute to annual monitoring reports. The audit team saw records of student input in annual monitoring reports in ways that improved learning opportunities but noted that the analysis of the returns made by students did not always permit full records to be provided in time for the completion of the reports. These problems of timeliness were confirmed by academic staff although they also expressed confidence in improvement measures including the introduction of the new online USP.

50 Students were generally positive about the feedback processes and were able to report examples of remedial or enhancement-driven action emerging from them: for example, at institutional level. At unit level, staff reported on changes to a unit in Child and Adolescent Studies. The audit team also saw records in annual monitoring of the ways in which issues raised by students related, for example, to professional placements, were being remedied in the associated action plans. Faculty annual monitoring reports identify patterns and trends from unit evaluations.

51 These arrangements for gathering and using feedback from students were considered by the audit team to be effective in contributing to the management and enhancement of learning opportunities.

Role of students in quality assurance

52 There was evidence of involvement at institutional level by representatives of the Students' Union at meetings of senior University committees. Similarly, at course and faculty levels the audit team saw evidence of the involvement of elected student representatives in course and field committees and faculty academic boards. The effectiveness of the arrangements for student involvement were generally supported in the student written submission and confirmed by students met by the audit team, who identified ways in which, in their role as representatives, they were able to secure changes. The students also confirmed that they had access to external examiner reports in field committees and through Bedfordshire Resources for Education Online (BREO).

53 While the audit team viewed these arrangements as coherent and generally comprehensive there were aspects which were less effective: notably that student attendance was patchy and that students were not members of FTQSC. Given the importance of FTQSCs

as deliberative committees in each faculty in reporting to the equivalent University committee on matters relating, for example, to annual monitoring of quality and standards, and student evaluations, responses and liaison meetings, this is an important omission, notwithstanding the University's desire not to overburden students with committees.

54 The Students' Union is responsible for training course representatives, with financial support provided by the University and with contributions by the Centre for Personal and Career Development. The training is considered by the students to be helpful to them in undertaking the role of representing their colleagues. There was evidence at course and faculty levels of appropriate information being provided to students about the purposes of staff/student consultative committees and about student representation at programme and faculty levels. The audit team considers that the University is actively providing effective support and training for student representatives.

55 The audit team concluded that the University's approach to involving students in the management of the quality of learning opportunities was generally effective although they were of the view that the inclusion of student representatives on FTQSCs would further strengthen this area.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

56 The University's Education and Research Strategies 2008-2013 emphasise the importance of research in supporting student learning and informing the curriculum. There is a range of actions to strengthen the research base which include strategic appointments at professor and reader level and an increasing emphasis on research in other academic appointments as well as support for existing staff. Senior staff were aware of the challenge that this area of work represented, given that in the academic year 2008-09 only 15 per cent of academic staff recorded themselves as research active and similarly small numbers are engaged in enterprise activity. The 2008-09 Time Allocation Survey was completed by approximately 86 per cent of total academic staff and 70 per cent of these staff self-declared they did little or no research.

57 A research-informed teaching strategy was implemented in 2007 alongside the curriculum review (Cre8). The strategy takes a broad approach to research to include also scholarship and enterprise. The strategy has led to a curriculum-focused guide to research-informed teaching together with supporting documents, arrangements for departmental co-mentoring as well as research-informed teaching projects. The latter have been supported by a three year HEFCE funded project. Research-informed teaching development has been disseminated through university-wide events. Departments are required by 2010 to have statements covering the relationship between research and the curriculum.

58 Annual monitoring reports include a section devoted to research-informed teaching. While some of these provided insights into the ways in which research and allied activity supported teaching, for the most part they focused on describing staff research and professional activities. The Teaching Quality and Strategy Committee (TQSC) is responsible for monitoring the overall impact of the strategy but, at the time of the audit, the matter had not yet appeared as an item on that committee's agenda, suggesting some delay in this area.

59 The implementation of the strategy is also monitored through the periodic review process. The self-evaluation reports seen by the audit team showed good accounts of research-informed teaching, including links with student dissertations. The periodic review documents also included well-developed research-informed teaching statements and action plans. The students whom the team met were generally aware when staff used their research to support their teaching.

60 The University has a well developed and coherent strategy to strengthen the links between research and teaching and this is being taken up in the faculties and is welcomed by the students. The audit also established that the University was monitoring the effectiveness of the strategy.

