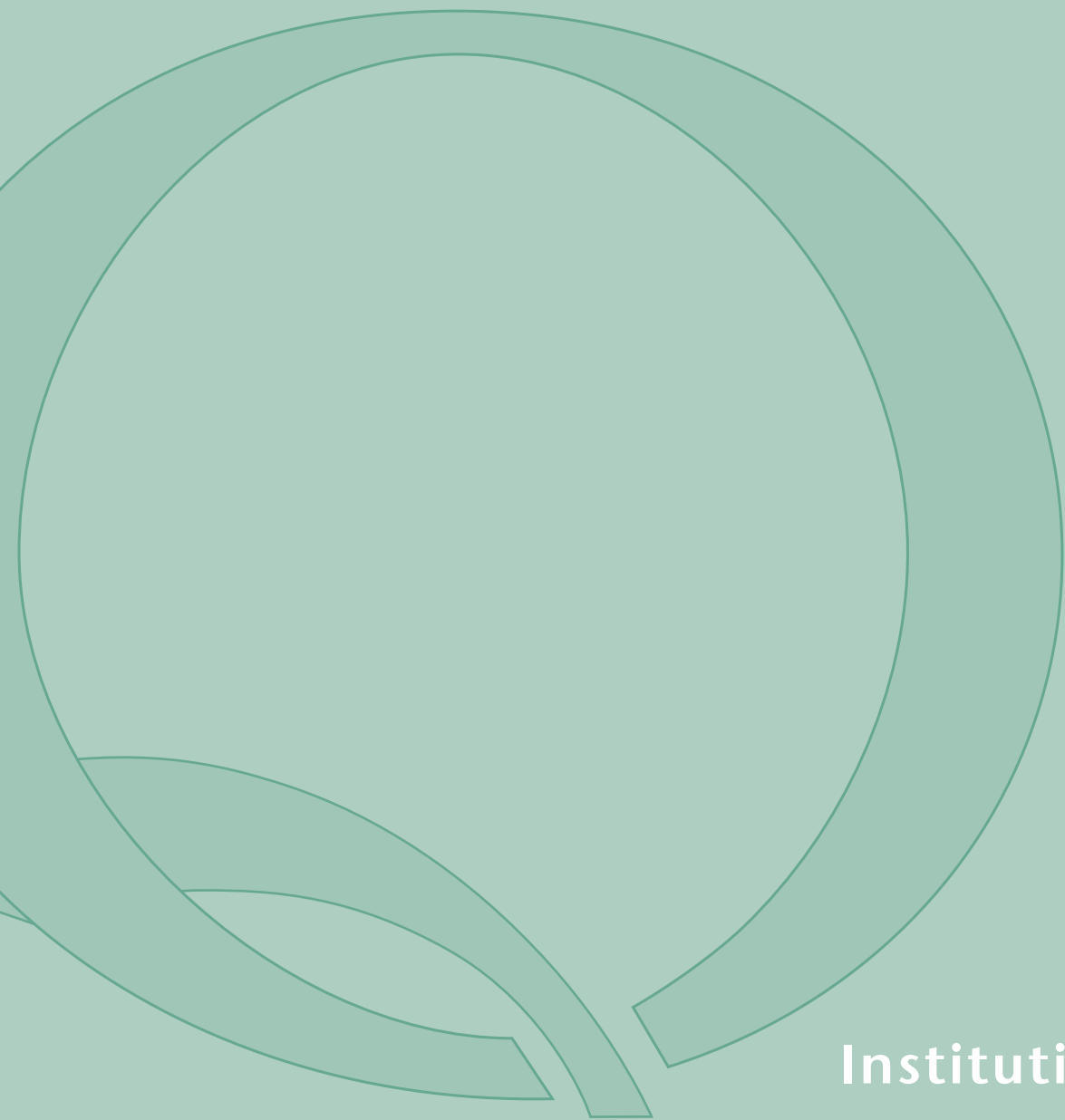




QAA



Institutional audit

University of Winchester

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Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA) mission is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. To this end, QAA carries out Institutional audits of higher education institutions.

In England and Northern Ireland, QAA conducts Institutional audits on behalf of the higher education sector, to provide public information about the maintenance of academic standards and assurance of the quality of learning opportunities provided for students. It also operates under contract to the Higher Education Funding Council in England and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland, to provide evidence to meet their statutory obligations to assure the quality and standards of academic programmes for which they disburse public funding. The audit method was developed in partnership with the funding councils and the higher education representative bodies, and agreed following consultation with higher education institutions and other interested organisations. The method was endorsed by the Department for Education and Skills (now the Department for Business Innovation, and Skills). It was revised in 2006 following recommendations from the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group, a representative group established to review the structures and processes of quality assurance in England and Northern Ireland, and evaluate the work of QAA.

Institutional audit is an evidence-based process carried out through peer review. It forms part of the Quality Assurance Framework established in 2002, following revisions to the United Kingdom's approach to external quality assurance. At the centre of the process is an emphasis on students and their learning.

