

University of Leicester

May 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 Leicester (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.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit found the University's commitment to quality enhancement evident in a number of activities; it found also that these activities would benefit from greater coordination and that there is in particular scope for the more effective dissemination of good practice.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

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

Published information

The University provides helpful information for staff and for current and potential students, and has in place procedures for ensuring its accuracy and completeness; it is moving towards making external examiners' reports available to student representatives in line with HEFCE circular 06/45, *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes*.

Features of good practice

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

- the University's inclusive approach to learning support, which is designed to meet a wide range of student needs (paragraphs 31, 60)
- the high quality of the learning opportunities provided for the University's distance-learning students (paragraph 52)
- the developmental opportunities provided for students across the University through the Leicester Award for Employability Skills (paragraph 61)
- the rigorous management and oversight of research student supervision (paragraph 89).

Recommendations for action

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

- review the assessment regulations for taught postgraduate programmes, to ensure that the required learning outcomes are met for all awards (paragraph 30).

It would be desirable for the University to:

- use the opportunity presented by institutional restructuring to simplify its quality assurance processes (paragraph 7)
- adopt a more systematic approach to identifying and disseminating good practice (paragraphs 15, 73)
- review arrangements for the double LLB/Maîtrise in English and French Law to ensure that it engages fully with the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* (paragraph 80).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 The University, which received its royal charter in 1957, with university title and full degree awarding powers, is largely located on a compact campus a mile from the city centre. Its mission expresses a commitment to international excellence through outstanding teaching and research. At the time of the audit, the University was structured academically around five faculties headed by deans; a major restructuring exercise, to be implemented prior to academic year 2009-10, will replace faculties by four colleges headed by provice-chancellors (see paragraph 7).

2 Almost half of the University's 22,000 students are undergraduates, 10,000 are taught postgraduates and 1,000 are reading for research degrees. A distinctive characteristic of the University is that almost a quarter of its students (around 45 per cent of taught postgraduates) are taking distance-learning programmes, normally on a part-time basis and overwhelmingly at postgraduate level.

3 The University has little collaborative provision, partly because of its preference for distance learning and partly because its two regional partner institutions have recently secured degree awarding powers, resulting in a reduction in numbers of students in its collaborative arrangements.

The information base for the audit

4 The University provided a Briefing Paper and supporting documentation. The index to the Briefing Paper was referenced to sources of evidence to illustrate the University's approach to managing the security of the academic standards of awards and the quality of its educational provision. The audit team had access to the report of the previous Institutional audit (December 2004) and the Review of research degree programmes (July 2006). It received hard copies of all documents referenced in the Briefing Paper and other documentation requested in the course of the audit; the majority of materials were also made available electronically. The University of Leicester Students' Union produced a written submission, setting out students' views on the accuracy of information provided to them, their experience as learners and their role in quality management. The team thanks the Union for its submission, to which it made frequent reference.

Developments since the last audit

5 The University's previous Institutional audit resulted in a judgement of broad confidence in its current and likely future capacity to manage the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The audit identified four features of good practice (in brief, its approach to e-learning; the close working relationship between senior officers of the University and the Students' Union; the framework for the quality management of distance learning; and the management of collaborative arrangements). It advised the University 'to review the mechanism for determining the assessment scheme that departments follow for classifying awards, in the interests of improving transparency, demonstrating consistency of the academic standards of

awards and fairness to students, and controlling the proliferation of scheme variants for individual courses'; and indicated the desirability of encouraging the systematic codification of local quality assurance processes, and of reviewing the respective roles and responsibilities of deans and heads of department.

6 Of the features of good practice, the fact that the present audit also refers in favourable terms to the high quality of learning opportunities provided for distance-learning students (see paragraph 52) signifies that the University has built further on the achievements identified in 2004. No critical comment is made about any other feature of good practice previously noted. So far as the single 'advisable' recommendation is concerned, the revised scheme for undergraduate award classification is fair and transparent, and likely to lead to greater consistency in borderline cases; arrangements for postgraduate awards are the subject of critical comment in the present audit (see paragraph 30). Of the two desirable recommendations, while the present audit again suggests simplifying quality assurance processes, institutional restructuring provides an opportunity for this to be achieved; in respect of the second 'desirable' recommendation, the University intends departments to be more consistently integrated into colleges than many of them presently are into faculties.

7 Since 2004 the University has made progress on several fronts, some of them relating directly to the present audit. Most significantly, the review of governance structures will have far-reaching consequences for the management of academic quality and standards. This review, which was based on concerns about aspects of academic leadership and the complexity of the present deliberative structure, was driven (in brief) by a desire to achieve subsidiarity within a clear regulatory framework, and greater effectiveness and economy in central and college committees. The audit team, having reviewed in some detail the existing quality management and deliberative frameworks, concurs with the University's critical view of present arrangements, which contributed to its decision to engage in a fundamental restructuring exercise: these arrangements were found in some cases to be rather elaborate (particularly but not exclusively at faculty level and below) and likely to make the development of a clear strategic institutional vision more difficult. It is desirable for the University to use the opportunity presented by institutional restructuring to simplify its quality assurance processes.

8 The audit team explored the work of the Academic Restructuring Project Board in some detail, noting that an inclusive approach had been taken throughout, with high levels of staff commitment consequently secured; it found senior staff, including the heads of college-elect, all of whom were in post by February 2009, confident of timely and smooth implementation. Nevertheless, in that the new structures, which herald a significant change in culture, strategy and operations, were some three months short of implementation at the time of the audit, no evaluation is yet possible.

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

9 As the University's supreme academic body, Senate has ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. It discharges this responsibility through a suite of subordinate committees consisting of: Academic Review Committee (responsible for annual and periodic reviews, and the consideration of external examiners' and professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) reports); Student Experience and Enhancement Committee (responsible for the Learning and Teaching Strategy, quality enhancement, academic and personal student support and staff development); the Board of Graduate Studies (responsible for monitoring all postgraduate programmes of study and for overseeing responses to external examiners' reports); and faculty boards, which monitor and regulate all aspects of departmental activity relevant to this audit, including the nomination of external examiners.

