QAA

Institutional audit

University of Hull

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Preface

QAA's 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 for 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 Innovation, Universtities 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 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.

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

An audit team from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) carried out an Institutional audit of the University of Hull (the University) from 20 to 24 April 2009. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's management of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. To arrive at its conclusions, the team spoke to members of staff and students and also 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 is 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 its awards. It is about the provision of appropriate teaching, support and assessment for students.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view is 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
- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University has developed a dual approach, designed to enhance both the systems for the management of quality and standards and the practice of learning and teaching. Implementation is not yet complete, but the strategy is sound and already effective in identifying and disseminating good practice.

Postgraduate research students

The University's management of its research degree programmes 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,* published by QAA, with the exception of two areas discussed in section 6 below.

Published information

The University has established robust procedures for maintaining the accuracy and completeness of the information that it publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

Features of good practice

The audit team identifies the following features of good practice:

- the range of information designed to make the University's Quality and Standards Framework more accessible to all types of staff, including the Implementation Guides, Quality and Standards Updates and 'Working with…' series of leaflets (paragraph 15)
- the range of staff development opportunities on offer (paragraph 48)

- the contribution made by quality enhancement reports to the management of quality and standards and, in particular, to the identification and dissemination of good practice (paragraph 55)
- the encouragement and recognition of excellence in learning and teaching that is provided by the University Teaching Fellowship scheme, and the contribution of both National and University Teaching Fellows to quality enhancement (paragraph 57).

Recommendations for action

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

It is advisable for the University to:

- implement consistently the requirements of its Code of Practice that annual monitoring reports are completed by postgraduate research students and their supervisors (paragraph 69)
- extend the range of information it uses to assure itself about the standards and quality of research degree programmes (paragraph 75).

It is desirable for the University to:

- ensure that any action taken as a result of student feedback from module evaluation questionnaires and staff-student committees is communicated effectively to all students (paragraph 33)
- strengthen its oversight of the process by which departments ensure that postgraduate research students who teach are adequately prepared to do so (paragraph 71)
- implement consistently the requirements in its Code of Practice that external examiner reports, and departmental responses to external examiner reports, are shared with students through staff-student committees (paragraph 80).

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 higher education. It allows for diversity and innovation within academic programmes offered by higher education. QAA worked with the higher education sector to establish the various parts of the Academic Infrastructure, which include:

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

The audit found that, in general, the University took due account of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. Those areas where the University's engagement with the *Code of practice* could be strengthened are identified in the report.

Report

1 An audit team from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) carried out an Institutional audit of the University of Hull (the University) from 20 to 24 April 2009. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's management of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team comprised Dr J Hostler, Professor D Meehan, Dr F Quinault and Dr S Ryrie, auditors, and Ms J Greenlees, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated by Mr W Naylor, Assistant Director, QAA Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3 University College Hull was founded in 1927 as a College of the University of London. It received its Royal Charter and became the University of Hull in 1954.

4 The University's provision is located on two campuses: one in Hull and the other in Scarborough. The latter accrued to the University, following the merger with the former University College Scarborough in 2000.

5 Teaching takes place across a broad range of disciplines, which are organised into 23 departments (or similar units that fulfil the responsibilities of departments). The departments are grouped into seven faculties: Arts and Social Sciences; The Business School; Hull York Medical School; Health and Social Care; Institute for Learning; Postgraduate Medical Institute; and Science.

6 At 1 December 2008, the University had a total of 17,226 students enrolled on higher education programmes, shown by programme level and mode of study below. Approximately 10 per cent of students are based at the Scarborough campus.

Level	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Undergraduate	12,394	2,616	15,010
Taught postgraduate	1,076	690	1,766
Research postgraduate	354	136	490
Total	**13,824**	**3,442**	**17,266**

7 According to the University's Strategic Plan 2008-12, its vision is, 'To explore, create and communicate knowledge in order to enhance regional, national and global communities'.