The aim of the revised Institutional audit process is to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges of higher education in England and Northern Ireland have effective means of:

- ensuring that the awards and qualifications in higher education are of an academic standard at least consistent with those referred to in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree-awarding bodies in a proper manner
- providing learning opportunities of a quality that enables students, whether on taught or research programmes, to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications
- enhancing the quality of their educational provision, particularly by building on information gained through monitoring, internal and external reviews, and feedback from stakeholders.

Institutional audit results in judgements about the institutions being reviewed. Judgements are made about:

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of awards
- the confidence that 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.

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes
- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research

- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

If the audit includes the institution's collaborative provision, the judgements and comments also apply, unless the audit team considers that any of its judgements or comments in respect of the collaborative provision differ from those in respect of the institution's 'home' provision. Any such differences will be reflected in the form of words used to express a judgement or comment on the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, and about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards.

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

The reports of quality audits have to be useful to several audiences. The revised Institutional audit process makes a clear distinction between that part of the reporting process aimed at an external audience and that aimed at the institution. There are three elements to the reporting:

- the **summary** of the findings of the report, including the judgements, is intended for the wider public, especially potential students
- the **report** is an overview of the findings of the audit for both lay and external professional audiences
- a separate **annex** provides the detail and explanations behind the findings of the audit and is intended to be of practical use to the institution.

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website.

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited University of Winchester (the University) from 11 to 15 May 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

To arrive at its conclusions, the audit team spoke to members of staff and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the University manages the academic aspects of its provision.

In Institutional audit, the institution's management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are audited. The term 'academic standards' is used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award, for example, a degree. It should be at a similar level across the United Kingdom. The term 'quality of learning opportunities' is used to describe the support provided by an institution to enable students to achieve the awards. It is about the provision of appropriate teaching, support and assessment for the students.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

- confidence can 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 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

The University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2009-11 has identified four priorities for enhancement: enhancing the student learning experience via academic staff support and learning resources; enhancing the quality of teaching provision by research-informed teaching and e-learning; enhancing the learning process through the provision of a variety of assessment methods with timely and constructive feedback, and enhancing student employability and lifelong learning. The audit team found that each priority was being progressed and that action against set objectives was being monitored annually.

Postgraduate research students

The University has mechanisms in place to support both research students and research-active staff. The University is encouraged to consider further external benchmarking of its postgraduate research degree provision. An annual overview of external examiner comments following the examination of postgraduate research students could become a valuable addition to the enhancement of research degree programmes.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

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

- the Headstart induction scheme for students
- promoting and achieving access to higher education via scholarships for care leavers
- the work-based learning Foundation Degree programme, in partnership with a regionally based international company
- the University's blended learning research training programme offered to postgraduate research students, which meets the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, and fulfils the requirements of the Arts and Humanities and other research councils.

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- to review its policy and procedures to ensure that the University exercises adequate control over the issuing of transcripts to students on validated provision, and ensure that the procedures are acted upon in a consistent and transparent manner.

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- to take appropriate action based on the analysis contained in the interim report on the University's committee structure
- to work towards routinely providing student transcripts that meet the requirements of the European Diploma Supplement
- to consider further external benchmarking of postgraduate research degrees provision, for example, by implementing the Research Councils UK Concordat, and through institutional overview of external examiners' comments relating to research degree examinations.

Reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team investigated the use made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure, which provides a means of describing academic standards in UK higher education. It allows for diversity and innovation within academic programmes offered by higher education institutions. QAA worked with the higher education sector to establish the various parts of the Academic Infrastructure, which are:

- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- the framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland
- subject benchmark statements
- programme specifications.

The audit team found that the University took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

Report

1 A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Winchester (the University) from 11 to 15 May 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

2 The audit team comprised Professor Andy Cobb, Ms Melinda Drowley, Dr Andrew Eadie and Professor Alan Jago, auditors, and Mr Mark Wainman, audit secretary. Mr Derek Greenaway, Assistant Director, Reviews Group, coordinated the audit on behalf of QAA.

Section 1: Introduction and background

Institution and mission

3 The University's mission is 'To educate, to advance knowledge and to serve the public good'. The University was founded in 1840 as the Winchester Diocesan Training School; it became known as King Alfred's College from 1928 until 2004 when taught degree awarding powers were conferred and the institution became University College Winchester. A year later, the Privy Council conferred the title of University of Winchester: research degree awarding powers followed in 2008.

4 The three campuses, King Alfred, West Downs and Medecroft are all within walking distance of Winchester city centre. The small Chute House Campus in Basingstoke, 20 miles distant, offers a number of University courses delivered on a flexible basis. Since 2005, the University has been reorganised in phases. It now comprises four faculties: Arts, Education, Social Sciences, and Business, Law and Sport; 14 new academic departments are located within the faculties.

5 At the time of the audit, the University had 5,933 students including 3,813 full-time and 2,028 part-time students, of whom 65 were postgraduate research students. Numbers of overseas students (237) and students on collaborative programmes (124) were relatively low.

6 The University has a long tradition of teacher education, which now sits within an expanded portfolio of mainly full-time degree programmes, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, in the fields of arts, humanities and social sciences. All undergraduate students admitted since September 2005 have been registered for University of Winchester awards and since 2008, the same has been true of postgraduate research student admissions.

