

**University of Hull**

**April 2009**

## **Annex to the report**

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## Introduction

A team of auditors 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 19)
- the range of staff development opportunities on offer (paragraph 95)
- 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 112)

- 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 117).

### 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 143)
- extend the range of information it uses to assure itself about the standards and quality of research degree programmes (paragraph 152).

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 56)
- strengthen its oversight of the process by which departments ensure that postgraduate research students who teach are adequately prepared to do so (paragraph 146)
- 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 160).

## Section 1: Introduction and background

### The University and its mission

1 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.

2 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.

3 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; Business School; Hull York Medical School; Health and Social Care; Institute for Learning; Postgraduate Medical Institute; and Science.

4 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
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,824</b>	<b>3,442</b>	<b>17,266</b>

5 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'.

### **The information base for the audit**

6 The audit team had access to the reports of the following QAA reviews: the Institutional audit of the University of Hull, November 2004; the Major review of healthcare programmes report of the University of Hull for Allied Health Professions, May 2006; the Major review of healthcare programmes report of the University of Hull for Nursing and Midwifery, February 2004; and the QAA Review of postgraduate research degree programmes, for the University of Hull, July 2006.

7 The University provided the audit team with a Briefing Paper outlining its approach to managing quality and standards, supporting information, as cited in the Briefing Paper, and sets of documents relating to the sampling audit trails selected by the team.

8 The Hull University Union produced a student written submission (SWS) covering the accuracy of the information provided for students, the experience of students as learners and students' involvement in quality assurance processes.

9 The audit team was given full access to the University's internal documents on the Portal. It met groups of staff and students, according to a programme agreed with the University.

### **Developments since the last audit**

10 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.

11 An annex to the Briefing Paper described the University's response to each of these recommendations. The annex 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. Each of these is discussed in detail under the relevant headings below.

### **The institution's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities**

12 The development, approval and implementation of the University's framework for managing academic 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 (SMT), 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 SMT.

13 Senate is the University's most senior academic committee. It is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and its membership includes the pro-vice-chancellors, the faculty deans, a number of other academic staff and no fewer than 11 student representatives. The Academic Board, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, 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 that reports to the Academic Board. Learning and teaching are overseen by the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee (ULTAC); quality and standards for on-campus provision is overseen by the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC).

14 Within SMT, the senior manager with responsibility for academic standards and quality is the Quality Director, University Registrar and Secretary, who chairs QSC and line-manages the University Quality Office, which has operational responsibility for maintaining the University's quality assurance framework and for servicing the University's key quality committees. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) also plays an important role in the management of quality by chairing ULTAC, 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 designated the deputy chair of ULTAC, and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching the deputy chair of QSC.

15 Each faculty is led by a dean or director, who reports to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. 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.

16 Each faculty has a board, which is responsible for all matters falling within the remit of the faculty, including learning and teaching, quality, research and reach-out, and financial matters. Each faculty has also established joint or separate committees, with responsibilities for overseeing learning, teaching and assessment, and quality and standards.

17 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.

### **Effectiveness of the framework**

18 The University's expectations for the academic standards and quality of its provision are articulated through a framework comprising regulations approved by Senate, and Codes of Practice approved by Academic Board on the advice of QSC. This framework emphasises clarity of responsibilities and expectations, reflected in the consistent use of mandatory, advisable and desirable expectations in Codes of Practice; and the role of academic staff in defining and maintaining standards, and ensuring the quality of learning opportunities, supported by specialist services such as the library.

19 All aspects of the University's framework are published in its Quality Handbook, which is published on the University's website. 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 who the team met confirmed that the documents were helpful and widely used. The team 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, including the Implementation Guides, Quality and Standards Updates and 'Working with...' series of leaflets.

## **Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards**

### **Approval, monitoring and review of award standards**

#### **Programme approval**

20 There are three stages in the University's procedure for approval of new programmes. The first is development consent, which is granted by the Academic Board as part of the annual planning round. At this stage, consideration is given to likely demand for the programme and the resources to provide it, and alignment with strategic priorities of the department and the University as a whole. The second stage is planning permission, which is given by faculty planning permission committees (PPCs). This involves consideration of the aims and intended learning outcomes of the programme, the module structure and the staffing involved; it is informed by external advice about likely recruitment and demand. The final step is full approval, after which recruitment may commence. This is given by a full approval panel (FAP), again constituted at faculty level, but with a chair who is either a dean or deputy dean from another faculty and a member of the Programme Approvals Monitoring and Enhancement Committee (PAMEC). It involves consideration of the full programme specification and there is a requirement for external academic comment about the standard of the award. PAMEC meets periodically to consider the effectiveness of, and enhancements to, the programme approval procedure.

21 The audit team scrutinised two examples of programme approvals from within the last two academic years. These confirmed that the published procedure was being followed. The team noted that external advice was detailed and thorough, and was used to inform the development and approval of the programmes, and the use of subject benchmark statements and *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) was appropriate and explicit.