Other modes of study

61 Apart from the collaborative provision, the programmes offered by the University are predominantly based on the campuses in Bedfordshire. Students following the MBA by supported and distance-learning are for the most part based at collaborative centres. Such distance provision operates within the same quality assurance framework as other provision, with guidance papers in the University's Quality Handbook giving advice on adjustments relating, for example, to online access and support. The University staff who teach on the MBA are well prepared for the task by the Learning Development Manager in the Business School. Notwithstanding some frustration with access to the virtual learning environment in overseas centres, the students following the programme by supported and distance-learning generally expressed satisfaction with the support they received including online resources

62 The University's Education Strategy (2008-2013) emphasises the expanding role of e-learning to provide a blended approach as the primary mechanism of delivery. An associated Technology-Enhanced Learning Strategy (2008-2011) sets out a detailed action plan which includes development of the curriculum, learner support, infrastructure and staff development. At the time of the audit, technology enhanced learning was not yet included in annual monitoring. The student written submission was generally positive about the University's well-established virtual learning environment, BREO, despite some inconsistencies in its use by academic staff. This support was also confirmed in the meetings of the audit team with student groups who indicated that it is extensively used for communication, access to learning materials and resources, and posting results. They also referred to the useful information it contained relating to plagiarism.

63 The Education Strategy includes an aim that, where feasible and appropriate, students should have the opportunity for work experience as an integrated and supported part of their learning. This aim is supported by a specific Employability Strategy designed to provide an institution-wide approach to enhancing employability and personal development. The audit team saw evidence of well-planned work placements as a part of programmes developed with professional bodies. To support the strategy and to extend work-related learning to other programme areas, the University has established employability fellows to review the curriculum and to develop an action plan to support the employability of students. At the time of the audit, the employability fellows were auditing activity in this area and identifying good practice. There are a number of different ways in which students gain work-related experience including, for example, a 30-credit work placement in Sport Science, a University dance company for students in Performing Arts and the development of business pods in the Business School. The last provides a simulation of an office working environment which is used for project-based work. Student awareness of employability was variable, being strongest where there were placements. The team viewed the Employability Strategy as providing a useful framework to strengthen the employability of all students.

Resources for learning

64 A comprehensive Learning Resources Strategy with the Education, Estates and Information Technology strategies is designed to assist the University in delivering the Corporate Plan. The implementation of the Learning Resources Strategy is monitored effectively by the TQSC. An externally conducted satisfaction review for the library identified three priorities: to work more closely with lecturers and buy more copies of core texts; to fix broken computers more quickly; and to keep the catalogue up to date. The University has clearly identified action points in response to these identified priorities. Recent developments at the time of the audit included the 'digital library', yet to be accessible to all staff in partner institutions but well received by students, in addition to several other enhancements as a result of strategic planning and student feedback.

65 The audit team viewed samples of four Discipline Support Plans; these documents, each authored by the relevant academic liaison librarian, express a close working knowledge of discipline areas in the University. Each report identifies relevant developments in the discipline

area, analyses the collection, reports on a significant number of discipline support activities, benchmarks the University with an external peer department and makes recommendations for enhancements and purchasing. Academic Liaison Librarians work closely with academic committees and course teams and, in particular, deliver information literacy training, support the delivery of personal development planning and provide induction sessions for students including partner institutions. The University's research community is similarly supported and students explained to the team their satisfaction with the library service, particularly the 'digital library'; requests for resources via the Athens access management system had been accommodated

66 The University's virtual learning environment, BREO is used widely across both the main campuses and across partner institutions. Staff and students on-campus and at partner institutions valued the benefits of BREO, affirmed the ease of use and its usefulness in the support of learning. Students, both undergraduate, postgraduate, research and at partner institutions affirmed the ease of use, and confirmed its usefulness in support of their learning. The contribution of the BREO virtual learning environment to the management of learning opportunities in both home and collaborative provision is identified as a feature of good practice in the audit.

67 At the time of the audit the business faculty had reported a 'crisis' in terms of a recent influx of international students. In the year prior to the audit, there was 25 per cent growth (20 staff) in the Faculty of Business and 20 per cent growth in Education, to cope with the intake of international students, demonstrating that the University's systems are responsive to resource demands.

68 The University has a central timetabling system. The student written submission drew attention to multiple delays and inaccuracies in the electronic timetables supplied. Meetings with staff and students in the course of the audit confirmed that the problems were long-standing and persistent; the University attributes the problems to the implementation of timetabling software over the previous 18 months. While a pragmatic approach has been adopted in issuing local paper copies of timetables which were confirmed to be accurate, the audit team considers it desirable that the University take action to ensure that all students be provided with accurate timetables at the start of the academic year.

69 The audit team considers that the University's approach to the provision of learning resources is effective in the management of learning opportunities.