Developments since the last audit

8 QAA's last audit of the University in 2004 resulted in a judgement of broad confidence in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The report noted six features of good practice and made three recommendations where action was considered advisable, and three where action was considered desirable. The advisable recommendations related to: the development of an institutional-level strategy for the management of joint and 'with' degree programmes; the clarification and implementation of the University's expectations and requirements for the role of external examiners; and the consistency of application of assessment criteria at programme level. The desirable recommendations related to: the implementation of a more consistent and embedded staff appraisal process to support staff development; the implementation of the University's process for peer observation of teaching; and the establishment of a more explicit statement of the University's expectation of student contact with their personal supervisor.

9 An annex to the Briefing Paper described the University's response to each of these recommendations. It reported: the approval of new, or substantially revised, Codes of Practice on joint and 'with' degrees, external examining and assessment; the adoption of new single staff appraisal and peer observation schemes; and the publication of new guidelines on personal supervision. The audit team's scrutiny of documentation and meetings with staff and students demonstrated that these actions had been carried out as the University had reported. They are discussed in detail under the relevant headings below. The team, therefore, concluded that the University had responded appropriately to the recommendations of the 2004 audit report.

The University's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities

10 The development, approval and implementation of the University's framework for managing standards and quality are achieved through a blend of deliberative and executive responsibilities. Deliberative responsibilities rest with the University committees; executive responsibilities with the Vice-Chancellor advised by the Senior Management Team, deans and heads of department. Deliberative and executive responsibilities are brought together through the deliberative committees for seven strategic areas, each of which is chaired by a member of the Senior Management Team.

11 Senate is the University's most senior academic committee. The Academic Board reports to Senate and brings together the seven strategic areas of University activity: learning, teaching and assessment; quality and standards; research; reach-out; educational partnerships; student recruitment; and information services. Each of these areas is overseen by a committee which reports to the Academic Board. Learning and teaching are overseen by the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee. Quality and standards for on-campus provision are overseen by the Quality and Standards Committee.

12 Within the Senior Management Team, the senior manager with responsibility for academic standards and quality is the Quality Director, University Registrar and Secretary, who chairs the Quality and Standards Committee and line-manages the University Quality Office. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) also plays an important role in the management of quality by chairing the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, overseeing the implementation of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy, and by line-managing the Academic Services, Student Support Services and Careers Service. To promote coordination between quality and standards and learning and teaching, the Quality Director, University Registrar and Secretary is the deputy chair of the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) the deputy chair of the Quality and Standards Committee.

13 Each faculty is led by a dean or director. Heads of department are accountable to their respective deans. Both deans and heads of department are responsible for academic standards and quality in their areas. In the larger faculties the dean is supported by a Deputy Dean (Learning and Teaching), who is responsible for overseeing all aspects of learning and teaching within the faculty and its constituent departments. Each faculty has a board, which reports directly to Senate, and a Quality Committee, which reports to the Quality and Standards Committee and the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee.

Effectiveness of the framework

14 The audit team noted that roles and responsibilities within the executive structure outlined above are clearly defined, and that the deliberative committees conduct their business diligently according to clear terms of reference. The team concluded, therefore, that the structure is working as intended and provides an effective means for the University to manage the academic standards and quality of its provision.

15 All aspects of the University's framework for managing standards and quality are published in the University's Quality Handbook. The Handbook is in 13 sections. Each section contains any relevant Codes of Practice or guidelines and a series of annexes to these documents. To promote the accessibility and convenience of the Handbook, and to keep staff abreast of any changes to it, the University Quality Office also publishes Implementation Guides, Quality and Standards Updates and the 'Working with…' series of leaflets. The audit team regarded these documents as extremely useful, and noted that they had been produced in response to users' comments. Staff whom the team met confirmed that the documents were helpful and widely used. The team, therefore, identifies as a feature of good practice the range of information designed to make the University's Quality Framework more accessible to all types of staff.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

16 The University has detailed and well-documented procedures for the approval, monitoring and periodic review of its programmes. These procedures play an important role not only in assuring the standard of awards, but also in managing the quality of learning opportunities.

17 The procedure for programme approval comprises three stages; it includes a requirement for external comment on programme proposals and is designed to ensure that appropriate use is made of the Academic Infrastructure. There are also formal procedures for the approval of major and minor modifications to programmes, and for programme closure and withdrawal.