22 The University also has procedures for approval of amendments to programmes, and for approval of new modules. Major amendments include changes to award title, programme structure or learning outcomes, or to the location or mode of delivery: these require external academic advice and are subject to approval by FAPs. Minor amendments and new modules are approved by PPCs. Temporary suspension of recruitment to a programme may be approved by a PPC, but complete withdrawal of a programme requires the approval of a FAP and includes approval of an exit strategy to safeguard the interests of students registered for the award.

#### **Annual monitoring**

23 The procedure for annual monitoring of programmes encompasses the assurance of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, and the enhancement of provision. Within departments, programme teams complete a pro forma that addresses a wide range of topics: developments since the previous year, issues relating to assessment and examination, student support and feedback, learning resources and student achievement. There is a requirement to identify issues which can be addressed within the department and matters that require attention by the faculty or University, and to confirm that the learning outcomes continue to be appropriate for the standard of the award.

24 Departmental reports are considered by faculties, which prepare overview quality enhancement reports (QERs) for the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC). The template for QERs is wide-ranging and includes developments in the faculty's portfolio of programmes, the effectiveness of quality assurance and enhancement processes, and questions relating to student progress and achievement, academic standards, learning resources and staffing. The emphasis is on evaluation and follow-up of issues identified in previous reports; faculties are also asked to comment on annual themes prescribed by QSC. Faculty QERs are reviewed by a small panel from QSC, in order to identify matters that need to be noted and followed up, either by QSC or the faculty.

25 The audit team read documentation from annual reviews completed over the last three academic years (2005-06 to 2007-08), which evidenced that the procedures described above were followed. The departmental reports were generally thorough; a number of issues were flagged for attention by the faculty or University, but actions taken within departments, including follow-up to external examiners' reports and issues identified in previous years, were also reported. The faculty QERs were comprehensive, thorough and evaluative in their approach. Again, actions taken in response to issues raised in previous years, including action plans from periodic reviews, were reported. The QERs also included summaries of external examiner reports, including issues identified for attention, points of good practice, and any issues of serious concern. The overview reports prepared by the QSC panels were also thorough, and appropriately independent of the faculty concerned; issues for the attention of the faculty and the University were identified separately.

26 At the time of the audit, the University was piloting a new version of the annual monitoring procedure described above, aimed at limiting the amount of documentation produced and reported through annual monitoring to a record of exceptions to the University's regulations and Codes of Practice. The pilot had been successful and there was a recommendation to QSC that it should be continued and extended for a further year.

### **Periodic review**

27 The University stipulates that provision in every subject is reviewed in depth at least once every five years. The procedure involves the preparation of a self-evaluation document (SED) by the providing department and a process of scrutiny by a review panel acting on behalf of QSC. The template for the SED is detailed and comprehensive, covering all aspects of the provision under review, including the assurance of standards and quality, and quality enhancement. The University expects students to be involved, both in the preparation of the SED and in the actual review; there is a requirement for the panel to hold at least two meetings with students, one with research students and one with students following taught programmes. The panel membership includes two members of staff external to the providing department, and two who are external to the University.

28 The audit team read documentation relating to three recent periodic reviews. One of these used a sampling approach, justified by the fact that the focus of review is on the processes operating within a department, rather than the detail of every programme in the subject area. It is an approach that the University intends to continue when reviewing provision in large and complex subject areas.

29 The SEDs that the audit team saw were comprehensive and the review reports showed that the procedure for periodic review had been followed. The review panels included appropriate external representation, both academic and professional, and there was evidence of student involvement, both in the preparation of the SEDs and in meetings with the panels. The panel reports were thorough and identified areas of strength and matters for further development; issues to be addressed by the University were identified separately from those for the attention of the department or faculty. The reviews were reported to QSC, as well as being included in the faculty QERs.



30 Besides piloting a modified procedure for annual monitoring, at the time of the audit, the University had recently considered how it was able to ensure the continuing validity and relevance of its programmes. It had concluded that its procedures for annual monitoring and review, together with its formal approval of module and programme changes when they take place, were sufficient for this purpose, and it had issued guidance to staff involved in these processes to ensure that questions of currency and relevance are explicitly addressed.

31 In view of the comprehensive scope and detail of the procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review, the evidence of the effectiveness of their operation, and the use made of external opinion and the Academic Infrastructure in this context, the audit team concluded that these procedures make an effective contribution to the assurance of the standard of the University's awards.

### **External examiners**

32 The University adopted a new Code of Practice on external examining in 2007, in response to the QAA Institutional audit report of 2004, which had recommended the clarification and more consistent implementation of the University's expectations and requirements for the role of external examiners. In developing its policies in this area, the University took cognisance of the *Code of practice*, the views of its own staff and external examiners, and good practice in the sector. As recommended in the 2004 audit report, the new policy defines clearly the role and responsibilities of external examiners and the scope and arrangements for their participation in the assessment process.

33 External examiners are nominated by heads of department and are appointed by QSC, under criteria specified in the University's Code of Practice. Appointments are normally for three years, with the possibility of extension to four. Newly appointed external examiners are inducted both by the University and by the department. These induction processes involve the provision of documentary information, including copies of the University Code of Practice; regulations; course handbooks and programme specifications; an invitation to meet with staff and students of the department, and an invitation to attend a University induction event.