Admissions policy

70 The University operates a centralised approach to admissions. Detailed guidance on how to apply through UCAS or direct to the University is available on the University website. Applicants with non-standard qualifications or for advanced standing are referred to the relevant academic department for consideration. Information on how a student should appeal against an admissions decision is clearly stated on the University's website.

71 The audit team found that information on admissions provided by the University was full and helpful and supported the University mission of widening participation and also international recruitment. The University's approach to admissions is sound and reflects the expectations of the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*.

Student support

72 The University aims to achieve a highly diverse student population for which it provides extensive pastoral and academic support which is well publicised in both hard and electronic copy. Generally, students found support systems to be effective. At the time of the audit the University was planning to invest in its estate to enhance the availability of its support services to students Corporate Academic Advice and Counselling Service, Learning Support, Pastoral and Welfare Services and the Executive of the Students' Union work collaboratively to share

knowledge as appropriate, subject to confidentiality issues. The student written submission commented generally favourably on the level and effectiveness of the Student Support Services. The Dean of Students prepares an annual report for the Academic Board on the effectiveness of student support.

73 In support of Cre8, the support services offer opportunities to develop employability, information literacy, personal management strategies, and study skills. Students spoke highly of the benefit of Personal and Academic Development in improving academic writing skills.

74 The International Office is responsible for the admission and induction of international students. Given the actual and projected growth in international student numbers, the development of English language skills is an important part of the University's support for students. The Division of Language and Communication in the Business School provides a team of specialists in Academic English and Study Skills and the University plans to provide a significant range of support mechanisms in English Language Skills and improved social learning facilities.

75 At the time of the audit, the Academic Board of the University had instigated a wide-ranging process of enhancement of the personal tutor system. The operational aspects of the revised and strengthened principles of personal tutoring are being managed by the Learning and Teaching Directorate. The guidelines for personal tutoring are comprehensive and include case studies of various personal tutor systems from across the University which, though different in characteristics, matched the principles established by Academic Board.

76 The team concluded that the University systems for student support made a positive contribution to achieving the aims of the Strategic Plan and to the management of learning opportunities.

Staff support (including staff development)

77 The University achieved the Investors in People standard in 2008. Academic Staff are expected to carry forward the University's mission in teaching, research, scholarship and advanced academic practice, knowledge transfer and liaising with regional partners.

78 Staff induction includes mandatory University seminars and departmental events. The University operates a one-year probationary period. All campus-based academic staff are expected to become associates of the Higher Education Academy. Staff development is managed by the Organisational Development Training Unit. The annual staff review process identifies staff development needs.

79 Academic Directors are described by the University as agents of change and enhancement at faculty level and are led by the Director of Learning and Teaching. A system of Assessment and Learning Advisers has been established to support staff in the adoption and implementation of Cre8, but at the time of the audit it was too soon to evaluate the impact of this initiative. Both the Quality Directorate and the Teaching and Learning Directorate provide training events on teaching, learning, assessment, BREQ, and quality assurance matters. The University Teaching and Learning website offers a good range of support and links to support for academic staff.

80 A system of peer review of teaching operates throughout the University. Poor teaching can be identified and remedied through a variety of means, including attendance at some units on the postgraduate programme in learning and teaching.

81 The audit confirmed that the University's approach to staff support and development made an effective contribution to the University's management of learning opportunities.

82 The audit found that confidence could be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

83 The University has adopted a strategic approach to quality enhancement. The University's Quality Handbook begins with a clear exposition of the general principles underpinning quality enhancement, a framework for external and internal engagement with quality enhancement and an overview of the University's quality enhancement systems. The section on quality assurance and approval of courses and units is prefaced by an account of the policy context and principles underpinning the strategic enhancement of the academic portfolio. Similar principles are articulated and embedded within subsequent sections on annual monitoring and periodic review.

84 The University aims to promote continuous improvement in the student experience. It views quality enhancement as a whole-university activity, involving all members of staff, which may occur in two ways: firstly through the review and re-engineering of its processes, policies and procedures; and secondly through incremental change and development. In terms of the first way in which quality enhancement occurs, the University draws attention to the key role played by the Education Strategy, its sub-strategies and their associated action plans, the implementation of which is monitored by the Teaching and Learning Directorate which reports regularly on progress to Teaching Quality and Standards Committee (TQSC). The effective work of the Directorate in promoting quality management and enhancement was apparent to the audit team through discussions with staff and scrutiny of academic committee papers. The high-quality training and support materials provided by the Teaching and Learning Directorate are considered by the team to be a feature of good practice. The formation of the University of Bedfordshire is an example of the second way in which enhancement occurs.