Developments since the previous audit

7 The Institutional audit in May 2005 found that broad confidence could be placed in the soundness of the then University College's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and its institutional-level capacity to manage effectively the security of its awards.

8 The audit report noted a number of features of good practice and made several recommendations. The University College was advised to give priority to ensuring that its data processes were fit for purpose, appropriately targeted and consistently used both centrally and across the schools to support its learning and teaching strategy. It was also advised to develop such guidance on the peer observation of teaching as would ensure that a shared and clearly understood system was put in place that was designed to secure further the quality of the learning experience. In addition, it was considered desirable that the University College: ensure greater engagement at programme level with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), in order to assist staff in the setting and monitoring of standards; ensure that the University College has effective systems in place to assure the quality and standards of its collaborative and its off-site provision during a period of substantial planned expansion, and consider strategies to increase the validity and reliability of feedback from students to the institution.

9 The University responded to the general recommendations contained in the audit report in the one-year follow-up report submitted to QAA on October 2006. Considerable improvements have been made to the quantity of available data and the quality of data analysis, as exemplified by the Annual Statement on the Quality of Taught programmes. A Collaborative Enhancement of Teaching Policy, incorporating peer observation of teaching, has been developed and implemented. It was clear to the 2009 audit team that academic staff were not only fulfilling the basic requirements of the scheme, but deriving considerable benefit from it (see also paragraph 50). Revised guidance and staff development has been provided to assist staff at programme level in the setting and monitoring of academic standards. The audit team was satisfied that staff at programme level were engaging appropriately with the FHEQ within validation and review processes.

10 The University describes its engagement with collaborative provision since the previous audit as 'cautious and strategic' indicating that the planned expansion has been curtailed. Action taken to address the recommendation included revisions to the Quality and Enhancement Handbook, the provision of staff development, the establishment of the Collaborative Provision Committee and the development of a collaborative provision strategy. The audit team noted that, in most respects, systems had improved. Two specific areas in which practice was less than secure are discussed in detail in paragraphs 23 and 24. Steps taken in relation to student feedback include changes to the format of the University's Student Satisfaction Survey and the prioritisation of student representation within the new faculty structure. The quality of student feedback provided via programme committees and other mechanisms indicated a high level of student satisfaction.

11 The current Vice-Chancellor was appointed in 2006. Under the Vice-Chancellor's leadership, the University continued the process of reviewing and redeveloping its policies and strategies for the enhancement of the student learning experience. Processes for programme approval and review have been reviewed and aligned with the new structure of faculties and departments. In 2008, the University opened the new University Centre and also made a submission to the Research Assessment Exercise under six Units of Assessment, 76 per cent of which was judged to be internationally recognised.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

12 The University sets and defines the standards of its awards through its system for the management of curricula and its assessment processes. Responsibility for academic quality lies with Senate, which is the final decision-making body for all matters related to the University's academic activities. Responsibility for operating the systems for the assurance and maintenance of academic standards and quality is delegated by Senate to the Academic Standards Committee. The Academic Standards Committee has a number of subcommittees: the Academic Regulations Committee, the recently formed Collaborative Provision Committee and the Research Degrees Quality Committee, which collectively are responsible for monitoring the quality of the provision of the academic programmes, including collaborative programmes, of the four faculties.

13 As well as the formal structure, the University has a number of less formal groupings that provide input into quality assurance. These include the Programme Leaders Forum, the Heads of Department Forum, committee chairs/associate deans meetings, and the 'Blue Skies' meetings for the Academic Standards Committee and the Learning and Teaching Committee. Staff that the audit team met were very positive about the advantages of having such fora for discussion. The team viewed the collegiality and the good communication between staff of different faculties as a positive advantage to the University in developing and delivering its quality assurance agenda.

14 The University produces a Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook, which is annually updated for approval by the Academic Standards Committee. The handbook is available both online and in printed form. In addition, advice is available to staff at faculty level from the associate deans and chairs of the faculty quality committees, and at university level from the Director of Quality, the Quality Office, Director of Learning and Teaching, and the Director of Regional Academic Programmes, the latter specifically in relation to collaborative programmes.

15 New programmes are approved by the Academic Standards Committee on behalf of Senate, following a validation process. That process is initiated after the approval of an Academic Resources Form by the University Management Group and the Planning and Resources Committee. A validation panel is then set up and is chaired by a member of staff independent of the faculty. All panels have two external members, one academic and one representing professional and/or employer interests. The University takes seriously the role of external participants and the audit team saw evidence of the effectiveness of their involvement in securing standards.

16 Periodic review of programmes occurs every six years. Programme teams produce a self-evaluation document that draws upon annual monitoring and other evidence. Documentation is considered by a re-approval audit panel, which is constituted in the same way as those for new programmes. The audit team viewed evidence of this process being operated, and came to the view that it is both effective and thorough. However, the University has acknowledged that it may be possible to lighten the burden on faculty quality committees in particular, and to improve the quality of approval and re-approval by using academic reviewers and a more paper-based approach. The team would encourage the University to continue to review its processes, with the intention of streamlining and simplifying them wherever possible.