34 External examiners are further supported by material on the University Quality Office website and by an occasional newsletter that updates them about changes in the University's practice and expectations.

35 External examiners are required to submit an annual report using a pro forma that asks for qualitative comments rather than yes/no replies. Incoming reports are read and acknowledged by the Vice Chancellor, and any serious concerns are followed up at institutional level by the University Quality Office. Reports are copied to faculties, and departments are required to report their responses and follow-up actions to faculties, as well as to external examiners themselves. The QER process described in the previous section provides a systematic mechanism for institutional oversight of these responses to external examiners' reports; issues of serious concern are also reported directly to QSC.

36 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.

### **Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points**

37 The University's engagement with national subject benchmark statements and with the FHEQ is achieved primarily through its procedures for programme approval and review. The University's regulatory framework ensures that its programme requirements are aligned with the FHEQ and its template for programme specifications, as used in its procedures for programme approval and review, promotes recognition of the expectations of subject benchmark statements.

38 The University takes account of the *Code of practice* by participating in its development and by asking relevant offices to consider the implications for the University when new or revised sections of the *Code* are issued. This is undertaken under the general oversight of QSC, and reports on the implications of revisions to the *Code* are submitted to QSC from time to time.

39 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. Its Codes of Practice and policy documents reflect the expectations of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*.

40 The University takes account of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies' (PSRB) requirements through its procedures for programme approval and review, which allow for external advice to be sought from employer representatives and organisations as well as from academic staff. An overview of these expectations is maintained by PAMEC, through its members chairing FAPs. The University has recently begun to adapt its review process, where appropriate, to facilitate more effective working with PSRBs, whose accreditation and inspection reports are considered in the course of annual monitoring, and an overview of them is achieved through QERs.

41 The audit team concluded that the University is making effective use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points in assuring the standard of its awards.

### **Assessment policies and regulations**

42 The University has a comprehensive Code of Practice on Assessment Procedures, which it developed as part of a review of assessment and examination procedures in 2007. The Code sets out an assessment tariff that is designed to achieve parity in the volume of assessment between programmes, and to avoid excessive assessment loads. The Code also sets out the University's expectations with regard to anonymity in assessment and feedback to students. The Code is supplemented by institutional statements of the grading criteria to be used at each level of attainment within programmes. Other Codes of Practice govern the examination process, including the conduct of examination boards, the consideration of mitigating circumstances and decisions regarding the progression of students.

43 The QAA Institutional audit of 2004 recommended that the University ensure a more consistent application of assessment criteria at programme level. The present audit team noted that the Codes of Practice described above address this issue explicitly, and observed that consistency in the application of assessment criteria between programmes was also being considered in the course of annual monitoring and periodic review.

44 The University has two subcommittees that play important roles in the way assessment is managed and carried out. One is the Student Progress Committee, which reports to QSC and 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 other is the Assessment Committee, which has a more developmental role and advises both QSC and the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee. This Committee has produced a number of guidance documents and resources, including examples of good practice in giving assessment feedback to students, statements of grading criteria for each level of attainment, and a 'learning outcomes tool' that helps staff define and express intended learning outcomes at each level.

45 Assessment requirements, including the interpretation of marking scales and information about examinations, coursework and plagiarism, 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 which applied to their programmes.

46 The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for the assessment of students are making an effective contribution to the assurance of the academic standards of its awards.

## Management information - statistics

47 The University produces annually a student statistics handbook, which provides a digest of statistical information at the level of each faculty, department and programme. The handbook includes applications and admissions data, for example, with entry qualifications, analysis by geography, gender, age, 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. It also shows comparisons with sector means, competitor institutions and other faculties within the University. The handbook also includes a cohort analysis of progression through each programme.

48 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. As part of the annual monitoring pilot noted above, the University is exploring the use of 'benchmark parameters' to promote more effective use of, and reflection on, statistical data in the context of managing the standard and quality of its programmes.

49 Staff whom the audit team met confirmed that the statistical data provided by the University enables them to monitor the standard of students' work and are sufficient for their reporting needs. The team concluded that the University is making effective use of management information in assuring the standard of its awards.

50 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 the quality of learning opportunities

### Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

51 In the Briefing Paper, the University stated that the, 'management of the quality of learning opportunities is systematically informed by the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points'. This is manifest in the close alignment, in terms of both structure and coverage, between the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, and the University's own Codes of Practice, which are drawn together within the Quality Handbook. The responsibility for keeping abreast of changes to the *Code* falls to the relevant support service, for example, the University Quality Office, which makes recommendations to the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC) for amendments to the University Code wherever necessary. The audit team saw evidence in QSC minutes that this mechanism was operating effectively. In addition, the University Codes are subject to periodic review and revision as part of the University's five-year programme of review of its Quality and Standards Framework. Staff are informed of any changes to the Codes through Quality and Standards Updates, published by the University Quality Office.