85 The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) has overall responsibility at institutional level for the continuous enhancement of the academic quality of all provision and for designing and delivering a thorough-going change management programme embracing the University's full academic portfolio. Responsibility for managing the University's quality enhancement systems and developing its quality enhancement policies and procedures rests with the Academic Registrar. Sub deans (Quality Enhancement) chair Faculty Teaching and Standards Committee (FTQSC) and have responsibility for promoting quality enhancement at faculty level in respect of taught provision. As ex-officio members of TQSC, Quality Forum and the Sub-Dean (Quality) Working Group, they are also in a position collectively to promote quality enhancement at institutional level.

86 The audit team found evidence, through discussions with staff originating in both the Luton and Bedford campuses, of a high level of consultation and engagement in the merger process. It was apparent that a strong emphasis had been placed on embedding within the new University of Bedfordshire the best practices of both its legacy institutions. Course journals provide a good example of this. Originating in the Bedford campus, these online records of course-related matters have now been adopted across the new University. In a similar vein, Student Attainment Review Boards, cited as a feature of good practice in the 2005 Institutional audit of the University of Luton, as a means of supporting students at risk, have now been adopted throughout the new University. The planning and management of the merger and the structured exploitation of the resultant strategic enhancement opportunities are identified in the audit as features of good practice.

87 The Education Strategy and its sub-strategies and CRe8, all provide evidence to support the University's claim that quality enhancement is brought about by incremental change and development. There was evidence of active implementation of the Employability Strategy, the Technology-Enhanced Learning Strategy and the Research-Informed Teaching Strategy.

88 The annual learning and teaching symposium and the annual institutional meeting with the University's external examiners both serve as good examples of embedded quality

enhancement processes. An Academic Portfolio Development Strategy Group, recently established at the time of the audit, is intended to ensure that quality enhancement is embedded in processes of new subject development by engaging deans and heads of Department more in strategic discussions at the institutional level.

89 In conclusion, it was evident that the University was taking a systematic and strategic approach to enhancing the quality of the student experience across and at all levels of the institution.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

90 The University's 'New Futures' Strategic Plan 2007/12 commits the institution to strengthening existing and to nurturing new partnerships and, in meeting its Education Strategy 2008/13, it will become a distributed institution supporting learning wherever its awards are offered. A published list of collaborative partners is maintained by the Quality Directorate. The University has a number of different types of collaboration defined in the Quality Handbook:

- articulation (or recognition) arrangements, where a course designed, delivered and assessed by another institution attracts a specific credit-rating against a University award-bearing programme. Students on articulated programmes are not students of the University and have no rights of access to University learning resources
- partnerships, where a course is designed and delivered on a partnership basis between the University and another institution. At the time of the audit, this was an arrangement for Foundation Degrees only
- supported distance-learning, where a standard curriculum is designed by the University and learning materials are made available through electronic and other means for delivery in approved locations worldwide. The University is responsible for all assessment
- transnational education, where a course designed and owned by the University is delivered in another institution. Staff of the partner institution teach to the University's syllabuses, and examinations are set and marked by University staff
- validated courses, where design and delivery is the responsibility of an independent institution. Courses are subject to University quality assurance processes and lead to University awards.

The University's preferred form of international collaboration is through articulation arrangements.

91 At the time of the audit, there were two 'accredited' colleges, one UK and one overseas, which enjoy greater levels of discretion in relation to University academic processes.

92 The University's Partnership Strategy 2009/12 (sub-strategy to its Educational Strategy) relates to UK-based non-NHS collaborations only. The audit team found that this strategy represented a coherent framework for the strategic management of its UK-based partnerships.

93 The planning of international partnerships is initiated through the office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (External Affairs) and the International Strategy Group includes in its terms of reference reviewing the business case and approving international collaborative proposals. At the time of the audit, the University did not have a formal international partnership strategy analogous to the partnership strategy but it did indicate in the course of the audit an intention to develop such a strategy. The audit team considers it desirable that the University expedite the development of a formal international partnership strategy to provide a sound framework for further work in this area.

94 The University considers collaborative provision to be mainstream work, and it is therefore managed through the University's normal academic structures. Academic Board has overall responsibility, but has delegated authority to act in this respect to TQSC which in turn is supported by a new committee, the Teaching Quality and Standards Committee (TQSC) Collaborative Partnerships Committee. Staff reported that the University was seeking a more holistic approach to the academic oversight of all its collaborative provision through this Committee. At the time of the audit, a TQSC working group was reviewing the scale and scope of University collaborative partnerships and its interim report in May 2009 reported the outcomes of monitoring of University procedures and practices in relation to the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

95 There are clearly defined stages for approval of collaborative provision, including consideration of the business case, drafting of legal agreements and the institutional and course delivery approval; the latter aligns with those for on-campus provision and usually involves a visit to the proposed partner. Scrutiny of documentation and discussion with staff in the University and partner institutions confirmed that the arrangements were sound and operating as intended.