18 The procedure for annual monitoring takes place at two levels. Reports are compiled by departments, covering the programmes for which they are responsible; overview reports are then prepared by faculties, focusing on broader issues. At both levels, there is an emphasis on evaluation, identifying aspects of good practice as well as issues for attention or concern, and there are mechanisms to ensure that any problems identified in previous years are tackled.

19 The procedure for periodic review involves the preparation of a self-evaluation document by the department concerned, and scrutiny by a panel comprising staff from other departments and faculties and external experts from outside the University. Periodic review includes meetings with students, and students are expected to be involved in the preparation of the department's self-evaluation.

20 The audit team scrutinised several recent examples of these procedures in operation, and concluded that they are thorough, effective and fit for purpose.

21 The University's use of external examiners is governed by its own Code of Practice, which was introduced as part of an overhaul of assessment arrangements in 2007. External examiners are appointed in accordance with explicit criteria, normally for a period of three years. On appointment, they are provided with a comprehensive package of briefing material and are invited to induction events by the University and department; there is also a section of the University website tailored to their needs. They are required to complete annually a detailed report form which is considered by central University and faculty staff as well as the department concerned. The departments are required to respond to external examiners, and actions taken as a result, as well as points of good practice commended by external examiners, are identified and followed up through annual monitoring.

22 The audit team concluded that the arrangements for external examining are functioning as the University described and make an effective contribution to the assurance of the standard of its awards.

23 The University takes account of the Academic Infrastructure in several ways. For example, its procedures for programme approval and periodic review require that the learning outcomes of programmes are aligned with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and the relevant subject benchmark statement. The University has also taken steps recently to ensure that its procedures check the ongoing validity and currency of its programmes.

24 The University is aware of the implications of the creation of the European Higher Education Area and it routinely issues the European Diploma Supplement to its students. The audit team noted that the University's Codes of Practice and policy documents reflect the expectations of the S*tandards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area,* published by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

25 The University has a comprehensive suite of assessment policies and regulations as a result of an internal review in 2007. Its Codes of Practice regulate the conduct of examinations, the work of examination boards, the consideration of mitigating circumstances and decisions regarding the progression of students; there are also guidelines about the volume of assessment, anonymous-marking and the grading criteria to be used at each level of award.

26 The implementation of these policies is overseen by two University committees. The Student Progress Committee focuses on the standard of assessment and awards. It formally approves all progression and award decisions, and deals with special cases and academic appeals. The Assessment Committee has a more developmental role. It has produced a number of guidance documents and resources, including examples of good practice in giving assessment feedback to students, and a 'learning outcomes tool' that helps staff define intended learning outcomes at each level of award.

27 Assessment requirements are communicated to students in programme handbooks. Students who met the audit team confirmed that they received these handbooks and found them helpful, and that they were aware of the assessment requirements applying to their programmes.

28 The University produces an annual student statistics handbook, which provides a digest of statistical information at the level of each faculty, department and programme. It includes applications and admissions data, data on progression and achievement (including the classification of awards), and student feedback data from the University's own questionnaires and the National Student Survey. The data is used in a variety of contexts within the University. It informs the annual planning round and the scrutiny of proposals for new programmes. It is also used in annual monitoring and periodic review. Staff who met the audit team confirmed that the data enables them to monitor the standard of students' work and is sufficient for their reporting needs.

29 The audit team concluded 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

30 The University's Codes of Practice are aligned closely with the *Code of practice*, published by QAA. Responsibility for keeping abreast of changes to the *Code* falls to the relevant support service; the University's Codes are also subject to periodic review and revision as part of the institution's five-year programme of review of its Quality and Standards Framework.

31 The University's procedures for programme approval, monitoring and periodic review each expect programme teams, and external experts where they are involved, to consider the availability of appropriate learning opportunities for students alongside academic standards. The audit team's scrutiny of a range of documents associated with these processes confirmed that this expectation was being met effectively.

32 The University provides students with a range of opportunities to provide feedback on their learning experience including module evaluation questionnaires, feedback schemes run by specific service areas, such as the library, and student involvement in periodic review. The University's Student Experience Committee, which was commended by the student written submission, plays a major role in contributing to the oversight of the experience of all students.