52 The audit team concluded that the University is making effective use of the *Code of practice* in the management of learning opportunities.

### Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

53 The University's procedures for programme approval, monitoring and periodic review, described in Section 2 of this Annex, each expect programme teams, and external experts where they are involved, to consider the availability of appropriate learning opportunities for students, alongside academic standards. Salient features of these processes include the correspondence between the first stage of programme approval and the annual planning round, which ensures that the staffing and other resource requirements of new programmes are considered at the outset; the broad coverage of the annual quality enhancement reports (QERs), which draw on the views of students and external examiners in reporting on the adequacy of learning opportunities; and the involvement of students in periodic review, including in the preparation

of the department's self-evaluation document. The audit team's scrutiny of a range of documents associated with these processes confirmed that they were each contributing effectively to the sound management of learning opportunities.

### **Management information - feedback from students**

54 According to the Briefing Paper, the University is committed to maintaining an environment in which students know that there is a range of opportunities to provide feedback about all aspects of their learning experience. The range of opportunities includes: module evaluation questionnaires; the National Student Survey; feedback schemes run by specific service areas, such as the library; student representation on departmental, faculty and University committees; student involvement in periodic review, and the participation of Students' Union officers in University working groups. Students are made aware of many of these opportunities primarily through student handbooks; the University's template for student handbooks obliges departments to explain the feedback procedures on offer.

55 The University's Code of Practice for annual monitoring states that departments must draw on student feedback, including the results of module evaluation questionnaires and the minutes of staff-student committees, in undertaking the critical reflection upon which annual monitoring is based. The operation of staff-student committees is subject to a separate Code of Practice on student representation, which commits all departments to: providing a forum through which staff and students can communicate, with sufficient regularity, on the full range of matters affecting the student experience; ensuring that students are able to participate in these fora in a meaningful way; and ensuring that any issues raised by students are logged, responded to and disseminated to students within the department in question. Different departments discharge these commitments in slightly different ways. In one school, for example, each subject area has its own staff-student committee that feeds into overarching committees at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. One faculty has created an additional committee for undergraduate joint and 'with' programmes. Meetings of staff-student committees covering programmes delivered at the Hull and Scarborough campuses alternate between the two sites. Committees for students on distance-taught programmes, such as the MBA (Distance-taught) programme, are held 'in country' with staff from the University attending.

56 Students whom the audit team met, confirmed that they had completed questionnaires at the end of modules and in some cases had participated in mid-module focus groups. They also confirmed that staff-student committees took place and gave them the opportunity to communicate with staff about a wide range of issues, as the Code of Practice intends. However, students also commented that they were often unaware of the responses departments made to module evaluation questionnaires and discussion at staff-student committees and, in some cases, believed that the minutes of staff-student committees were confidential. This suggested that some departments were failing to discharge effectively their responsibility for the dissemination of issues raised in staff-student committees and the actions they take in response. The team noted that students' comments echoed concerns in the 2004 QAA Institutional audit report about the reporting of actions taken in response to student feedback. The team, therefore, considers it 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.

57 The primary university-level committee with responsibility for considering students' views is the Student Experience Committee. The Committee brings together senior staff from several faculties and support services, including Student Support Services, the Library and Computing Services, with student representatives from each faculty and the Students' Union to identify and research student issues, make recommendations for enhancing the quality of student provision and contribute to the implementation and monitoring of policies relating to the student experience. The Committee reports to the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee (ULTAC) and is consulted by ULTAC and QSC on the development of new policies, procedures and Codes of

Practice. Much of the Committee's work is conducted through task and monitoring groups, for example the recent task group on feedback and monitoring group on library resources. The student written submission (SWS) commended the Committee's contribution in helping to, 'get the student voice across.' The minutes of Committee meetings demonstrated that it focuses clearly on the student learning experience and plays an important role in addressing a range of important issues.

58 The University also makes use of the feedback generated by the National Student Survey (NSS) and the International Student Barometer. The audit team saw evidence that the results from the NSS are considered through ULTAC and are also referred to departments for further comment and action wherever necessary. Specific service areas, such as the library, also gather student feedback on the services they provide. This is considered in paragraphs 70 to 75 below.

59 The audit team concluded that the University provides students with an ample number of opportunities to provide feedback within different levels of the University, and saw much evidence, particularly within annual monitoring and periodic review, 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.

### **Role of students in quality assurance**

60 The University's Code of Practice on student representation sets out the joint commitment of the University and Students' Union, to implement an effective and coherent system of student representation at all levels of the institution. The system is hierarchical: at programme level, students elect colleagues to sit on staff-student committees; from the pool of staff-student committee representatives faculty representatives are elected, and from these are elected Senate representatives. All student representatives are also members of the Students' Union Academic Council.

61 Students are represented on the University's central committees mainly through officers of the Students' Union. The Union President is a member of Council, Senate and Academic Board and the Vice President (Academic Representation) is a member of ULTAC and QSC.