96 In the case of articulations, responsibility for credit-rating another organisation's courses resides with TQSC but authority is delegated to Faculty Teaching and Standards Committee (FTQSCs). The proposal is scrutinised by a faculty credit-rating panel which has internal membership including representation from the Quality Directorate but no external adviser involvement. The University might wish to consider whether the robustness of this process would be enhanced by external advice.

97 Periodic course review is undertaken on a five-yearly cycle based on a critical self-evaluation. The process is the same as initial course approval and includes external panel membership. Reviews normally involve a visit to the partner. In discussion with the audit team, staff from one of the University's partners described periodic course review as a major support to further development. At the time of the audit, the University had recently undertaken work to produce guidelines and procedures for the conduct of institutional review and had drawn up an initial schedule of reviews.

98 Contract renewal for articulations provides an opportunity to consider the effectiveness of the partnership. There are sound arrangements to secure continued alignment of the curricula of the partner and of the University programme. The audit team saw an example of significant changes made to the year 1 curriculum of the Business School undergraduate provision, with the introduction of the Business Pods. A major Chinese articulation partner had decided to modify its own curriculum to align with these changes, and there was evidence of substantial cooperation between the University and its Chinese articulation partner including staff visits to China to advise on curriculum change and to provide staff development inputs for Chinese academic staff who would deliver the revised curriculum.

99 The audit team also considered cases where the University had reviewed collaborative provision involving two partnerships and had decided to terminate the arrangements on business grounds. The exit strategies for both of these partnerships were framed in such a way that academic standards and quality were likely to be maintained, and the interests of students safeguarded.

100 Annual monitoring for collaborative provision operates in broadly the same manner as for on-campus provision. Collaborative provision is considered by FTQSC alongside on-campus provision in the field. Some partners were using the University's course journal approach but, at the time of the audit, these had not been generally implemented across the University's collaborative provision. Partners have the opportunity to be present when their annual reports are considered by the University. While not many partners took advantage of this, in discussion with the audit team a course leader from a partner institution spoke of valuing the opportunity to present the college's annual report alongside another member college within the Health and Wellbeing group.

101 The monitoring procedures adopted at faculty and University levels generally provide an adequate oversight of both the UK and overseas provision, which is reinforced by a summary presented to TQSC of the outcomes of annual monitoring of collaborative programmes with further education colleges, and through the summary external examiner reports for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes prepared by the Quality Directorate for TQSC. The limitations noted above on the summary reporting of external examiners' reports applied also to summary reporting of external examiners' reports in some partner colleges. Outcomes from annual monitoring are fed back to partners via the link tutor.

102 Collaborative courses are located within fields in one or another of the University's departments. Departments are responsible for quality management and assurance with support from the Quality Directorate. All collaborative courses have University-appointed link tutors whose roles and responsibilities are detailed in the Quality Handbook; the University considers link tutors to be pivotal to the effective management of its collaborative provision. The link tutor's responsibilities include making regular visits to the partner organisation. There was evidence of a minimum of three visits each year to UK-based partnerships, but not for overseas partnerships. Discussion with staff established that the practical expectation for overseas partnerships was for at least one link tutor visit during the year with such visits tending to be longer in duration than those to UK-based partners. The audit team considers it desirable that, in order to give proper guidance to staff involved and to avoid creating false expectations on the part of overseas partners, the University define expectations for link tutor visits to partner institutions overseas and amend its documentation accordingly.

103 There is a strong support network for UK-based collaborations, with regular meetings between the Principals of groups of providers and senior staff at the University, and there is representation of senior partner college staff on University committees. The audit team reviewed the minutes of some of these fora and concluded that they made a useful contribution to the University's management of its UK-based collaborative relationships.

104 Admission of students to collaborative programmes is generally overseen by the partner operating within the framework of the University's regulations, but with the University reserving the right to refuse admission. Appropriate delegation of authority to act in respect of admissions was confirmed in the case of both UK and overseas partners visited by the audit team. The audit team found that these arrangements were sound and were operating as intended.

105 Staff from collaborative partners whom the audit team met confirmed that they received and responded to external examiner reports. Students on collaborative programmes do not see the reports; the University will wish to ensure that it shares external examiners' reports as a matter of course with student representatives in accordance with HEFCE letter 06/45.