10 The Vice-Chancellor, as Chief Executive Officer, is supported managerially by three pro-vice-chancellors (a group recently expanded to seven by the appointment of the college heads), and by the Registrar and Secretary. The three original pro-vice-chancellors have remits for, respectively, Students, Research, and Resources. The Vice-Chancellor is also advised by the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee, a body whose membership (for unreserved business) also includes the Students' Union Academic Affairs Officer (as de facto Union President). This Committee's functions include taking a preliminary view of Senate business, routing such matters as require committee discussion to the appropriate body and discussing matters that concern Senate directly under a standing agenda item.

11 The University has a well-developed set of codes of practice and guidance notes to cover the main areas of business, including: admissions; programme approval, annual and periodic review; examining; research degrees; student placements; collaborative provision; distance learning; programme and module specifications; and handbooks. Both codes of practice and guidance notes make consistent reference to relevant aspects of the Academic Infrastructure.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

12 For the sake of convenience, all aspects of programme approval, monitoring and review are described in this section. They all apply to distance-learning provision as well as to on-campus teaching programmes, although approval and review activities for such provision also address the extent to which departments comply with the University's Code of Practice for Distance Learning.

13 Programme approval, which includes proposals for major modifications (departmental or faculty-level procedures exist to consider minor modifications and incremental change), is a two-stage process: proposals are initially made by departments to Programme Development Committee, which consists of senior personnel and is normally chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Resources). This Committee ensures that: proposals fit into the University's strategic aims; they are academically and financially robust; all necessary resources have been identified; and no reputational risk exists. The audit team scrutinised examples of this process, confirming it is comprehensive in scope and rigorous in execution. In cases where, having considered the Committee's report, a faculty board decides to proceed, the department concerned completes a formal proposal covering: programme specifications; regulations; entry requirements; progression rules; any placement arrangements; staff development needs; learning outcomes; the level and overall balance of the programme; engagement with external reference points; and employment possibilities on completion.

14 A Programme Approval Panel, chaired by a pro-vice-chancellor and including an external adviser (whose attendance is required in the case of new proposals but who may submit written evidence where modifications to existing programmes are concerned), then examines the proposal to ensure that it complies with all internal and external requirements. The comments of external advisers are given particular attention and separately recorded. Reports, with recommendations for action, are submitted to the relevant faculty board (or, where appropriate, the Board of Graduate Studies) for follow-up or approval. These arrangements appear in all respects satisfactory.

15 Annual monitoring is described by the University as an evidence-based process in that it requires departments to identify and address issues arising in a specified range of documentation; it follows procedures laid out in the internal Code of Practice: these themselves engage with the precepts of the relevant section of the *Code of practice*. The Academic Review Committee considers individual departmental pro formas, and Academic Office reviews the reports collectively, to identify serious or repeated problems: these procedures appear to be conscientiously undertaken. The audit team did note, however, that annual monitoring focuses more on identifying and eliminating problems than on disseminating good practice: although staff confirmed that positive

features can be included in annual reports, no invitation to do so exists and little evidence of it happening was found in reports scrutinised by the team. The University recognises that asking faculty teaching and learning committees to review departmental annual reports would contribute to the sharing of good practice: asking departments to identify such practice in annual monitoring reports would clearly increase the effectiveness of this process. While the team is aware that improvements to this process are under consideration it learned that competing priorities mean that discussions are unlikely to be completed for some time. It is desirable for the University to adopt a more systematic approach to identifying and disseminating good practice.

16 Periodic review takes place six-yearly at departmental level (student-facing activities, such as the Library and Information Technology Services being, for this purpose, defined as departments). It involves the establishment of a panel chaired by a pro vice-chancellor and containing: two members of Academic Review Committee from outside the department; the relevant faculty dean or equivalent; an external academic specialist appointed by the Vice-Chancellor; and a lay member of Council. Prior to the whole-day meeting, internal members visit the department, observing teaching, examining facilities and talking to staff. At the meeting, at which the Panel is required to compare arrangements with internal and external best practice, interviews take place with staff and students, further evidence of student views being obtained from staff-student committee minutes, questionnaires and the results of the National Student Survey. Panel reports are submitted to the Academic Review Committee, which forwards its recommendations to Senate. The audit team confirms, from its examination of relevant documentation, that follow-up arrangements are sound, that the process is rigorous and extensive, and that, unlike annual review, it invites the identification of areas of good practice.

17 Overall, the audit team, while considering that annual monitoring has as yet unrealised enhancement potential, confirms that approval, monitoring and review meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*.

External examiners

18 External examiners are normally appointed at programme level only. Departments submit proposals to the appropriate faculty board, which, having ensured that nominees meet internal criteria, makes a recommendation to Senate. In addition, the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee examines nominations under reserved business: the audit team found examples of recommendations being referred back for further information and, in one case, being rejected. Procedures exist for briefing external examiners on all aspects of their duties and for ensuring that, throughout their tenure, they are kept abreast of changes in curriculum, marking procedures and assessment schemes. Although external examiners' views on proposed programme changes may be solicited, they are not permitted to become members of programme approval or periodic review panels.

19 External examiners' reports are submitted first to the Vice-Chancellor, who personally reads them all, annotating them, in some cases quite vigorously, before forwarding them to the department concerned. On occasion an immediate response is requested. Within departments, the reports are considered at a formal meeting. They are not, however, necessarily shared with student representatives: this matter has been the subject of considerable discussion, but the audit team was definitively advised that the University has detailed plans to ensure that reports will be shared with students from the next academic year.