62 Departments are responsible for the election of students to staff-student committees at the beginning of the academic year. The names of successful candidates are forwarded to the Students' Union, which provides an induction and training programme. During the 2008-09 academic year, there had been delays in these elections, leading many representatives to miss the training. The Students' Union has assumed responsibility for the administration of the student representative network at the Scarborough Campus for a trial period. The audit team learned that this arrangement may be extended to the Hull site, subject to a review in the second semester.

63 The University is investigating ways of extending students' involvement in quality assurance, in particular, within programme approval and periodic review, as part of a thematic enhancement project.

64 The audit team concluded that the University has developed effective systems to involve students in the management of quality assurance. The team would, however, encourage the University to ensure that the election of student representatives happens on time in all departments.

### **Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities**

65 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'. The audit team learned that this principle is reflected in a requirement for all academic staff to teach, in support for the development of new taught programmes in areas where the University is strong in research

(such as logistics), and in the use of research methods modules, projects and dissertations for undergraduates in their final years. Departments are required to produce departmental action plans showing how they are working to deliver the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The team saw several examples within these action plans of the ways in which departments were seeking to strengthen links between teaching and research, including those outlined above. The use of departmental action plans is discussed in more detail in section four. The team also learned that the University's next annual learning and teaching conference will focus on the issue of research-informed teaching.

66 Students whom the audit team met were clearly enthused by the research interests of their teaching staff and welcomed the links made between these interests and the taught curriculum. Their comments reinforced the evidence from the departmental action plans that the University has succeeded in cultivating a research-rich teaching environment.

### **Other modes of study**

67 The University provides a small number of programmes by distance learning, based on learning resources delivered through its website. At the time of the audit, there were 55 students registered on these programmes. The University operates its normal quality assurance procedures in respect of distance-learning programmes, including its requirement for the peer observation of teaching, which it has adapted and applied to distance learning through the 'Collaborative Observation of On-line Learning' project. The audit team regarded the project as an innovative way of dealing with the special characteristics of distance-learning provision, although at the time of the audit, it was too early to evaluate its effectiveness. Evidence from programme approval and annual monitoring confirmed to the team that the University was applying the remainder of its normal quality assurance procedures to distance-learning provision, and that the academic standards and quality of this provision were secure.

68 The University provides one distance-taught programme, an MBA, which, at the time of the audit, had around 600 students registered in several countries in Asia and the Middle East. According to the Briefing Paper, 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'. The audit team noted, however, that 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 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)*. The team considered, therefore, 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.

69 The provision of work placements and work-based learning is subject to a dedicated Code of Practice, which sets out the University's expectations of departments, students and placement providers and describes the processes for the monitoring and evaluation of placements by departments. The Code was recently reviewed in the light of revisions to the *Code of practice, Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*. The SWS reported that students found work placements useful and enjoyable, although some felt that, during the placement, there was a lack of communication from faculties. Students whom the audit team met were also very supportive of the placement opportunities made available to them, and felt the support offered to them by their departments was appropriate.

## Resources for learning

70 Executive responsibility for learning resources rests with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching); deliberative responsibility lies primarily with the Information Services Committee, one of the seven strategic committees that report to Academic Board (see paragraph 13). The remit of the Information Services Committee, which is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching, includes formulating and implementing relevant policies and procedures, making recommendations regarding strategic priorities for investment and oversight of information services and its performance against strategic targets. The Student Experience Committee also plays a role in monitoring the provision of learning resources, which the audit team observed through its minutes; and the Learning and Teaching Spaces Effectiveness Committee advises ULTAC on the use of teaching rooms.

71 Operational responsibility for the provision of learning resources rests with Academic Services. Academic Services takes its strategic lead in this area from the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the Library Development Strategy. At the time of the audit, the University was in the process of reviewing its General Information Strategy and IT Investment Plan to promote a closer alignment with the Learning and Teaching Strategy. In addition, Academic Services is currently being restructured to achieve a better correspondence with corporate needs. The audit team heard during the visit that support services are reviewed by the University, although there is no formal written procedure or timetable relating to this procedure.

72 Library services are delivered through the Brynmor Jones Library on the Hull Campus and the Keith Donaldson Library at Scarborough. Library provision is informed by the Library User Group, the Library's comment and feedback scheme and consultation with departments, faculties and the Students' Union. The Library also uses a balanced scorecard approach to measuring its own performance against the areas of customer service, finances, internal processes and learning and growth. The audit team saw much evidence that the Library responded quickly to any concerns which these various feedback and monitoring mechanisms exposed, in particular through the Scarborough Strategy, part of which is dedicated to improving library resources at the Keith Donaldson Library in response to students' complaints. Furthermore, the SWS commended the responsiveness of library staff to suggestions made by the Students' Union, and the students who met the team 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.

73 Computing Services provides communications and information technology infrastructure services. These include a range of network services for the Hull and Scarborough campuses and halls of residence, 24-hour computing facilities at Hull and support for a wide range of hardware and software. Computing Services also provides staffed helpdesks on both campuses. Students who met the audit team were generally satisfied with the University's information technology provision and the SWS commented on a significant improvement in access to computers by students since the last audit in 2004.