106 There was evidence of student representation within collaborative provision. In the case of an overseas partner, students knew who their class representatives were and could give examples of issues raised and resolved by either the partner college or the University. In the case of a UK partner, students were less clear on the representational arrangements which were in place. Staff at the college confirmed that there was student representation on internal committees, though the geographically dispersed distribution of students and their mode of attendance was challenging in terms of adequate representational arrangements. Collection of student feedback is the responsibility of the collaborative partner and outcomes were included in the partner's annual report to the University. Students confirmed that they were asked to complete locally devised feedback questionnaires, and generally felt that any concerns they raised were responded to satisfactorily by the college partner or the University.

107 Staff teaching on collaborative programmes are approved at the time of validation and there are satisfactory arrangements for confirming subsequent appointments. The audit team was provided with a number of examples of sound practice in relation to development for partner staff. Development plans for staff of FE college partners involved in delivery of University awards

were discussed at the time collaborations were approved. Partner staff are invited to attend staff development events at the University, and staff at a UK-based partner confirmed they did take advantage of this but clearly geographical location of the partner colleges played a major part in whether staff could access such events. Staff from partner colleges may enrol on University award-bearing programmes including the PG Cert in Academic Practice, and the fees are waived. A programme leader from one of the University's FE College partners gave the audit team a positive account of the way in which the University had ensured partner staff were aware of and knew how to implement the University's new regulations relating to plagiarism. These examples were illustrative of the University taking a positive approach to staff development in partner colleges, but there was no definitive statement of what the University regarded as its obligations in relation to staff development in its various types of collaboration. The team considers it desirable that the University draw on existing good practice to develop a structured approach to the development of staff in partner organisations to enhance its management of its collaborative provision.

108 The suitability of locally available learning resources is appraised when a partnership is approved. All students on collaborative programmes (apart from articulations) are able to access Bedfordshire Resources for Education Online (BREO) and through this to gain access to online library and information resources. Students confirmed they did enjoy such access and they commented very positively on this feature of the University's collaborative arrangements. Documentation suggested there had been problems over communications links at an overseas partner but students at the partner indicated they had no problems accessing BREO and that they made good use of it. The University indicated partner staff also had access to BREO and through this to the digital library resources of the University. Staff in a UK-based partner told the audit team they did not currently have access rights to the digital library but they believed the University was resolving the issue.

109 Students confirmed that the pre-enrolment information they received presented an accurate account of their programme of studies, and they had all benefited from an induction to their programme usually conducted by partner staff but, in the case of MBA, by supported distance-learning, delivered by University staff. Students also confirmed that they had a course handbook available in both hard copy and electronic formats, and they were clear that regulatory matters, and how to make a representation or complaint, were covered in the handbook.

110 The audit found that the University's approach to the management of its collaborative provision was sound and that it took due account of the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*. There can be confidence in the University's current and likely future management of its collaborative provision.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

111 The University Research Committee (URC) has responsibility for overseeing all aspects of research within the University. Its tasks include oversight of student registration, progress and examination. Minutes of URC evidence scrutiny of proposed external examiner appointments, consideration of student registrations, and oversight of Research Institutes through their annual reporting. The University has its own Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes incorporated into the Research Handbook given to supervisors and students, and the University has mapped this against the section of the *Code of practice* on postgraduate research programmes.

112 There are eight Research Institutes covering the full range of research activity in the University including the supervision of research students. Research Institutes are located in Faculties with most faculties having more than one Institute. Each Institute is headed by a Director. Research Institutes report to the URC, but Research Institute Directors report to Faculty

Academic Boards, and the Directors work closely with Heads of Department on academic direction and resource issues. Postgraduate research students whom the audit team met confirmed that they regarded themselves as belonging to their Research Institute or, in some cases, their Research Centre within the Research Institute.

113 At the time of the audit, postgraduate research student numbers were 127 postgraduate research students enrolled on-campus (67 full-time and 60 part-time) with a further 20 part-time overseas students. The University is planning significant expansion with the Strategic Plan 2007/12 targeting growth in postgraduate research student numbers of 10 per cent per annum, and the University's Research Strategy 2009/14 envisaging expansion to at least 500 students, with growth particularly of professional doctorates.

114 The challenge for the University of expanding its research capability has been noted and has implications for meeting the supervisory demands arising from the projected growth in postgraduate research student numbers, particularly as staff confirmed they did not anticipate any significant change in the supervisory model as student numbers increased. The Business School in its Faculty Plan 2009/10 indicated that it was 'seriously exposed in terms of research leadership and PhD supervision' and faced challenges of staff capability with regard to research.