17 There are processes for considering changes to programmes between periods of validation. The process used depends on the scale of change. There is also a process for the closure and the running out of programmes. The audit team saw evidence of this process being used effectively with a programme run, both within the University and as an overseas collaborative programme.

18 Course academic standards are reviewed annually by means of the annual monitoring process, which is managed by the Academic Standards Committee and the faculty quality committees. Each programme leader produces an action plan and evaluation report, which is scrutinised by the relevant faculty quality committee. In addition, each department produces a departmental report that provides an evaluation of the department as a whole, drawing out common themes and issues, which is also scrutinised by the faculty quality committee. An annual report on the quality of programmes in the faculty is produced and forwarded to the Faculty Committee and then to the Academic Standards Committee, which in its role as being responsible for monitoring the overall quality of the academic programmes of the University, will normally decide to audit one departmental report from each faculty. The audit team was satisfied that these processes worked well with flexibility and appropriateness.

19 Senate and its subcommittees discharge their responsibility for overseeing academic activities effectively and thoroughly. Although students and staff who met the audit team stated that attendance at committee meetings was neither repetitive nor burdensome, concern has been voiced within the University about the efficiency of the arrangements. The team shared this view, observing the extent to which deliberation on issues and developments tended to be replicated at different levels and in various fora. At the time of the audit, the first Interim Report of the Outcomes of the Review of Committee Structure had been produced. In the light of the report and notwithstanding the effectiveness of committees, the team consider it desirable that the University take appropriate action based on the analysis contained in the interim report on the University's committee structure (see also paragraph 57).

20 The external examiner system underpins the University's assurance of academic standards. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook clearly sets out the role and duties of external examiners. External examiners are nominated by faculty quality committees, confirmed by the Academic Standards Committee and approved by Senate. External examiners are appointed to an individual programme or group of programmes. Once appointed, they are offered the opportunity of an induction session at the University. They are also provided with a defined set of programme-level information and an information pack of standard University

documentation.

21 External examiners attend department boards, which deal with module marks, and make recommendations to faculty examination boards concerning individual students. One of the external examiners from the faculty's programmes will act as Chief External Examiner and that individual attends the Faculty Award Board. All external examiners are required to produce an annual report. The report and a formal response to it forms part of the annual action plan and evaluation report. External examiners receive a copy of the action plan and evaluation report for the programme(s) they examine. All external examiner reports are distributed to the Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic), the Director of Quality and the Chair of the Academic Standards Committee. The Director of Quality produces an annual report of significant issues for the Academic Standards Committee and any actions to be taken with regard to any significant issues are decided at that committee. From the evidence that the audit team viewed, it was clear that the external examining system was effective in contributing to assuring the academic standards of both programmes and awards.

22 External reference points are considered to be a key aspect of the institution's framework for quality assurance, including the use of external examiners, a good working relationship with relevant professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and use of the Academic Infrastructure. The University has embedded the principles of the FHEQ and the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA, into the relevant sections of its own quality assurance framework.

23 The University's quality assurance handbook makes it clear that all awards of the institution are granted by the University. It notes that a validated award partner may provide a transcript of marks, but may not grant an award. It specifies that arrangements for the production of certificates by Registry, the detail recorded on them and for graduation should be established via the Memorandum of Agreement. However, despite what is said in the Memoranda of Agreement about the University issuing both certificates and transcripts, 'this process did not operate' and that, in effect, the arrangements are being revised to reflect custom and practice. The audit team formed the view that there would be benefit in attaching an operational statement to each Memorandum of Agreement.

24 Following ratification by Senate, award certificates are sent to the partner institution so that 'the transcript can be married to the certificate and posted to the graduate'. The staff the audit team met were clear how the University exercises control over the transcripts at this point. The team recognised that the scale of the problem is currently small, representing less than 1 per cent of the student population, but was of the view that the matter needed to be addressed to safeguard the integrity of the University's academic standards both now, and in any future context. The team agreed it advisable that the University reviews its policies and procedures, to ensure that it exercises adequate control over the issuing of transcripts to students on validated provision and ensure that the procedures are acted upon in a consistent and transparent manner.

25 The University considers itself compliant with Part 1 of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* by means of its quality assurance and enhancement processes. In relation to the European Diploma Supplement, it provides the detailed information required when any graduate requests it. The audit team considers that the quality of learning opportunities would be enhanced if students were proactively provided with the Diploma Supplement. The team, therefore, considers it desirable that the University works towards routinely providing student transcripts that meet the requirements of the European Diploma Supplement.

26 Some of the University's awards are accredited by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and, from the evidence the audit team saw, the procedures for considering their requirements are effective.

27 The University's assessment policy is articulated in its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and Implementation Plan, its academic regulations and its Moderation of Assessed Work Policy. There are common sets of regulations for undergraduate awards, master's programmes and higher degrees, including collaborative provision. There is a copy of the relevant regulations within the Student Handbook and they are also available on the Portal. Students met by the audit team were clear about the regulations in force for their particular programmes.