20 Departmental responses to undergraduate external examiners' reports are considered by a panel of deans prior to submission of an overview report to Academic Review Committee. In the case of postgraduate taught programmes, the Board of Graduate Studies considers the reports and produces the overview. Reports include comments on aims and objectives, and on programmes' engagement with external reference points. The audit team scrutinised many such reports, and noted that most contain extensive comment on strengths and weaknesses, and that the combination of free-form writing and prompts on matters to be addressed produces reports

likely to contribute to the assurance of academic standards. It is confirmed that: the process is conducted in accordance with institutional guidelines; external examiners overwhelmingly judge the standards attained appropriate to the level of the award; and they contribute appropriately to the assurance of academic standards.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

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

22 The University has a suite of internal codes of practice, regulations and policies, designed to ensure that all programmes meet the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points. The Academic Review Committee, which is responsible for overseeing this process and ensuring that procedures meet new and updated expectations, has this topic, which places particular, but not exclusive, emphasis on the Code of practice, as a standing agenda item. The codes are revised annually to take into account any changes in external and internal requirements and expectations; implementation is monitored both by faculties and institutionally. The audit team found evidence of external expectations informing changes to institutional codes of practice and protocols.

23 The University does not have a bespoke code of practice for students with disabilities or particular learning needs, but the Library and the AccessAbility Centre (see paragraph 60) offer advice and help, ranging from the provision of equipment for the visually impaired to a fetching service for those with mobility problems.

24 Subject benchmark statements form part of programme approval and review, with any changes to benchmarks notified to departments, which are asked to map them against their programmes. The University has a well-established credit framework for internal programmes. It does, however, offer one dual award with a European partner, where different arrangements apply: this is the subject of comment and a recommendation later in this annex (see paragraph 80).

25 External accreditation has a considerable impact on curriculum development, assessment practice, and, on occasion, entry standards. Visits of PSRBs to departments offering externally accredited programmes involve both the department and institutional-level representatives. The University does not overview such reports to identify common themes, but the Academic Review Committee reviews each such report, carefully considering recommendations for action, all of which it monitors carefully. Where appropriate, such reports are also drawn to the attention of the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee.

26 Overall, the audit team found that the University engages constructively with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points.

Assessment policies and regulations

27 The University's codes of practice include details of assessment schemes and progression criteria for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes, both on-campus and distance learning. These details are available in departmental or programme handbooks. It is confirmed that all students have access to advice as to what is expected of them and how marks are allocated.

28 The Learning and Teaching Strategy requires all degree programmes to include a range of transferable skills. For undergraduates these include: literacy, numeracy, working in groups and skills for lifelong learning; for postgraduates they include: research methods; teamwork; oral and written communication and networking. The audit team confirms that programme and module specifications comply with this. In neither case, however, are the assessment methods specifically chosen to be such as to guarantee that all graduating students have demonstrated these skills.

29 At the time of the University's previous Institutional audit, the existence of two undergraduate assessment schemes led to a recommendation. The University now operates only one such scheme, with scope for variations where a case for making them is accepted. The University stated in its Briefing Paper that, while some reservations about the adoption of a single scheme had been expressed, the effect on the distribution of final honours classifications had been very small.

30 In the case of postgraduate taught programmes, however, the audit team noted that two assessment schemes continue to exist: it accordingly explored in some detail the implications of this structure for the assurance of academic standards. In brief, one scheme is based on a count of credits passed, the other on a credit-weighted average; in both cases students must pass the dissertation and 'satisfactorily complete all coursework requirements'. When the team scrutinised handbooks from three contrasting (in size and discipline) departments using the second scheme, it found that the demands made of students varied widely. In one department all modules had to be passed (with only two modules permitted to be repeated); a second department required students to achieve a 50 per cent average on taught programmes to proceed to the dissertation; in a third department a student was found to have been awarded a master's degree having failed more than half of the required taught course modules. In this latter case the external examiner commented that it would in fact be theoretically possible for a strong dissertation to permit a student who had failed every taught module to be awarded a master's degree. While the team has no reason to believe that in any of these cases the academic standard required fell below the threshold of acceptability, it is clear that: (i) there is a lack of consistency in departmental expectations of students; and (ii) the learning objectives at programme level cannot be achieved if substantial numbers of modules are failed. It is advisable for the University to review the assessment regulations for taught postgraduate programmes, to ensure that the required learning outcomes are met for all awards.

31 University regulations offer detailed information on plagiarism and academic misconduct; this information is supplemented by examples displayed in the virtual learning environment, some of which take the form of 'plagiarism tutorials' stressing the moral basis for academic honesty as well as the penalties involved (see also paragraph 60). Tutorials are attuned individually to each subject: in that they acknowledge and examine the possible impact of cultural expectations and assumptions on interpretations of academic honesty they constitute both an extended form of learning support and an important part of students' early studies. The audit team confirms that staff, who described in some detail their methods of policing students' work, are conscious of the risks to academic standards presented by such misconduct, and meetings with students demonstrated both that the importance of academic honesty is emphasised and that they are clear as to what is expected of them. Here as elsewhere (see paragraph 60) the team considers the University's inclusive approach to learning support, which is designed to meet a wide range of student needs, a feature of good practice.

32 The audit team, having reviewed the assessment regulations and their implementation, and, subject to the recommendation in paragraph 30, confirms that they are effective in assuring the maintenance of academic standards.

Management information (statistics)

33 The University stated in its Briefing Paper that it makes use of management information in both its review of programmes and its overall strategy and direction. Key datasets include: progression; degree classifications; recruitment and admissions; student feedback; and graduate destinations. These are supplemented by results gathered from external data, including: the National Student Survey; the Higher Education Statistics Agency performance indicators; and Unistats data. All such information is routinely but carefully monitored by the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee and presented to Senate.