115 The Research Strategy 2009/14 expressed the intention that all new staff appointments should be part of an agreed research and enterprise strategy with no teaching only appointments. In discussion with staff of the challenges in this area, the audit team was informed that the University was seeking to reinvigorate its research culture and was seeking to increase its supervisory capacity through new appointments and developing existing staff through co-supervisions. The attention of the audit team was drawn to new professorial level appointments in the Business School responding to the concerns about research and research supervision in that faculty. The Research Strategy 2009/14 also includes a commitment that at least 20 per cent of total academic staff time should be devoted to research and enterprise but, at the time of the audit visit, this remained an aspiration. Although much of the proposed growth was intended to be in new professional doctoral programmes for which initial taught elements would defer the requirement for individual supervision and some element of group supervision might be possible, the audit team nonetheless considered that the underlying challenge of capacity to supervise the proposed growth in postgraduate research students remained.

116 The Research Graduate School (RGS) is responsible for the integration of quality assurance and administrative arrangements for postgraduate research students. It works with the Research Institutes and each student's supervisory team to ensure postgraduate research students are appropriately supported throughout their programmes of studies with access to training and development programmes. Directors of Research Institutes undertake the selection of postgraduate research students, applying the entry qualifications set out in the University Regulations. Approval of research proposals is the responsibility of the URC acting on advice from the Director of the relevant Research Institute. Students told the audit team that the information they had received concerning postgraduate research degrees at the University was fit for purpose and a good match with their subsequent experience as students. They also expressed satisfaction with the admissions process.

117 Primary responsibility for the induction of new postgraduate research students lies with the RGS. Students, both full-time and part-time, confirmed this had been their experience and felt the induction process clearly communicated the University's expectations to them. Directors of Studies are responsible for inducting students into the research environment within which they will work. Students attend an Academic Induction Workshop repeated twice during the year to allow for later admissions. The Research Student Training Programme organised by the RGS covers a range of general issues, and this may be supplemented by subject-based sessions organised by their faculty or research centre (and known as the 'Related Studies Programme'). Timing sometimes makes it impossible for students to attend particular sessions, but material relating to the sessions was uploaded on Bedfordshire Resources for Education

Online (BREO). Part-time students confirmed they were not always able to attend training sessions run during the day, and would have liked sessions delivered during the block periods when they were in attendance. Students generally would like more support in some areas of skills development.

118 Postgraduate research students are introduced to personal development planning at induction. The University seeks to encourage the students to reflect in a structured and supported way on their own learning, to assess their progress and to make plans for the improvement of their understanding and skills. Personal Development Planning (PDP) is expected to incorporate the outcomes from the training needs analysis which Directors of Studies and students jointly produce at the beginning of each year. Students confirmed they had been given the documentation relating to PDP, but regarded it as an optional activity and did not value it highly.

119 Directors of Studies act as principal supervisors, coordinate the supervisory arrangements and are the principal points of contact between the student and the University. Supervisory teams have at least two internal supervisors with external supervisors also appointed in around a quarter of cases to provide expertise which was not available within the internal supervisory team. Information relating to supervisors and their responsibilities is made available to both staff and students via the RGS BREO site and the Research Handbook. New supervisors are mentored by other members of the supervisory team and undertake a Research Supervisors Development Programme which covers roles and responsibilities, assessment arrangements and ethical issues in research. At the time of the audit, attendance at this programme was not mandatory for new supervisors, but the University was moving towards making it so. A Supervisors' Away Day is held each academic year, and programmes for recent away days showed a good balance of updating, skills development and practice sharing. Staff whom the audit team met were unsure about any formal policy on the limits to supervision to avoid excessive demands on staff but senior staff indicated a limit of eight supervisions which was checked through the student registration process. Students who met the audit team were very positive about both the academic support they received and the accessibility of their supervisors.

120 Postgraduate research students whom the audit team met were involved in both teaching and assessment, though the latter was always under the supervision of a member of University staff. There was some confusion among staff about the University's expectations in relation to support for postgraduate research students undertaking teaching and assessment. Students receiving a University bursary are contractually expected to teach up to six hours per week including preparation. Staff believed that the same limits on teaching hours applied to the generality of postgraduate students but were unable to point to where this was formally stated or how it was communicated to students. Postgraduate research students whom the team met described a range of experience in this area. Most had undertaken the University's 'Introduction to Academic Practice' course, a short input integral to the initial induction session; a few had also undertaken the workshop on 'Introduction to Assessment'. One student had benefited from extensive mentoring from academic staff relating to teaching and assessment duties, but another had received no training or other support before being asked to teach and assess. Staff told the audit team that there was an expectation that postgraduate research students undertake these University training sessions but that it was not compulsory. The University pointed to a legacy document on this matter from the University of Luton as still having currency, but senior staff acknowledged the need for the University to be clearer in its expectations of postgraduate research students in this area. The team read a draft 'Policy on Research Students and Teaching' which set out clearly policy and procedures, including restrictions on teaching hours, and the support that the University would provide. The team came to the view that, provided that the policy was implemented across the institution and the requirements were adequately communicated to the students, it would meet the expectations of section 1 of the *Code of practice* on postgraduate research programmes. The team considers it advisable that the University implement consistently the requirements for training and support for postgraduate research students who teach and who conduct assessment.