28 The University has made good progress since the previous audit in developing its management information systems, and has improved the processes to make use of the data produced. The data includes a range of statistics on applicants, entrants, progression, completion and first-destination information on existing students, and their performance at the level of both the module and the programme. The data is used in monitoring and review processes. The University acknowledges that presenting some of this data for its combined honours programmes still presents a challenge. Notwithstanding this, the audit team came to the view that the data supplied was used appropriately in annual monitoring and in periodic review.

29 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

30 The University sees the management, development and enhancement of learning opportunities and experiences as being at the core of its Learning and Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2009-11. The Strategy has a number of key principles among which, the development of critical, autonomous and lifelong learners from diverse backgrounds is at the heart of its approach. The resource planning process determines the adequacy of learning resources based on an analysis of the viability of programmes. The audit team found clear evidence of widespread engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points informing the University's management of learning opportunities. The University's approval and review processes have the Academic Infrastructure as an important reference. There was also evidence that the *Code of practice* regularly and effectively informs policy-making across the University.

31 Student feedback is integral to the University's management of both academic standards and learning opportunities. The University's response rate in the National Student Survey has been of the order of 69 per cent. The results from the National Student Survey are considered at all levels of the University, from Senate to programme, and form part of the annual monitoring process. In addition to the National Student Survey, the University organises its own Student Satisfaction Survey. Issues raised by the Student Satisfaction Survey are considered widely across the University, in particular, as part of the annual monitoring process both for programmes and for Professional Services. A separate but similar survey is organised for postgraduate taught students. There is also a survey of postgraduate research students, the results of which are summarised in an annual report to the Research Degrees Quality Committee. At the level of the programme, student evaluation takes place in a number of ways, including through anonymous module evaluation forms. Such evaluations show a high level of participation. Students that the audit team met were very positive about the way in which responses are made by staff of the University at all levels. Overall, the team concluded that the University is well informed about student views through its feedback mechanisms, and that it is proactive in dealing with issues that are raised.

32 Students have representation in all of the relevant committees of the University including the Board of Governors, Senate, the Planning and Resources Committee and the Senate's subcommittees. Students are also represented on all of the relevant faculty and programme committees. The students the audit team met were happy with their role in the quality assurance

processes, and felt their views were taken seriously by the University, their views listened to and that attendance at these committees was a good use of their time.

33 One of the aims of the University's Strategic Plan is to have all staff involved in research and knowledge exchange activity by the academic session 2010-11. Each member of staff is allocated a minimum of 400 hours of their time to undertake exchange activity, which is further supported by internal research funding and funds generated from the Research Assessment Exercise. In 2006-07, the University funded a project which confirmed that students were aware of, and appreciated, the connection between staff research and teaching. This view was confirmed by the student groups the audit team met during the briefing, and audit visits, who put forward the view that the staff in general were experts in their fields and that the expertise contributed positively to the student experience. Students confirmed that they are conscious of the research profiles of the academic staff and were able to cite several examples of how the research activity of staff was positively influencing their undergraduate experience; some of the overseas students the team met stated that they had chosen to enrol at the University on the strength of a specific member of teaching staff's published research papers. Staff who met the team during the audit visit commented positively on the University's strategic approach to research informed teaching and how the approach was stimulating the adoption of good practice across the institution. In addition, the team noted that the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Implementation Plan 2009-11 includes a commitment to fund up to 11 research-informed teaching projects per year, and deliver two University-wide events on research-informed teaching.

34 The University has been using 'Moodle' as its virtual learning environment since 2007 at the same time adopting the title 'Learning Network' for the system. While the University acknowledges that e-learning is not extensive, the use is growing as a key element of the current Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy.

35 The majority of the University's resources for learning are delivered by two service departments, the library and Information Technology Services. The heads of both departments submit annual reports to the Planning and Resources Committee, so that the performance of the services can be monitored. Benchmarking of the library, using information supplied by the Society of College, National and University Libraries, shows that it performs well in relation to its benchmarking groups with respect to books and loans per full-time equivalent student. Funding on the library has increased by 22 per cent since 2005-06. Students, expressed satisfaction with the library facilities, including space in the library for study, availability of textbooks for short and long-term loan and both hard copy and electronic access to journals. The Information Services Strategy, monitored by the Planning and Resources Committee, sets out the plans for the development of information technology in the University in the period to 2011. All staff and students have access to email, the internet and the University Portal, and much of the main campus has wireless access to the internet.

36 The student written submission highlights the lack of appropriate teaching rooms and spaces available for the wide variety of subject areas the University covers. In response to these needs, and also the need identified by staff, the University's Estates Strategy 2007-11 has identified teaching and learning accommodation as a top priority. This is currently being addressed by a £14 million investment in a new teaching block and plans for a Performing Arts Centre, and a dedicated building for the Business School.

37 The University has recently revised its admissions policies. A new policy covers undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes while a separate policy covers the admission of postgraduate research students. The policy for taught programmes was developed to address all of the precepts of *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education*, September 2006, with regard to the advice and expertise of the sector-wide Supporting Professionalism in Admissions initiative. The University has a Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning Strategy, which is reviewed every three years. The University's Key Performance Indicators show that the University is meeting or exceeding its targets on widening access.