34 Quantitative data (notably progression, marking trends, degree classifications, recruitment and graduate destinations) is used in programme monitoring and review; recruitment information is used in programme approval. Such data is used in formulating the new undergraduate degree classification scheme and continues to be deployed in reviewing modules with disproportionately high failure rates. The use of data for planning as opposed to retrospective analysis is scheduled to increase further: for example, the University has piloted studies into the effect of disability, ethnicity and gender on student performance, and, given its intention of increasing the number of international students, it will no doubt find extending such studies further will enhance its policies on student recruitment and support.

35 Overall, the audit team concludes that confidence can 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

36 For the sake of convenience, all aspects of programme approval, monitoring and review were described in the previous section, where it was found that, while the procedures for annual monitoring do little to facilitate the sharing of good practice, the processes as a whole contribute appropriately to assuring the quality of learning opportunities. It was noted in particular that the University pays close attention, in both the documentation and enquiries undertaken, to: learning outcomes; placement arrangements; staff development; the level and overall balance of the programme; engagement with all external reference points; students' views of their own learning opportunities, both directly in periodic review and in the form of internal and external survey responses; and, for the most part, quality enhancement. It is confirmed that the University's arrangements meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*.

37 Also for the sake of convenience, all aspects of institutional engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points were described in the previous section, where it was noted that the University engages actively and systematically with all such reference points, and that there is evidence of its own practices being developed and enhanced by such engagement.

Management information (feedback from students)

38 The University specifies its approach to obtaining student feedback in a Protocol. The Student Experience Enhancement Committee analyses externally generated information such as the National Student Survey, as well as producing and analysing surveys of its own, for example, of first-year students and graduates. Departments are required to confirm in annual monitoring that they have considered and responded to matters of substance raised by students, reporting back either through the University's virtual learning environment or on their own websites. Recent examples of institutional-level responses to student feedback include: a review of the personal tutor system; a review of assessment and feedback; and a recent decision to open the University library for 24-hours a day for the summer examination period. Students informed the audit team that the University's feedback procedures function properly.

39 The University has participated in the Higher Education Academy's two postgraduate research student surveys and the pilot Postgraduate Taught Student Experience Survey. The results of the National Student Survey and the minutes of staff-student committees, together with the responses made to them, are incorporated into annual monitoring.

40 The audit team confirms that procedures for collecting, analysing and responding to student feedback are comprehensive in scope and appropriately executed; they constitute an effective response to issues raised by students.

Role of students in quality assurance

41 All boards and committees relevant to this audit are required to have student representatives: in the case of senior institutional committees this right applies normally to sabbatical officers of the Students' Union. The Academic Affairs Officer (the de facto President) is also a member of the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee, a distinctive arrangement regarded by the University as an indicator of its strong relationship with the Union and which, both staff and students informed the audit team, is working well: a view confirmed by scrutiny of the Committee's minutes. A requirement exists for student representation at departmental level: where departments, normally on the ground of small size, do not have staff-student committees they are required to include such representatives on their departmental committee. Student representatives are trained by the Students' Union, and detailed support is available in a Student Representatives' Handbook produced by the Union, but, containing a foreword by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students).

42 In addition to these formal mechanisms, regular meetings take place between Students' Union officers and senior University personnel, normally the Academic Registrar or their representative, in order to discuss issues of mutual concern. These include themes arising in the Students' Union's casework with students in difficulty: such matters, discussed with due regard to confidentiality, are raised to ensure that the University is aware of and addressing structural issues which may be creating individual problems. The audit team confirms, from both meetings and documentary study, that these processes function well and are appreciated by the student body. Monthly meetings also take place between the Students' Union Executive Team and the Vice-Chancellor, both sides stressing the value of these meetings. It is confirmed that the relationship between the University and Students' Union officers is cordial and purposeful.

43 More generally, students informed the audit team that the representative system as a whole works well. Although the view was also expressed that formal feedback from academic departments is variable and can be slow, it was stressed that the many opportunities available to provide informal feedback mitigate this variability, and the strength of day-to-day working relationships between departmental staff and students was regularly emphasised to the team.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

44 In its Briefing Paper the University stressed its commitment to creating a synergy between teaching and high-quality research. It stated that it meets this commitment by: requiring almost all members of academic staff, including internationally renowned researchers, to teach; exploring the link between staff research and the curriculum in periodic review and, where appropriate, engaging in discussion as to how such synergy might be better achieved; ensuring that Academic Review Committee's oversight of the outcomes of periodic review addresses all outstanding issues; and (normally) requiring all undergraduate programmes to offer penultimate and final-year students module choices reflecting departmental research strengths. The audit team, while unable to verify that such modules are invariably available, confirms that they frequently are; certainly on-campus science and technology undergraduates have access to research equipment and are required to submit a research dissertation in their final year.

Other modes of study

45 The University is distinctive in that it teaches almost a quarter of its students at a distance, some programmes being available globally; the large majority of such students are based overseas. Programmes by distance learning are offered by 12 departments, largely to postgraduate professionals, managers or business people.

46 The University aims as far as possible to integrate the management of distance learning with that of on-campus teaching, making procedural enhancements as appropriate: hence, while distance learning is subject to the same regulatory framework as face-to-face provision, two senior staff, the Professor of e-Learning and the Director of Distance Learning Development, are jointly charged with strengthening the strategic development, coordination and management

of distance learning and e-learning. Part of the University's distance-learning portfolio, including its use of overseas agents, was reviewed in May 2008 by the QAA audit in Greece and the Republic of Cyprus, when the clarity of its legal agreements, its creation and deployment of the Director of Distance Learning Administration and its internal Code of Practice were among the positive features identified.

47 Distance-learning students are supported by a bespoke website allowing access to a range of institutional resources, including: departmental websites; resources from the e-library; information about future module choices; Students' Union services; study support; and welfare provision. Distance learning is also increasingly supported through the range of learning opportunities available in the virtual learning environment, which offers student chat-rooms and other modes of electronic interaction.