74 In 2008, the University began installing and transferring to a new virtual learning environment, prompted by the recognition that its two current platforms were outdated and incompatible with other systems. Implementation of the new virtual learning environment is being overseen by a steering group chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching). A key objective of the transfer is to widen and deepen the use of the virtual learning environment as a learning resource. Training has been made available for staff in summer 2009; for example, the Learning and Teaching Support Unit will run a three-day residential retreat on the new system, and a dedicated support team created. The SWS commended the installation of the new system and the associated staff training.

75 The audit team concluded that the University has adopted an effective approach to the management, provision and monitoring of learning resources.

## Admissions policy

76 Responsibilities for admissions are described in the form of guidance notes for undergraduate and postgraduate admissions issued by the University Admissions Office. Separate admissions arrangements apply to research degree programmes (see Section 6 below). The academic component of admissions decisions is made by departmental admissions tutors, whose terms of reference are set out in a dedicated section of the Quality Handbook. The non-academic component of admissions decisions, such as whether the applicant satisfies the general matriculation requirements, is the responsibility of the Admissions Office. Faculty admissions tutors coordinate admissions activity. For international students, 'in country' offers are made by International Officers and by Admissions Office staff following agreement with departments, within agreed entry criteria. Since the last Institutional audit the University has established the Hull International Qualification Admission Standards, which provides standard guidance for all departments considering international qualifications, and has been informed by advice from the National Academic Recognition Information Centres. Where an applicant is rejected by a department, the decision is checked by the Admissions Office, to ensure that it conforms to the University's Equal Opportunities Code.

77 Institutional oversight of admissions is provided by the Student Recruitment Committee, which reports to Academic Board, and by QSC, which focuses on the fairness and transparency of the procedures. The audit team noted in the minutes of the Student Recruitment Committee the regular reporting and discussion of admissions statistics. The Committee also receives an annual report on complaints about admissions. The report for the period 2006-08 showed a very small number of formal complaints had been received. The Committee is supported by the Entry Qualifications Group, which considers proposals for the recognition of new qualifications.

78 The University's Widening Participation Strategy has several aims in terms of widening participation, and raising educational aspirations and achievement in the region. The Strategy is accompanied by an action plan and the University publishes a directory of widening participation on its Portal. The Widening Participation Committee, reporting to ULTAC, oversees the implementation of the strategy.

79 Accreditation of prior learning is governed by a University Code of Practice, revised in 2007, which sets out guidance and expectations for staff determining applications for the accreditation of prior learning, both certificated and experiential.

80 The University stated in its Briefing Paper that its admissions process is informed by the *Code of practice*, sector good practice and relevant legislation. The audit team concurred with this view. In addition, it concluded that the detailed guidance notes and terms of reference for admissions tutors ensure that the University's policies are implemented consistently.

## Student support

81 The University's Quality Handbook, Section K, sets out its requirements for student information, representation and support. Within Section K, a Code of Practice on 'Welcome, Orientation and Induction' describes how the University devotes the first week of every academic session to orientation and induction, to allow students to become fully accustomed to life and study in the University, so that by the beginning of week two they are ready to begin the substantive programme of study. The Code of Practice contains a matrix detailing what the department and the University should provide to new students, both before they arrive at the University, drawing on a set of templates for pre-arrival communication published as an annex to the Code, and before the end of the first week. International students arrive a week before induction, to take part in an orientation programme led by the International Office. Students whom the audit team met agreed that their induction to the University had been useful.



82 Students are given a range of handbooks including the University's online student handbook, which is maintained by Student Administrative Services, and departmental handbooks for programmes and modules. Departmental handbooks are prepared according to a template contained within Section K of the Quality Handbook, in order to promote accuracy and consistency. The departmental handbooks read by the audit team met the requirements of Section K, and the team heard from students that they were satisfied with the information provided within them.

83 The University uses personal supervisors as its primary means of providing academic and pastoral support to undergraduate and taught postgraduate students. The supervisor and student are from within the same department; students on programmes encompassing more than one department are allocated supervisors in each department. The operation of the supervisor system is informed by guidelines published within Section K of the Quality Handbook, which cover the allocation of supervisors, including to students studying outside the University, such as those on work placements; the range of guidance and advice available; arrangements for changing supervisors, and record-keeping. The guidelines also describe the Senior Tutor system, whereby students have access to an independent academic from a different faculty who can intervene in the event of a dispute between student and department on academic matters.

84 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 such that students may now expect 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, some of whom enjoyed regular contact with their supervisors and others who had not met them at all. 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.

85 Student handbooks include information regarding complaints and academic appeals, and students who met the audit team understood how to find this information. Complaints are governed by the University regulations for the investigation and determination of complaints by students. Deans are expected to make an annual report on complaints in their area through the faculty QERs, and Heads of non-academic areas make an annual report to QSC. The University's regulations on Academic Appeals cover taught undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as postgraduate research students. Student Progress Committee receives an annual report on appeals.