33 Departmental staff-student committees produce an annual report, drawing together issues raised and actions taken during the year and these reports, together with the outputs from module evaluation questionnaires, are incorporated into the University's annual monitoring and periodic review processes. Students whom the audit team met were largely unaware of what happened as a result of their feedback through these mechanisms, an issue also raised in the 2004 audit report. The team considered that the University provides students with ample opportunities to provide feedback, and saw evidence that the University treats this feedback seriously and has systems in place to respond to any problems which student feedback exposes. Some departments, however, could improve the dissemination of actions taken in response to student feedback gathered through module evaluation questionnaires and staff-student committees and the team, therefore, considers it desirable for the University to ensure that action taken in response to feedback generated by these two mechanisms is communicated effectively to all students.

34 The University regards the role of student representatives as fundamental to its governance and commitment to an outstanding student experience. This is manifest in student representation on all of the University's key committees, the majority of places being filled by elected Students' Union officers. Departments are responsible for the election of students to sit on staff-student committees and from this pool of representatives, faculty and Senate representatives are elected. During the 2008-09 academic year there were delays in these elections, leading many representatives to miss the training offered by the Students' Union. The audit team would encourage the University to ensure that the election of student representatives happens on time in all departments.

35 One of the principles of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy is, 'educating students within a research-rich learning environment, designed and delivered by staff working at the frontiers of academic enquiry and professional practice'. Departmental action plans are expected to show how departments are working to deliver the Learning and Teaching Strategy, and those seen by the audit team demonstrated that departments are seeking to strengthen links between teaching and research in several ways. Students whom the team met were enthused by the research interests of teaching staff and welcomed the links made between these interests and the taught curriculum.

36 The University provides one distance-taught programme, an MBA which had, at the time of the audit visit, around 600 students registered in several countries in Asia and the Middle East. The University defines distance-taught provision as, 'provision where all aspects of the design, delivery, assessment and academic support [of or within the programme] are provided by University staff who travel to the point of delivery'. However, the University uses local agents to market the programme, help administer admissions, enrolments, assessment and examinations and facilitate access to local learning resources. In the view of the audit team, this constituted a collaborative arrangement, according to the definition in the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning),* published by QAA. The team, therefore, considers that it would be appropriate for the University's distance-taught provision to be considered in more detail during its audit of collaborative provision in 2011.

37 Library provision is informed by a number of feedback mechanisms and the audit team saw evidence that the library responds to any concerns raised. Furthermore, the student written submission commended the responsiveness of library staff to suggestions made by the Students' Union, and the students who met the team met were generally satisfied with the services and resources offered through the University's libraries, notwithstanding some concerns about the availability of core texts, which the library plans to address by making more of these texts available electronically.

38 Students who met the audit team were generally satisfied with the University's information technology provision and the student written submission commented on a significant improvement in access to computers by students since the last audit in 2004. In 2008, the University began installing, and transferring to, a new virtual learning environment; a key objective of the transfer is to widen and deepen the use of the virtual learning environment as a learning resource. The student written submission commended the installation of the new system and the associated staff training.

39 Responsibilities for admissions at both departmental and University level are described in guidance notes issued by the University Admissions Office. Since the previous audit, the University has established the Hull International Qualification Admission Standards, which provides University guidance regarding international qualifications.

40 Admissions procedures are informed by the University's Widening Participation Strategy, overseen by the Widening Participation Committee, reporting to the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, which has a number of aims in terms of widening participation, and raising educational aspirations and achievement in the region. Accreditation of prior learning is governed by a University Code of Practice.

41 The University provides an induction programme at departmental and university levels for new students, and international students also participate in an orientation programme. Students are provided with a range of handbooks including the University's online student handbook and departmental handbooks for programmes and modules. Student handbooks include information regarding complaints and academic appeals, which are governed by appropriate University regulations, and students whom the audit team met were clear about how to find this information. Faculty deans make an annual report on complaints in their area through quality enhancement reports, and heads of non-academic areas make an annual report to the Quality and Standards Committee.