48 The University has a well-established procedure for providing library services for distance-learning students, and librarians are involved in the development of new distance-learning programmes; work closely with programme teams, and are easily accessible by students. The services made available to distance-learning students include a mailing arrangement for books and articles (postgraduates are permitted 40 'free' journal papers annually); online searches for distance learners lacking fast internet access; dedicated pages on the library website, including resource 'rooms' which provide easy, fast and effective access to the library catalogue and journals within a subject area; and a range of video tutorials (often subject based) on matters ranging from searching the catalogue and database to academic writing and plagiarism.

49 Study materials normally take the form of module folders of written material, often augmented by other resources such as study guides, textbooks, collections of articles and online library services. Some materials include extracts from publications and journals so that students do not have to locate these sources themselves. The focus in the module materials is on active engagement with learning: some materials, therefore, are interactive, featuring review exercises and other activities. As part of its investigations the audit team conducted an email correspondence with a sample of distance-learning students; in the light of this, the team confirms that students value these materials: the high quality of their content and production, their usefulness and versatility.

50 In some locations the University has service agreements with collaborative partners to support distance-learning students: normally this involves partner institutions supporting recruitment, collecting fees and allowing access to their learning resources. Where such arrangements exist they are subject to contractual agreements based on a common template under central administrative control and coordination, with departments responsible for monitoring operations in their normal review procedures.

51 Completed assignments are posted or emailed to the University, directly or through a local agent. A major part of the learning process is through individual feedback on assignments. A wide range of support services, including a telephone and email-based advice and guidance service operated by academic and administrative staff, supports the exchange of materials and assignments. The audit team was informed, in both its email correspondence with students and its meeting with members of staff, that these support services are speedy, effective and appreciated by students.

52 The audit team, having explored the quality of these services, confirms that they are highly regarded by both students and academic staff. The team considers the high quality of the learning opportunities provided for the University's distance-learning students a feature of good practice.

Resources for learning

53 The University library is subject to periodic review in a similar manner to academic departments. The University has invested heavily in library resources, both plant and contents, since the previous Institutional audit, and the Librarian is centrally involved, strategically and operationally, in the University's quality management procedures. Library staff liaise with academic staff and students to identify information requirements, collaborating also with institutions and groups such as the Library Users Forum, which includes faculty, departmental and student representatives, to optimise the use of resources. The Librarian comments on new programme proposals; considers possible implications of external examiners' reports; is a member of, or attends, key University committees; and holds regular meetings with the Students' Union Academic Affairs Officer.

54 The University has also invested in information technology: the student portal provides easy ways of accessing information relevant to living in Leicester, including access to library resources; these resources are also accessible through the virtual learning environment; and fast internet connection is now available from every bedroom in student residences, as is wireless networking in most communal spaces on-campus.

55 Members of academic staff who met the audit team stated that the University does not specify minimum requirements or expectations as to the use of the virtual learning environment to provide module and programme information, leaving this to departmental discretion. Students stated that they are broadly happy with the environment, claiming, however, that usage is variable across the University. The team confirms the existence of distinct variations in usage, noting, however, that usage has increased markedly since 2002, and, having accessed the environment itself, that many examples exist of constructive and imaginative usage.

56 The positive comments about learning resources made by students who met the audit team are confirmed by both the results of the National Student Survey and successive evaluations of internal reviews of library resources. The team confirms that the University provides students with a satisfactory level of learning resources.

Admissions policy

57 The Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee advises on recruitment and admissions policy, and monitors performance. At an individual level, the authority to regulate admissions, formally vested in Senate, is devolved to trained admissions tutors, whose decision-making is monitored by the Admissions Office. At the time of the audit, as part of a larger programme in preparation for the new college structure, the University was developing new admission procedures designed to improve efficiency, consistency and the quality of communication with applicants for both campus-based and distance-learning programmes. The University has also developed widening participation schemes, including summer schools, outreach work, master classes and taster classes; it also participates in a number of activities associated with HEFCE's Aimhigher initiative.

58 The audit team confirms, on the basis of both documentary study and discussions with students, that the University's admissions policy is effectively implemented and carefully monitored by the Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee. The results of this monitoring have been translated into the procedural enhancements to be implemented in the academic year 2009-10.

Student support

59 The University operates a universal personal tutor system, which, in its Briefing Paper, it described as 'under almost constant review'. Heads of department allocate personal tutors and monitor operations; at University level the effectiveness of the system is tested primarily through departmental reviews and the Graduate Survey, which requests feedback on the operation of the system. Students informed the audit team that: students make use of both personal tutors and

welfare tutors for non-academic matters; many students also use programme and module leaders for academic support; the systems work generally well; and the support of both academic and support staff is greatly valued.

60 The Student Support and Development Service, comprising: the Careers Service; the Teaching and Learning Unit; the Welfare Service; the AccessAbility Centre; and a confidential Counselling and Mental Wellbeing Service, is an integrated and inclusive facility. The AccessAbility Centre in particular offers services and support for students with dyslexia and other learning difficulties, disabilities and longer-term conditions. The audit team explored the work of this Centre, including its easily navigable website, finding its provisions wide-ranging in scope and sensitively delivered. In addition, as noted above (see paragraph 31), the highlighting of plagiarism as a continuing problem led to the creation of an online tutorial, tailored to the needs of individual subjects, to teach about academic integrity. The team found this tutorial simple to access and well-produced, and students confirmed its value and relevance. The team considers that the University's inclusive approach to learning support, which is designed to meet a wide range of student needs, constitutes a feature of good practice.