121 Students receive a comprehensive Research Degree Handbook. In addition, the RGS has a site on BREO containing training materials accessible to all research students. BREO is also the principal means of communication with postgraduate research students and incorporates a discussion area within which students may share experiences and problems. When asked about their rights to complain or to appeal, students said they would refer to the Research Handbook and to information uploaded on BREO by RGS.

122 Specialist Academic Liaison Librarians are the principal source of advice on library and information resources to support postgraduate research students. Additionally, a dedicated Research Librarian has a general coordinating and supporting role for the University's research community, and provides induction and training sessions for new researchers. Postgraduate research students may access IT support and study skills development workshops offered by the University to all students. Students indicated they found both library and IT staff supportive. BREO is well regarded as a resource for postgraduate research students. Students value the remote access to journals and information resource provided by the digital library.

123 Student progress is monitored through completion of annual student monitoring statements, one completed by the student and one by the Director of Studies. At an individual level, where annual monitoring raised concerns, students are interviewed by the Head of the RGS. In addition the Head of RGS produces an overview annual report for URC which, as well as capturing generic issues arising from annual monitoring, provides URC with information relating to student recruitment, withdrawals, completions and equal opportunities. The key stage of transfer from MPhil to PhD is approved by URC acting on a recommendation from the relevant Director of Research Institute, informed through assessment of a report and a research seminar undertaken by the student. Students have the opportunity to participate in the University's annual research poster exhibition. The audit team considered that both the process of transfer and the research poster exhibition provided a valuable interim opportunity for students to undergo peer review and to gain experience of publishing their research outcomes.

124 Final assessment is through submission of a thesis and a viva voce examination. The examining team is recommended by the Research Institute Director and approved by the URC. In response to the findings of the special review of Research Degree Programmes there is provision for an independent chair for viva voce examinations with the role of ensuring assessment is conducted fairly and in accordance with University regulations. Requirements in relation to assessment criteria and procedures are clearly communicated to students through the Research Handbook.

125 Each of the research institutes has a student representative on its Management Board and all postgraduate research students are members of the Research Student Support Group (RSSG) which staff attend as observers. The chair of the RSSG is the student representative on the URC.

126 Overall, students with whom the audit team met expressed satisfaction with their experience at the University, and they regarded their Director of Studies and other staff as very accessible and very responsive to their needs. The audit found that the University had sound institutional arrangements for its postgraduate research students. In the main, the research environment and postgraduate research student experience meet the expectations of the section of the *Code of practice* on postgraduate research programmes.

Section 7: Published information

127 Overall responsibility for publications and editorial control of the prospectus lies with the Communications and Marketing department with responsibility for maintaining the accuracy, completeness and currency of information being within operational departments of the University. Students whom the audit team met identified the website as the most important source of information for students. The students' written submission commented generally favourably on the accuracy of published information quoting feedback from Student Perception of Modules and NSS data.

128 The University's collaborative partners are contractually required to submit to the University for approval all publicity materials provided in print or on websites. All such materials were reviewed by the University in 2009 to confirm the accuracy of information. The University concluded, through a range of methods from direct review and detailed correction of prospectus information, that all of the material was appropriate and in line with University expectations. The audit team reviewed the web-based publicity material at sites belonging to collaborative partners and that which had been assessed through the University's own review. The team found that the University review had not identified all the inconsistencies and inaccuracies with respect to collaborative partners outside of the FE partner network. Information on the campus-based programmes and programmes within the FE network is full, clear, helpful and accurate; however, the confidence that the University expressed in the briefing paper with regard to the accuracy of information, including publicity and student recruitment material, relating to University awards delivered off campus and outside the FE network could not be endorsed by the team because it identified inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the material. It would therefore be desirable that the University appraise the effectiveness of processes for managing the accuracy of information, including publicity and student recruitment material, about the University's provision provided by partner institutions outside the FE partner network.

129 The audit team involved consideration of the University's response to the requirements of HEFCE 06/45 for public information about academic standards and the quality of higher education and confirmed that the University was fulfilling its responsibilities in this respect.

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

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