42 The University uses personal supervisors as its primary means of providing academic and pastoral support to students. The 2004 Institutional audit report recommended that the University consider the desirability of, 'establishing a more explicit statement of the University's expectation of student contact with their personal supervisor in order to strengthen the present self-referral arrangements'. In response, the University revised its guidelines on personal supervision such that students may now expect their departments to define any specific departmental requirements as to how often supervisors and students should meet, and the audit team noted that some departmental handbooks contained such requirements. However, not all did so, an inconsistency reflected by the comments of the students whom the team met. Against this backdrop, the team would encourage the University to continue to monitor whether departmental requirements regarding personal supervisor contact are being communicated effectively to students.

43 The University's revised policy statement on personal development planning (PDP) makes explicit the responsibilities of the University, staff and students. The majority of students whom the audit team met, particularly those on taught programmes, did not actively engage with PDP, although some were aware of the opportunities available. The implementation of a work plan relating to this process is being overseen by the Learning and Teaching Support Unit's Senior Advisor for PDP, as chair of the associated implementation with a view to engaging more students with the PDP process. The audit team concluded that the University has recognised the need to increase participation and is taking positive steps to try to engage more students in this activity.

44 The 2004 Institutional audit report advised the University, 'to develop an institutional level strategy for the management of joint and 'with' degree programmes to include the more effective monitoring of equity in the student experience'. In response, the University introduced a Code of Practice in 2005 articulating its expectations for the management of these types of programmes. The audit team heard that the Student Experience Committee is revising the Code,

taking into consideration several sources of information and feedback. Evidence from students whom the audit team met, and from the student written submission, showed that there are a number of outstanding issues for students on joint and 'with' programmes, such as conflicting information in different departmental handbooks; the allocation and use of personal supervisors, particularly in the 'second' department, and timetabling. The audit team would, therefore, encourage the University to give a high priority to the ongoing review of its Code of Practice for joint and 'with' programmes.

45 Student Support Services provide the University's specialist support services, including Disability Services; Loans and Hardship; Counselling; the Hall Wardens; the Mature Students Advisor and the Careers Service. These services are co-located with the Students' Union Advice Centre at the Hull Campus, and the student written submission reported that the University and Students' Union services enjoy a good working relationship. Provision at the Scarborough Campus replicates, as far as possible, this arrangement, although the audit team noted that the Union's advice centre has a lower profile than Student Support Services at Scarborough, owing to its more limited resources.

46 The Staff Development Team provides all new staff with a comprehensive welcome pack and delivers a generic induction day three times a year. New academic staff are also assigned a mentor from within their department and may be asked to complete the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education, depending on their previous teaching experience. The audit team met several members of staff who confirmed that they had undergone induction and praised the postgraduate certificate.

47 The 2004 Institutional audit report made two desirable recommendations about staff support and development, the first regarding peer observation and the second staff appraisal, both of which echoed comments from the previous report of 2000. The report also commented that there was no clear locus of responsibility for the coordination of staff development. In response to the two recommendations, the University introduced a new Code of Practice for peer observation with effect from 2007, and adopted a single appraisal scheme, which came into full operation from January 2009. The audit team observed that deans had reported on progress in implementing the new peer observation scheme through faculty quality enhancement reports since January 2009. Human Resources is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the new appraisal scheme, although the team heard that this mechanism was not yet fully operational at the time of the audit. Staff who had experienced the new appraisal scheme commented that it was working more effectively than its predecessors.

48 The University has a very comprehensive staff development programme in place for 2008-09, coordinated by the Staff Development Team. Departments and faculties also hold staff development events including staff 'away days'. Staff praised the range of staff development opportunities and the accessibility of these opportunities for staff at both campuses, and commended the role of the Staff Development Team. The audit team identifies, as a feature of good practice, the range of staff development opportunities offered by the University.

49 The University's criteria for academic staff promotion recognise research and scholarship; administration; management and academic leadership; teaching and course development; and external and professional contribution. Staff whom the audit team met commented on the clarity of the process for promotion, and commended the feedback given to both successful and unsuccessful applicants.