61 The Careers Advisory Committee, which contains employer representation, has developed an institutional Employability Strategy, and encourages departments to integrate this theme into teaching programmes. This Strategy includes the Leicester Award for Employability Skills, a six-month career management and skills programme open to all students. This scheme, introduced four years ago in partnership with employers, is designed to provide students with such skills, and will be extended from its initial 50 students to over 400 students in the next academic year. The audit team explored the workings of the scheme with both student participants and academic and careers support staff: students considered it had improved their employability skills and allowed them access to relevant employers. The team considers that the developmental opportunities provided for students across the University through the Leicester Award for Employability Skills constitute a feature of good practice.

62 Students in all departments are encouraged to participate in personal development planning, and the audit team confirms that the necessary resources for engaging with it are readily available on departmental websites. The University, acknowledging that take-up has been variable, is currently considering how best to promote its benefits.

63 The University requires all departmental handbooks to explain the complaints and appeals regulations and procedures. All students considering lodging a complaint or an appeal are encouraged to seek advice and support from the Students' Union. The audit team confirms, from its scrutiny of a range of such handbooks, that the University's requirement is conscientiously followed, the handbooks are clear and accessible, and the procedures meet the expectations of the relevant section of the *Code of practice*.

Staff support (including staff development)

64 Institutional staffing policies are supplemented by advisory documents covering matters ranging from academic workloads to leave arrangements. The audit team confirms, from periodic review reports and departmental committee minutes, that these policies are effectively implemented, and in particular that software to facilitate workload allocation is effectively used. The Staff Development Centre, which provides a one-day induction programme three times a year, shares responsibility for induction and continuing professional development with departments: these arrangements are supplemented by detailed written information on issues ranging from the 'introduction of research into teaching' to 'lecturing techniques'. Opportunities also exist for new heads of department to participate in a development programme delivered by the Heads of Department Forum: this involves senior staff delivering sessions on topics such as budgets, human resources and (in a compulsory session) health and safety. These programmes appear effective and timely.

65 Newly appointed members of academic staff: normally serve a probationary period; are assigned a trained mentor to provide help and support; and, if they have less than three years' teaching experience, are required to complete the first two modules of the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice in Higher Education. The audit team, on learning that this programme can be taken after one year's teaching experience, when it is considered by some members of the University to be more meaningful, confirms that the quality of teaching provided by such staff prior to taking the modules is assured through the mentoring system. A Code of Practice for the Employment of Part-Time Teaching Assistants is designed to ensure that such assistants receive training at institutional, faculty and departmental levels. As noted later in this Annex (see paragraph 91) the team heard evidence that this is in place and is considered helpful and worthwhile by those who deliver and receive it.

66 The compulsory appraisal scheme, which covers teaching, administration and research, aims to improve practice through identifying training needs and providing continuing support for staff members. All departments are required to operate peer observation schemes; consideration is given to such schemes in periodic review, and the audit team confirms that examples exist of schemes leading to reviews of practices in several areas. The University's commitment to teaching is further demonstrated by opportunities for promotion or accelerated incremental progression on the main ground of teaching excellence. The University also uses teaching fellowship awards to promote excellence in teaching and learning: these awards, open to all staff members involved in teaching at any level, are made on the basis of criteria similar to those for the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme. The team, following discussions with a teaching fellow, believes the scheme, while currently of value, not least in its expectation that award winners will contribute to the wider teaching community, would be enhanced were consideration given to further possible ways of encouraging teaching fellows to contribute to the dissemination of good practice.

67 The audit team confirms that staff support and development provision contributes to the assurance and enhancement of students' learning opportunities.

68 Confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the learning opportunities available to its students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

69 In its Briefing Paper, the University described its approach to quality enhancement as one of embedding continuous improvement and innovative practice within the management of learning and teaching. The process is led by senior committees (particularly the Academic Review Committee and Student Experience Enhancement Committee, which have complementary responsibilities for quality enhancement at policy and individual levels) and supported by central services. The audit team especially noted that the latter Committee's Assessment and Feedback Working Party has used student feedback from multiple sources to enhance the quality of learning opportunities by a range of staff development activities, including institution-wide seminars and workshops.

70 The University also stated that redeveloping the library was a conscious and deliberate action to enhance learning and teaching, through a close liaison with potential users and a design reflective of user need. The redevelopment allowed for increased numbers of study places, the integration of a number of different services and the use of technology to improve access to learning resources. Students who met the audit team cited the new library building, the services it houses and the consultation process which preceded it as positive features of their experience.

71 The University described programme approval, which requires scrutiny from different bodies with membership from across the University, as an opportunity to note and promote the dissemination of good practice. The audit team examined one proposal that involved the use of pre-developed distance-learning materials for new campus-based provision, noting that it had

been scrutinised by five different bodies. The team concluded, however, that, while such scrutiny might serve to increase awareness of the benefits and challenges involved in using such materials in the delivery of on-campus programmes, this was an incidental rather than deliberate feature of the process itself.

72 As noted previously (see paragraph 19), the Vice Chancellor personally reviews and annotates all external examiners' reports. While this undoubtedly has benefits, including ensuring prompt responses to issues arising, it is not of itself likely to be effective in achieving enhancement through the dissemination of good practice. Here the most immediate opportunities arise at departmental level, albeit that broader themes are identified and addressed institutionally. In this latter regard, it is noteworthy that external examiners' reports were instrumental in encouraging the University, in its revised Code of Practice, to take a more flexible and developmental approach to plagiarism (see paragraph 31), including, where appropriate, a facility for penalties to be imposed by examiners rather than through disciplinary procedures.

73 Conditions and follow-up actions identified in programme approval, monitoring and review are reported to the Academic Review Committee. While both annual monitoring and periodic review consider the contribution to quality enhancement made by departmental planning, annual plans as presently structured focus more on addressing issues of concern than on highlighting and disseminating good practice. A simple amendment to the annual monitoring templates would, however, facilitate a stronger contribution to enhancement. As noted above (see paragraph 15), it is desirable for the University to adopt a more systematic approach to identifying and disseminating good practice.