38 The student written submission noted that the current location of the Student Services Department is seen as a problem by the student population. The University has responded to this problem and Student Services had moved to a new purpose-built building on the main campus by the time of the audit visit in May 2009. All students have access to personal tutors for guidance, support and advice. In addition, each faculty has academic advisers who can be accessed, if required, for additional personal learning support. The students who met the audit team during the briefing and audit visits were happy with the system and how it operated in practice, and emphasised the important support role played by the dissertation supervisor in their final year.

39 Induction to the University takes place via the Headstart programme. On arrival, students are met by a second or third-year student guide who escorts them through a series of events including study-skills sessions; sessions relevant to residential students such as living and working in harmony, student budgeting and part-time working in the locality. There are information sessions to enable the students to become familiar with the University, the support available and the academic requirements of their programmes.

40 The students who met the audit team during the audit visit were very supportive of the Headstart programme and had greatly valued the experience. The team concluded that the Headstart induction scheme for students was a feature of good practice.

41 A study-skills strategy and an associated action plan was approved by the Board of Governors in 2008. The aims of the strategy are to encourage students to care and enthuse about their learning, to instil the ethos of self-directed learning, to support first-year students and to support progression to years two and three. Students who met the audit team during the visit had a positive experience with study-skills support, both in the one-to-one and workshop modes.

42 The students who met the audit team had a positive experience of a range of careers advisory support services, but were not clear about the concept, or the importance, of graduate employability. The team heard that an Employability Strategic Working Group had met and that there were initiatives in some areas of the University to improve employability.

43 Personal development planning is embedded in the curriculum in some parts of the University, and in others, students are provided with the resources to undertake their own personal development planning. Currently, personal development planning is a learning and teaching priority of the University and pilot projects to give the students access to e-portfolios are underway. During the audit visit, the audit team saw a progress report from a working party which is currently considering the merits of four electronic portfolios, with a view to making a recommendation as to which the University should adopt by the summer of 2009.

44 The current Staff Development Policy was revised during 2007-08. Staff development is the responsibility of the Assistant Vice-Chancellor, with assistance from the Director of Lifelong Learning and Staff Development and guidance from the Staff Development and Training Group. Deans and directors produce an annual summary of staff development activity that has been undertaken in their area, which includes priorities for the future. This is reported to the University Management Group and reviewed by the Planning and Resources Committee. The University's Staff Development and Review scheme was updated in 2007, in particular, to enable a more systematic approach to be taken to research and knowledge exchange activity. All academic staff have an annual staff development review discussion, which includes their research and knowledge exchange activity and their involvement in the collaborative enhancement of teaching, including peer observation of teaching. Staff who met the audit team during the visit were very positive about the process, including the support stemming from the process and, in particular, the identification and delivery of their training needs.

45 The Induction Mentoring and Review Scheme for new academic staff includes a comprehensive centrally organised induction programme delivered by senior members of the University, covering all of the University's mission, activities and policies and procedures. In addition, new staff are allocated a mentor for their first year of employment, during which they must develop a personal research programme. New members of staff with little or no experience in higher education are expected to complete the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education within 24 months of their appointment. The audit team met recently appointed staff during the audit visit, who confirmed the effectiveness of the processes described above.

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

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

47 The University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2009-11 has identified four priorities for enhancement, namely; enhancing the student learning experience via academic staff support and learning resources; enhancing the quality of teaching provision by research-informed teaching and e-learning; enhancing the learning process through the provision of a variety of assessment methods with timely and constructive feedback, and enhancing student employability and lifelong learning. During meetings with students and staff, and scrutinising minutes of faculty meetings, the audit team heard and saw evidence that each item was being progressed, and that action against set objectives was being monitored annually.

48 A Learning and Teaching Development Unit was established in 2008 to coordinate, prioritise, and disseminate innovations in learning and teaching.

49 Enhancement project outcomes are disseminated at Learning and Teaching and Research Development Days. Research-informed teaching days are posted on the Portal and outcomes are published in an in-house e-journal. The University actively seeks out good practice across the sector to inform its policies, processes and procedures. During meetings with academic staff, the audit team confirmed that staff are aware of the value and relevance of these events.

50 An example of the enhancement of the quality of the teaching environment, resulting from an advisable recommendation from the previous audit visit, is the Collaborative Enhancement of Teaching Policy, 2008-11, which has focused on the peer observation of teaching that takes place biennially.

51 The development of staff, and enhancing the student learning experience, are considered vital by the University. The annual Staff Development and Review process enables workloads to be negotiated, individual staff development needs to be identified and appropriate workshops and training events are provided by the University. The audit team noted that the use of the proprietary virtual learning environment by academic staff was both expected and encouraged by the University in response to the needs of students.