86 The University's revised policy statement on personal development planning (PDP), approved in June 2008, makes explicit the responsibilities of the University, staff and students. The implementation of a work plan relating to PDP is being overseen by the Learning and Teaching Support Unit's Senior Advisor for PDP, as chair of the associated implementation group, and the audit team noted the recent attempts to 'rebadge' PDP, including through a student competition. The majority of students who met with the team, particularly those on taught programmes, stated that they did not actively engage with PDP, although some were aware of the opportunities available. The team concluded that the University recognised the need to increase participation in PDP and is taking positive steps to achieve this.

87 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'. Primarily in response to this recommendation, the University introduced a Code of Practice in 2005 that articulates its expectations for the management of provision involving more than one subject area. The audit team heard that the Student Experience Committee is revising the Code, taking into consideration several sources of information and feedback, including the NSS, the SWS and the QAA outcomes from the

Institutional audit report, 'Arrangements for joint, combined and multidisciplinary programmes'. The joint student forum operating in one faculty (see paragraph 55), introduced during 2007-08, is also being considered for implementation in other faculties. Evidence from students who met the team, and from the SWS, 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 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.

88 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 SWS 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. Support Services at Scarborough report to the Head of Student Support Services at the Hull Campus to promote consistency. In its Briefing Paper, the University noted that it is experiencing significant growth in the number of students with disabilities, which it is working to address, and some of the students whom the team met expressed concern about the length of time it had taken them to obtain disability support, particularly for dyslexia.

89 The University's Study Advice Services, based in the Library on the Hull Campus and College House at Scarborough, offer advice and guidance for all students on study skills, academic writing, mathematics, numeracy and statistics. Students who met the audit team have found these services useful.

90 In its Briefing Paper, the University stated its commitment to the provision of a high standard of academic and personal support for all students as part of its stated strategic aim to deliver an outstanding student experience. The audit team concluded that the University had succeeded in meeting this commitment, notwithstanding some inconsistency among departments regarding the communication of requirements for contact with personal supervisors, and a few residual problems in the management of joint and 'with' degrees.

### **Staff support (including staff development)**

91 The Learning and Teaching Strategy recognises the importance of staff support and development in achieving the University's strategic aim of providing an outstanding student experience. Within this context, the Strategy identifies three specific overlaps with the Human Resources Strategy: rewards and recognition for excellence in learning and teaching; staff development with reference to learning and teaching, and the recognition of professional teaching standards.

92 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 (PGCHE), depending on their previous teaching experience. Chairs of selection panels indicate whether the new staff member needs to complete the certificate, although faculties have some flexibility about whether or not to accept the Chair's advice. The audit team met several members of staff, who confirmed that they had undergone induction and praised the postgraduate certificate.

93 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 2007-08, and adopted a single appraisal scheme, which came into full operation from January 2009. The new Code sets out a series of principles covering the frequency of observations for full and part-time staff, the variety of teaching activities to be observed and staff development for observers and observees. The audit team observed that deans have reported on progress in implementing the scheme through faculty QERs since January 2009.

94 The single appraisal scheme expects all staff to participate in a formal review annually. The Human Resources department is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the scheme, using data recorded by departmental staff on a University database, although the audit team heard that this mechanism was not yet fully operational at the time of the audit. Staff whom the team met during the visit had experienced the new scheme and commented that it was working more effectively than its predecessors.

95 In terms of staff development, the audit team saw evidence of a comprehensive staff development programme for 2008-09, called 'Opportunities For All', which comprises almost 200 training sessions, including a series of sessions on quality and standards, student information systems, student progress and assessment and learning and teaching. Departments and faculties also hold staff development events including staff away days. Staff whom the team met 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 team identifies as a feature of good practice, the range of staff development opportunities offered by the University.

96 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 successful and unsuccessful applicants.

97 The audit team concluded that the University's systems and procedures for staff support and development provided strong support to the aims of its Learning and Teaching Strategy. The team noted the progress made by the University in responding to the recommendations of the 2004 audit report and its provision of a comprehensive staff development programme.

## Conclusion

98 The University's management of the quality of students' learning opportunities is guided by a comprehensive and coherent framework of published Codes of Practice and other documents, 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 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 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

99 According to the Briefing Paper, the University's approach to quality enhancement is articulated through its Learning and Teaching Strategy and the document Approach to Quality and Standards (A2Q). It embodies an explicit distinction between the enhancement of the practice of learning and teaching and the enhancement of the systems and procedures used in the management of quality and standards. This distinction parallels that between the remits of the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee (ULTAC), the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) and the Learning and Teaching Support Unit, on the one hand, and the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC), the Quality Director, University Registrar and Secretary and the University Quality Office, on the other.

100 The Learning and Teaching Strategy is informed by the University's overall Strategic Plan, the first aim of which is to, 'provide an outstanding experience for our students'. The Strategy seeks to realise the vision for the Hull Student Experience through the achievement of seven strategic objectives. Its implementation section identifies departmental action plans as, 'the primary, and most appropriate, tool for enhancing the quality of the student learning experience'.