50 The University's management of the quality of students' learning opportunities is guided by a comprehensive and coherent framework of published policies, which reflect the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points. The audit team identified some inconsistencies in the implementation of these policies, particularly in the dissemination of information to students regarding both actions taken in response to student feedback and the frequency of contact with supervisors. Overall, however, the University's management of learning

opportunities is sound. Staff development is strong, and the University has developed structures for identifying and responding to students' views which students regard as effective. The audit team, therefore, concluded that confidence can reasonably 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

51 The University's approach to quality enhancement is fundamentally twofold: the Learning and Teaching Strategy is primarily concerned with the enhancement of the practice of learning and teaching, while a second document, the Approach to Quality and Standards, focuses upon enhancing the systems and procedures used in the management of quality and standards.

52 The Learning and Teaching Strategy seeks to realise the University's vision for the Hull Student Experience through the achievement of seven strategic objectives. These expand to 34 detailed commitments which describe how the objectives are to be achieved. In July 2008, all academic and relevant service departments were requested to submit departmental action plans, highlighting current good practice and outlining steps to be taken in the period to 2012 for each objective. The intention is that these plans will be updated each year and be incorporated into a fully searchable database.

53 The Approach to Quality and Standards, which was also issued in July 2008, describes the deliberate steps the University is taking to enhance its management of quality and standards, through a rolling review of all University regulations and Codes of Practice and a series of five thematic initiatives, all for completion by 2012.

54 Each faculty produces an annual quality enhancement report, based on the annual monitoring of programmes, that seeks to draw out examples of good practice worthy of dissemination across the University. The quality enhancement reports are substantial documents, compiled in accordance with a detailed template that requires commentary on the current thematic initiatives and reference back to previous quality enhancement reports. They are scrutinised by a small team from outside the faculty, which produces a shorter report concentrating on instances of good practice that are judged to be transferable. Other means of dissemination include an annual report for the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee, which also draws upon periodic reviews as the second main source of good practice, and the Annual Learning and Teaching Conference, inaugurated in 2007.

55 The audit team found evidence that some of the good practice thus identified was indeed being transferred both within and between faculties. The team identifies as a feature of good practice the contribution made by the quality enhancement reports to the management of quality and standards and, in particular, to the identification and dissemination of good practice.

56 The University operates its own Teaching Fellowship scheme, which recognises excellence in teaching and encourages further development through the award of grants. The scheme is overseen by the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee, which is chaired by one of the University's National Teaching Fellows. Another of the National Teaching Fellows is one of the three part-time secondees, who together make up the University's Learning and Teaching Support Unit.

57 The audit team identifies as a feature of good practice the encouragement and recognition of excellence in learning and teaching that is provided by the University Teaching Fellowship scheme, and the contribution of both National and University Teaching Fellows to quality enhancement.

58 Some important elements of the University's approach to quality enhancement, including the departmental action plans that serve to implement the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the complementary Approach to Quality and Standards, are recent innovations, as is the Learning and Teaching Support Unit in its present form. The University acknowledged that further progress

is needed before everything is functioning as is intended. The audit team was satisfied, however, by the progress that had been achieved. Furthermore, the University's overall approach to quality enhancement had already yielded what the team identify as two features of good practice.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

59 This section deals solely with the Hull York Medical School (HYMS). All other programmes delivered by the University of Hull in collaboration with other institutions will be the subject of a separate collaborative provision audit in March 2011.

60 HYMS was established in response to the national demand for more doctors and graduated its first cohort of students in July 2008. The management and governance of the School are overseen by a joint board, which is a committee of the Hull and York University Councils and includes members approved by the third element of the partnership, the regional National Health Service. Academic governance is the responsibility of a joint senate committee. The HYMS Board of Studies reports to the Joint Senate Committee via a joint learning and teaching committee of the two Universities.

61 HYMS programmes lead to joint awards by the two universities, which are governed by a distinct quality and standards framework approved by the Joint Senate Committee. The audit team saw, among other documentation: the minutes of the Joint Senate Committee and the Joint Learning and Teaching Committee; the annual programme reports for the last two years, which included reports from and responses to external examiners, and the report of a periodic review of HYMS conducted in 2008. It also met members of a staff and a student. The audit team concluded that HYMS has developed a comprehensive set of procedures for the management of quality and standards that are being deployed effectively.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

62 The University's management of the quality and standards of its research degree programmes is integrated within its quality assurance framework. Executive responsibility for these programmes rests with the Director of the Graduate School, who reports to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise), while deliberative oversight is provided by the Research Degrees Committee, chaired by the Director. The Research Degrees Committee is responsible for all matters relating to the academic progress of research students and for the award of degrees and other research qualifications. The effectiveness of the Research Degrees Committee is discussed in more detail at the end of this section.