52 The audit team noted the effective work the University is undertaking relating to widening participation in higher education of students who have been in public care. This support for care leavers has been recognised nationally by the award of a Quality Mark from the Frank Buttle Trust. The team agreed that promoting and achieving access to higher education via scholarships for care leavers is a feature of good practice.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

53 Through its Collaborative Provision Strategy, the University aims to fulfil a regional role, forge clear links with employers, further widening participation, take a lead role in the development of Foundation Degrees and be strongly involved in the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Lifelong Learning Network.

54 Currently, a modest part of the academic portfolio is delivered through collaborative provision, categorised as collaborative and validated awards. Collaborative awards are delivered by the University with a partner organisation, using the Winchester quality assurance procedures monitored by a faculty quality committee. On the other hand, validated awards are delivered by a partner, whereby the partner's own quality assurance processes are applied operationally, having been declared fit for purpose by the University.

55 There are currently 19 programmes at 12 partner institutions, of which seven are validated awards and 12 are collaborative awards, totalling 352 students, equivalent to 224.6 full-time equivalent students. This represents 5.9 per cent of the student body.

56 The introduction of academic link tutors, as a response to the desirable recommendation of the 2005 QAA Institutional audit, has ensured a closer and more effective management of collaborative provision. The Collaborative Provision Committee was introduced in late 2008 as a subcommittee of the Academic Standards Committee, to monitor the quality of the validated programmes.

57 The Collaborative Provision Committee had its inaugural meeting in November 2008 and has subsequently met in February 2009. A consideration of the terms of reference and the minutes of the first two meetings caused the audit team to question the purpose and value of this committee, since it appeared to duplicate existing faculty business. The team formed the view that the oversight of collaborative provision might belong better to the Director of Regional Academic programmes rather than with a committee that meets only three times each year. The team also noted that the current Review of the University Committee System was considering the value of this and other University committees (see paragraph 19).

58 The University is currently engaged in a highly successful work-based learning collaboration with a regionally based international company offering information technology services, to deliver a Foundation Degree in Management at its Chute House Campus in Basingstoke. This programme has been jointly designed by the University and the company to address the educational needs of the company. Students who successfully complete the course are guaranteed employment with the company for two years after graduation and their career opportunities are enhanced by the course. The audit team noted the enthusiasm and commitment of the students and staff they met during the audit visit who are involved with the programme. The team concluded that this work-based learning Foundation Degree programme, in partnership with a regionally-based international company, represents a feature of good practice.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

59 There are currently 65 postgraduate research students in the University and six PhDs were awarded during 2007-08. The Research and Knowledge Exchange Annual Report details progress against key performance indicators.

60 The scrutiny process for research degree awarding powers indicated appropriate and rigorous processes for research degrees. Subsequently, the History Panel for the Research Assessment Exercise in 2008 praised University support for postgraduate research students as 'outstanding'. Of the submitted refereed outputs, 76 per cent were identified as being of international quality.

61 QAA's Review of postgraduate research degree programmes in 2006 stated that 'overall, the institution's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree programme provision was appropriate and satisfactory'.

62 Academic standards are assured through the University's Regulations for Higher Degrees. The responsibility for monitoring and enhancing the quality of postgraduate research student provision resides with the Research Degrees Quality Committee. Management of postgraduate research student provision is centralised in the Research and Knowledge Exchange Centre, with overall responsibility resting with the Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange.

63 The University is developing a culture of research centres, based on a critical mass of staff and postgraduate research students in specific areas, a robust research environment and regular training for new and experienced supervisors. The responsibilities of research students and supervisors are detailed in dedicated handbooks. Further development of the research culture and a growth in postgraduate recruitment is planned, following the successful outcome of the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise.

64 The selection, admission and induction of postgraduate research students follow a clear process, with the central role of the supervision team, and reflects the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, September 2004.

65 Independently completed annual progress reports by the student and the Director of Studies, with an agreed action plan, are submitted to the Research and Knowledge Exchange Centre and scrutinised by the Research Degrees Quality Committee. The transfer process from MPhil to PhD provides a further opportunity for the review of student progress, via the submission of specimen chapters and a viva voce examination.

66 Postgraduate research student feedback is in annual progress reports, through student representation on faculty Research and Knowledge Exchange committee and via the postgraduate student satisfaction survey.

67 The University's Complaints Handling Policy includes complaints from postgraduate research students. Cases are monitored annually by the Research Degrees Quality Committee and reported in the Postgraduate Research Enhancement Review and Action Plan.

68 A distinctive and mandatory Research Training programme is offered to postgraduate research students, which fulfils the principles of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, September 2004, the Arts and Humanities and other Research Councils. The programme is delivered in a blended learning format over two years, and is accredited and graded at level 7. This programme is accompanied by a process of compulsory training for research supervisors that includes a multi-choice, online assessment of their understanding of the University's regulations and the *Code of practice, Section 1*.

69 The University has used Quality Related (QR) and capability funding from Research Assessment Exercise 2001, internal funds and awards from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) to develop its postgraduate research programme. In 2007-08, the Council capped the University's application to five awards.

70 At postgraduate level, the compulsory Research Training programme contains modules that directly address the AHRC/Research Councils skills requirements for postgraduate research students. Particular attention is paid to critical thinking and originality of research.