74 While the University makes use of PSRB reports in quality assurance, the audit team was unable to find evidence of their extensive use for enhancement purposes. Similarly, while evidence exists of the University's Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning promoting the sharing of good practice at disciplinary level, such centres were not created with the intention of enhancing quality at institutional level, and the team was unable to find evidence of their doing so in a planned and deliberate way.

75 In terms of management information, reference has already been made to the University's activity in piloting studies into the effect on performance of disability, ethnicity and gender (see paragraph 34); it is clear that such studies, if translated into policy and practice, have considerable enhancement potential. In addition, the Student Experience and Enhancement Committee identified, from the results of the National Student Survey, a need to review assessment and feedback to students, and established a senior working group for this purpose. A number of departments have also been considering possible ways of improving the use of assessment and feedback to facilitate learning.

76 The Teaching Fellowship Scheme recognises excellence in teaching and has served to establish a group of teaching fellows who act as catalysts for innovation. The audit team was told that, while many teaching fellows are also national teaching fellows, their remit does not currently extend specifically to enhancement: as noted above (see paragraph 66), introducing such a remit is a possibility to which the University may find it helpful to give consideration.

77 Overall, while the audit team saw many examples of sound practice and robust quality assurance, it found less evidence of deliberate, institutional initiatives designed to identify, disseminate and embed good practice. While a commitment to quality enhancement is evident in a number of activities, these activities would benefit from greater coordination; there is in particular scope for the more effective dissemination of good practice.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

78 The scope of the University's collaborative provision is fairly small, involving as it does: one dual degree awarding arrangement with another higher education institution; institutional validation of two regional partner colleges; programme-level collaboration, sometimes involving distance learning; articulation agreements; and distributed support for distance learning. The University's Register of Collaborative Provision indicates that about 1,500 students are on collaborative programmes; since, however, some two-thirds of these are located in one regional partner institution which has recently secured taught degree-awarding powers, this number is likely to decline. The audit team's scrutiny of documentation from this college confirms that the University has exercised its responsibilities in a proper and conscientious manner.

79 The University's Code of Practice on Collaborative Provision states that, rather than putting in place a complex infrastructure to support a small amount of collaborative provision, the University has taken a fairly conservative approach. Other than where additional procedures are considered necessary, the University requires the same arrangements for safeguarding standards and the quality of learning opportunities to apply to collaborative as to mainstream provision. Accordingly, while (i) proposals for new collaborative ventures must follow the distinct procedures laid down in the internal Code of Practice, and (ii) the proposed partner must be agreed before any programme approval process starts, collaborative provision once approved is subject to routine monitoring and review. The audit team confirms that the University does, with one exception, proceed thus.

80 The exception is a small-intake dual award, the four-year double LLB Maîtrise with an overseas university, under which students spend the first two years in Leicester and the final two abroad. The University classifies its LLB on the basis of the first two years only, although students must complete their two years overseas in order to gain the award. The audit team noted that potential participants in the programme are identified sufficiently early for their second year's teaching to be so rearranged as to ensure that they pass a sufficient number of third-year modules to meet the University's requirements for an honours degree. Although this arrangement, which offers an attractive option for the participants (approximately six per year), is not wholly straightforward and not regarded by the University as a model for other collaborative activity, the team found it to be characterised by conscientious liaison and strong student support. There are, however, two specific areas where the University acknowledges that current arrangements do not meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* the programme documentation is based solely on the University's provision and fails to meet the expectations of Precept A14, and the Memorandum of Agreement meets the expectations of neither the University's own Code of Practice nor Precept A10 in the *Code of practice*. Accordingly it is desirable for the University to review the arrangements for the double LLB/Maîtrise in English and French Law to ensure that it engages fully with the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 2*.

81 In programme-level collaborations the University establishes a programme management board, drawing its membership from both the University and the partner institution, which is accountable to the departmental meeting for ensuring the effective operation of all aspects of the programme concerned, and for providing curriculum advice. The audit team confirms that this procedure appears to be in place throughout the University and to operate effectively.

82 The University appoints external examiners for collaborative provision, who report in exactly the same way as the examiners for on-campus provision. Their reports are referred to the programme management board for a response: this is made in the annual monitoring report. The audit team confirms that these arrangements are operational and that, generally, the University has effective arrangements in place for the external examining of its collaborative provision.

83 The University's Code of Practice provides guidance on complaints, appeals, the use of the University's logo, approval of advertising materials, registration, and the issuing of certificates and transcripts: the last two are unequivocally a University responsibility. The University also has clear requirements, designed to be comparable to those used for on-campus programmes, for obtaining and sharing student feedback on a range of specified issues.

84 Overall, and subject to one area where a recommendation is made, the University has effective systems in place to safeguard the standards and manage the quality of learning opportunities in its collaborative provision.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

85 The University participated in the QAA Review of research degree programmes in 2006, the report of which confirmed that its ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of provision was appropriate and satisfactory.

86 Research degree provision is governed by the internal Code of Practice for Research Degrees and overseen by the Board of Graduate Studies, supported administratively by the Graduate Office. The Graduate School, headed by the Graduate Dean, is responsible for organising and managing provision for postgraduate research students. At faculty level, graduate studies committees, chaired by sub-deans and including student representatives, provide a flow of information between the Board on one hand and departments and faculties on the other. All departments have a postgraduate tutor to oversee supervisory and other arrangements: such tutors sit on the relevant faculty graduate studies committee; their duties are specified in the Code of Practice.

87 Entry requirements and selection procedures are similarly specified in the Code of Practice. Admissions are managed centrally by the Admissions Office, with applications assessed academically by at least two trained members of departmental staff. The admissions process is designed to ensure both that students are qualified and have the potential to succeed, and that the intended host department has appropriate supervisory capacity and resources.