63 The University has a comprehensive set of procedures for managing the quality and standards of its research degree programmes. Its Quality Handbook includes a Code of Practice for postgraduate research students, in the form of a description of the University's standards, criteria and policies for research degrees.

64 Although the University reviews its research degree programmes as part of periodic review, it has recognised that periodic review panels tend not to consider the full research student experience, and has resolved to make the consideration of research degrees within periodic review more explicit.

65 The University conducts research across a wide range of subject areas and has, according to the results of the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, particular strengths in health studies, geography, politics, social work, English, history and dance, drama and performing arts. Its Strategic Plan has the aim of expanding and promoting excellence in research, including by developing a larger community of postgraduate research students. The Graduate School provides a range of facilities for research students, including a common room, open-access computers and quiet study space, and manages the Postgraduate Training Scheme.

66 Departmental admissions officers consider research proposals offered by prospective students and determine whether the applicant should be offered a place. Successful applicants register directly with departments, which offer useful induction programmes to supplement that provided by the Graduate School.

67 Departments are responsible for appointing principal and second supervisors for each research student and for ensuring that supervisors have sufficient expertise. Inexperienced supervisors may attend the University's training programme, a series of four workshops covering all aspects of supervisory role.

68 The University Code of Practice sets out expectations for the frequency of contact between supervisors and students. The content and outcomes from meetings are recorded by the supervisor, in consultation with the student.

69 Annual monitoring of the progress of research students rests upon reports which supervisors and students are separately required to complete. These reports play a particularly important procedural role in highlighting any instances where the relationship between supervisor and research student is not working well. Within this context, the audit team noted that in two faculties, about one in five research students and one in 10 supervisors had not contributed to annual monitoring in 2007-08. The team also noted that there was little awareness of annual monitoring among the research students it met. The team, therefore, considers it advisable for the University to implement consistently the requirements of its Code of Practice that annual monitoring reports are completed by postgraduate research students and their supervisors.

70 The Postgraduate Training Scheme offers modules in a range of generic skills, including communications and information technology. Students whom the audit team met commended the Scheme and confirmed that the training they had received was timely and helpful.

71 Training for research students who teach is offered as part of the Postgraduate Training Scheme. The audit team noted that no more than three students undertook this training in 2008-09 and heard from both students and staff that students are not required to have undergone any training before undertaking teaching or demonstrating duties. The team considered that, although there was no evidence that standards or quality had been compromised by any lack of training of research students who teach, a clearer oversight of the process by which departments ensure that such students are adequately prepared would improve the quality of the learning opportunities of those whom the students were teaching. The team, therefore, considers it desirable for the University to strengthen its oversight of the process by which departments ensure that postgraduate research students who teach are adequately prepared to do so.

72 The University gathers feedback on student views from the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and the International Student Barometer, as well as from research student representation on departmental staff/student committees.

73 The arrangements for the assessment of research degrees are described in the Programme Regulations, supplemented by the Standards and Criteria for Research Degrees.

74 The University has a full set of procedures for handling complaints and appeals in respect of research students, as described for students in the Postgraduate Research Code of Practice.

75 The Research Degrees Committee's terms of reference state that it is accountable for monitoring the research degree provision and research student experience, including the supervision of research students. In considering the effectiveness of the Committee in discharging these responsibilities, the audit team noted that the only formal mechanism by which the Committee could track the progress of research students was the annual reporting process, whose implementation was not consistent (see paragraph 69). Other potential sources of information

about students' progress, such as progression and completion statistics, were not considered. The team noted that this was inconsistent with the guidance in the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, which states that there should be formal opportunities for institutional committees to consider statistical information relating to postgraduate research programmes. The team, therefore, considers it advisable for the University to extend the range of information it uses to assure itself about the standards and quality of research degree programmes.