71 The audit team concurred that the University's blended learning research training programme offered to postgraduate research students, which meets the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1*, and fulfils the requirements of the Arts and Humanities and other Research Councils, is a feature of good practice.

72 In meetings with the audit team, academic staff were unaware of the national Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, although the team heard that the University intended to participate in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey in the future.

73 The University is encouraged to consider further external benchmarking of its postgraduate research degree provision, for example, by participating in the national Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, organised by the Higher Education Academy, and by implementing the outcomes of the Research Councils UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. Furthermore, an annual overview of external examiner comments following the examination of postgraduate research students could become a valuable addition to the enhancement of research degree programmes. The audit team agreed that it is desirable the University considers further external benchmarking of postgraduate research degrees provision, for example, by implementing the Research Councils UK Concordat, and through institutional overview of external examiners' comments relating to research degree examinations.

Section 7: Published information

74 The University's website provides public access to a wide range of published material in a user-friendly and attractive format.

75 Published information for staff, students, prospective students and members of the public is managed by means of the University's External Publications and Communications Policy. Arrangements with collaborative partners in respect of published material are governed by this policy, together with the Protocol for Publicity and Marketing of Collaborative Provision, and incorporated within each Memorandum of Agreement.

76 The audit team noted that the arrangements by which collaborative partners are required to secure approval of published material are not described consistently in the University's documentation. The team formed the view that, while material generated by collaborative partners is not published without approval by the University, there is a mismatch between operational practices and the documentation which should guide such practices. The team was of the view that the University may wish to consider addressing this discrepancy.

77 Primary responsibility for signing off the preview data for the Unistats website lies with the Planning Officer and the Director of Finance. The Information Provision Working Group is responsible, inter alia, for monitoring the University's submission to Unistats. There was no evidence in the minutes of these meetings, however, to indicate that the Group was fulfilling this responsibility. The minutes of a September 2008 meeting note, to the contrary, that responsibility for Teaching Quality Information (sic) does not sit with this Group. The audit team would encourage the University to clarify the role of the Group in this respect.

78 QAA's Institutional audit report of 2005 advised the then University College to give priority to ensuring that its data processes were fit for purpose, appropriately targeted and consistently used, both centrally and across the schools, to support its learning and teaching strategy. The audit team saw evidence that significant improvements have been made in respect of both the quantity of data and the quality of data analysis since the previous audit.

79 Students confirmed that the information provided to them as prospective applicants was accurate, informative and helpful. The audit team noted that students were equally content with the published information they receive as learners. Students indicated that they had clear and accurate information about their modules and programmes, and would know how to access information about quality assurance processes, such as complaints or appeals as, and when, the need arose.

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

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

81 The audit team identified the following areas as being good practice:

- the Headstart induction scheme for students (paragraph 40)
- promoting and achieving access to higher education via scholarships for care leavers (paragraph 52)
- the work-based learning Foundation Degree programme, in partnership with a regionally based international company (paragraph 58)
- the University's blended learning research training programme offered to postgraduate research students, which meets the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1*, and fulfils the requirements of the Arts and Humanities and other research councils (paragraph 71).

Recommendations for action

82 Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- to review its policy and procedures to ensure that the University exercises adequate control over the issuing of transcripts to students on validated provision, and ensure that the procedures are acted upon in a consistent and transparent manner (paragraph 24).

83 Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- to take appropriate action based on the analysis contained in the interim report on the University's committee structure (paragraph 19)
- to work towards routinely providing student transcripts that meet the requirements of the European Diploma Supplement (paragraph 25)
- to consider further external benchmarking of postgraduate research degrees provision, for example, by implementing the Research Councils UK Concordat, and through institutional overview of external examiners' comments relating to research degree examinations (paragraph 73).

Appendix

The University of Winchester's response to the audit report

The University of Winchester is gratified by the audit team's confidence in the quality of our management of academic standards, our management of learning opportunities and our enhancement of our educational provision.

We are delighted to have had initiatives in several areas of our work identified as good practice. The University is committed to achieving, maintaining and enhancing high standards and we feel the report recognises our success.

Our continuing commitment will be demonstrated by our response to the one advisable and three desirable recommendations made by the report. In our strategy for the forthcoming year we will draw up an action plan to deal with these recommendations and with other guidance given in the body of the report.

In regard to the recommendations we have already determined that:

- we will review our Collaborative Provision policy and procedures to ensure that we exercise adequate control over the issuing of transcripts to students on our validated awards and will ensure that the procedures are acted upon in a consistent and transparent manner (paragraph 24)
- a paper recommending a new committee structure will go to an early meeting of Senate in 2009-10 (paragraph 19)
- the University will issue European Diploma Supplements to Winchester students from 2010 (paragraph 25)
- our successful Research Training Programme will be enhanced to ensure compliance with the RCUK Concordat and an overview of PGR external examiners' comments will form part of the Annual Monitoring Report of PGR provision (paragraph 73).

Finally, the University would like to record its thanks to the Quality Assurance Agency and the audit team for conducting the Institutional audit in a robust, fair and transparent manner.

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