88 The Graduate Office's central induction programme for all research students is followed by programmes at faculty and departmental level. The audit team reviewed these arrangements, finding the programmes appropriate and clearly documented, and the process as a whole carefully coordinated and managed.

89 Departmental supervisory arrangements are specified in the offer letter and approved on registration by the faculty board concerned. Supervisors' and students' responsibilities are laid down in the Code of Practice, and the departmental postgraduate tutor monitors compliance. All supervisors are required to be research-active and were, subject to eligibility, entered in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise. As both a support to the supervisor and a monitoring mechanism, all research students are assigned a thesis committee consisting of the main supervisor, a second supervisor or adviser and (to ensure continuity as well as quality and consistency of practice) the postgraduate tutor (or their nominee). All new supervisors are required to attend a training session, and heads of department are responsible for managing supervisory workloads. The audit team, having reviewed these arrangements, considers the rigorous management and oversight of research student supervision a feature of good practice.

90 The Board of Graduate Studies is responsible for progress monitoring and review. All research students undertake a probationary period and, after one year (two years in the case of part-time students), their suitability to undertake a research degree is formally assessed by means of a written report. Departments are responsible for subsequent progress reviews, which take place annually.

91 The University delivers a comprehensive generic research training programme, both centrally and at faculty level; students and their thesis committee agree individual training plans. Separate training is in place for research students with teaching responsibilities: the audit team ascertained that this is both effective and appreciated by students (see paragraph 65).

92 Research students are represented on all relevant committees; they also have the right to report directly on their experiences to the Board of Graduate Studies, in confidence if they wish, as well as through their department: the Graduate Office reviews all such reports, referring matters of particular concern to the Graduate Dean.

93 Assessment procedures receive regular attention and form part of institutional review; the appointment of external examiners is overseen by the Graduate Dean; viva voce panels have a formal chair where, as is often the case, to do so is deemed appropriate, although the University does not require the appointment of an independent chair. Where University staff are candidates for research degrees two external examiners are used. External examiners' reports are considered by faculty committees and then referred to the Board of Graduate Studies.

94 The complaints procedure, published in the Postgraduate Regulations, emphasises the importance of using informal methods to resolve issues as early as possible, but clearly sets out the procedures to be followed when informal methods prove unsuccessful. The appeals regulations distinguish two categories of appeal: those based on the award of a degree lower than that for which the student is registered (which are heard by a panel of the Board of Graduate Studies); and those against the termination of registration on academic grounds by the Board itself (which are heard by a panel of deans chaired by a pro-vice-chancellor).

95 The audit team found that the University has put in place effective procedures for the management of its research programmes, which meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Section 7: Published information

96 The University stated in its Briefing Paper that it has clear lines of responsibility for published information. Heads of department or division are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the web-based materials relating to their areas of authority, though the Division of Marketing and Communications undertakes a verification exercise; the Director of Marketing, who sits on the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee, is responsible for publications relating to recruitment and admissions and for corporate publications, and is accountable to the Registrar and Secretary for the effectiveness, accuracy and honesty of high-level web communications as a whole. The Director, together with the University's Planning Office, is also responsible for reviewing Unistats data to obtain comparative information and identify presentational issues. The audit team learned that the University does not currently consider it necessary to add commentaries to the Unistats site.

97 Material relating to the management of quality and standards, which is reviewed annually for currency, is readily accessible electronically and in paper format. Programme specifications, authorised in programme approval, are reviewed annually. Undergraduate specifications use a common template and are available on the website; taught postgraduate specifications are presented more flexibly, but the audit team confirms that in all cases they contain complete information. The University provides a template for module specifications and guidance notes on how to complete all categories of specification. Module specifications are concise documents, but, in the team's view, record the essential information on learning outcomes, teaching and learning methods and assessment.

98 Student representatives who met the audit team confirmed the statement in the student written submission to the effect that pre-entry information is accurate, and that expectations generally are met. Prospectuses, in their electronic format, have links to programme descriptions and departmental web pages: although reliant on inputs from academic departments, they are

edited by Marketing and Communications staff who, in doing so, take note of feedback from student focus groups and surveys.

99 The University applies strict rules to publicity materials produced by collaborative partners. It was confirmed to the audit team that International Office staff have or obtain the necessary language skills to check websites in languages other than English, and that agents are contractually required to submit for approval any advertisement or publicity material referring to the University. The audit team checked a sample of English language agent and distance-learning agent websites and found nothing which appeared inappropriate; many such sites had direct links to the University's website.

100 The guidelines for departmental handbooks provide a checklist of issues to be included, and text to cover central services and generic issues. Institutional-level monitoring is undertaken annually, both to ensure compliance and to identify and promulgate examples of good practice. The University stated in its Briefing Paper that students are asked, during periodic review, to comment on the accuracy and effectiveness of departmental publications. The audit team confirms that it found brief reference to such comments in some but not all of the review documentation analysed in the course of this audit.

101 Students who met the audit team were broadly happy with programme and module guides; they considered that they have good information on what is expected of them and of the level at which they must perform to gain particular marks. This confirms the results of an internal survey, which showed that 95 per cent of students possess a programme handbook, of whom 75 per cent rate it useful, the remainder being neutral. The team found that the University is successful in ensuring consistent and effective programme documentation, and has sound review procedures in place.

102 The University stated in its Briefing Paper that external examiners' reports are shared with student representatives. It emerged in the course of the audit, however, that full implementation of this policy has been delayed until the next academic year to coincide with institutional restructuring (see paragraph 19). The audit team is satisfied, however, that the University has detailed plans to ensure that this does in fact take place both comprehensively and on schedule.

103 The University provides helpful information for staff and for current and potential students, and has in place procedures for ensuring its accuracy and completeness; it is moving towards making external examiners' reports available to student representatives in line with HEFCE circular 06/45, *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes*.

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