76 With the exception of tracking the progress of research students, and that of oversight of the process of preparing research students to teach, the audit team considers that the University's management of its research degree programmes meets the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1*, published by QAA.

Section 7: Published information

77 The University publishes a wide variety of information for prospective students, in both electronic and paper form. This includes the full and part-time prospectuses, the website, and a wide range of handbooks at departmental level. The University offers additional information and guidance to students in a variety of forms, which students regard as being detailed, accurate and timely.

78 The University's developing web policy affirms the main function of the website as being to inform and attract prospective students. The Marketing and Communications Web Team, deans and heads of departments are responsible for the maintenance of web pages, which relate to the University, to a faculty and to a department, respectively.

79 Information published by each department, including handbooks, is examined by periodic reviews and, from 2008-09, reports of periodic reviews will be required to comment explicitly on students' views of published information. The students whom the audit team met regarded departmental handbooks for research students and for taught programmes as comprehensive, detailed and helpful.

80 The University's Code of Practice specifies that external examiners' reports and departmental responses should be shared with students through staff-student committees. The audit team read the minutes of several departmental committees, which made it clear that this requirement was not always fulfilled. Student members of staff-student committees who met the team confirmed that they had not seen external examiners' reports. The audit team considers it desirable for the University to implement consistently the requirements in its Code of Practice that external examiner reports, and departmental responses to external examiner reports, are shared with students through staff-student committees.

81 With that exception, the audit team concluded that the University has established robust procedures for maintaining the accuracy, completeness and availability of the information that it publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

82 Features of good practice identified by the audit team:

- the range of information designed to make the University's Quality and Standards Framework more accessible to all types of staff, including the Implementation Guides, Quality and Standards Updates and 'Working with…' series of leaflets (paragraph 15)
- the range of staff development opportunities on offer (paragraph 48)
- the contribution made by Quality Enhancement Reports to the management of quality and standards and, in particular, to the identification and dissemination of good practice (paragraph 55)

- the encouragement and recognition of excellence in learning and teaching that is provided by the University Teaching Fellowship scheme, and the contribution of both National and University Teaching Fellows to quality enhancement (paragraph 57).

83 Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- to implement consistently the requirements of its Code of Practice that annual monitoring reports are completed by postgraduate research students and their supervisors (paragraph 69)
- to extend the range of information it uses to assure itself about the standards and quality of research degree programmes (paragraph 75).

84 Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- to ensure that any action taken as a result of student feedback from module evaluation questionnaires and staff-student committees is communicated effectively to all students (paragraph 33)
- to strengthen its oversight of the process by which departments ensure that postgraduate research students who teach are adequately prepared to do so (paragraph 71)
- to implement consistently the requirements in its Code of Practice that external examiner reports, and departmental responses to external examiner reports, are shared with students through staff-student committees (paragraph 80).

Appendix

The University of Hull's response to the Institutional audit report

The University welcomes the judgement of the QAA audit team that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of current and likely future management of the academic standards of our awards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

We are particularly pleased that the report endorses our view of the range of good practice within the University, notably:

- The encouragement and recognition of excellence in learning and teaching that is provided by the University Teaching Fellowship scheme and the contribution of both National and University Teaching Fellows to quality enhancement.
- The range of information designed to make the University's Quality and Standards Framework more accessible to all types of staff, including the Implementation Guides, Quality and Standards Updates and 'Working with…' series of leaflets.
- The range of staff development opportunities on offer.
- The contribution made by Quality Enhancement Reports to the management of quality and standards and in particular to the identification and dissemination of good practice.

We are responding positively - in partnership with the Students' Union - to the specific recommendations contained in the report, with oversight by the Quality and Standards Committee. A number of actions will include the refinement of existing policies and procedures and of their implementation to address issues relating to aspects of the management of research degree provision, including the annual monitoring process, the provision of feedback to students arising from issues raised in module evaluation and staff/student committees, and the sharing of external examiners' reports with student representatives.

The University views the outcome of the audit as further evidence that we continue to enhance our management of learning opportunities and academic standards; in particular we welcome the conclusion that our strategy for quality enhancement is 'sound and already effective in identifying and disseminating good practice'.

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