101 In July 2008, ULTAC requested all academic and relevant service departments to participate in the implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy by developing quadrennial action plans, in consultation with the appropriate dean. These would then be reviewed by the corresponding deputy dean or equivalent, prior to being posted on the University's Portal in searchable form. Each of the seven objectives of the Learning and Teaching Strategy expands to a number of detailed commitments, 34 in all, which describe how the objectives will be achieved. The template for the departmental action plan invited sets of three responses to every one of these commitments: what good practice the department had identified in the current academic year; what steps it would be undertaking in support of the objective in the next academic year, and what it would be doing in support of the objective in the period to 2012.

102 Many, although not all, of the requested departmental action plans for 2008 were posted to the Portal, only some of which addressed the questions about steps to be taken in later years. They were accompanied by a report to ULTAC, which acknowledged that the template was issued too late for adequate internal discussion and that it should be redesigned to facilitate input. The report succeeded, nevertheless, in extracting, for each of the seven objectives, individual actions that are likely to be of interest to other departments.

103 Having discussed the departmental action plan project with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) the audit team was satisfied that the necessary modifications are being made, that the plans will be integrated into the University's planning round from 2009, as stated in the Briefing Paper, and that they will, as intended, be incorporated in a University database which will allow changes to be tracked over time.

104 The document Approach to Quality and Standards, which was issued in July 2008, is primarily concerned with the systems and processes used by the University in the management of quality and standards, rather than with learning and teaching practice as such. It defines the enhancement of quality as taking deliberate steps to improve those systems and processes. Two kinds of deliberate steps are distinguished: a rolling review of all University regulations and Codes of Practice; and a series of five thematic initiatives that are designed to have a positive impact on the student learning experience. An annex to the Approach to Quality and Standards tabulates a five-year action plan for completing the rolling review and the thematic initiatives by 2012. The responsibility for the implementation of the plan lies with the University Quality Office, reporting to QSC.

105 The audit team discussed the implementation of Approach to Quality and Standards with staff on two occasions. Those present on the first occasion were unclear about the progress of one of the current themes, Student Participation, which is intended to promote and extend the opportunities for participation by students in the policy and decision-making mechanisms of the University. However, the team learned in the second meeting that, although the timetable had slipped, a working group is now being formed to take the initiative forward. It was shown the draft briefing paper for this group, which noted, among other matters, that a priority would be to consider whether, when and how to introduce students as members of periodic review panels.

### **Management information - quality enhancement**

106 The Briefing Paper maintained that the University's approach to enhancement is informed by a range of management information that is both quantitative and qualitative. The few, brief examples provided were largely concerned with what staff can learn from practice elsewhere, whether through their membership of internal committees or from external bodies such as the Higher Education Academy or a professional body. However, these examples were supplemented by cross-references to other sections of the Briefing Paper, which described the University's attempts to make better use of its student data, especially progression and completion statistics, and of feedback from students. During the visit, the audit team learned about the University's attempts to develop 'benchmark parameters' with which to compare its own student statistics, and about the integrative function of the Student Experience Committee when responding to student feedback, both of which can be seen as fulfilling the University's own definition of quality enhancement.

### **Good practice**

107 The Briefing Paper noted that some good practice may be discipline-specific and not applicable elsewhere. It therefore reserves the label 'good practice' for instances that are deemed likely to be transferable. The quality enhancement reports (QERs) and periodic reviews were mentioned as sources of information about good practice, while the annual Learning and Teaching Conference and the newly established Departmental Quality Officers' Network were cited as means of dissemination.

108 The faculty QER is an evaluation of the annual monitoring of programmes within that faculty. Its purpose, as set out in the relevant University Code of Practice, is to draw out examples of good practice worthy of dissemination across the University and to identify areas for development. The template for the report comprises six sections, most of which are also subdivided. The Code emphasises the need to report on issues and recommendations arising from earlier QERs, so that a longitudinal picture of activity in the faculty develops over time. A thematic element was introduced in 2006, whereby the QER must contain an overview of the University's current enhancement theme(s), evaluating any differences in the approaches taken by individual departments. That has now been aligned with the five thematic initiatives of Approach to Quality and Standards.

109 The audit team examined the QERs from 2005-06, from 2006-07 and from 2007-08. They are substantial documents, running to many pages, with supporting appendices. When applicable, on-campus and collaborative provision are treated separately. Instances of good practice are highlighted, notably in the subsection of the report devoted to the 'Dissemination of good practice'. Each QER is reviewed by a small team from outside the faculty, which produces a shorter, analytic report, a principal purpose of which is to identify good practice that is amenable to dissemination, within the faculty or, through QSC, to another part of the University.

110 Two quality enhancement themes were being pursued by the University in 2006-07: the Induction of New Students; and Supervision and Support including PDP (personal development planning). Commentary on both these themes was a requirement for the QERs and this formed the basis for an additional report, drawn up by the University Quality Office, which looked for evidence of enhancement, as demonstrated by deliberate steps that went beyond the expectations of the corresponding Codes of Practice.

111 A further means of dissemination is the annual report produced by the University Quality Office for the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee (LTEC), which considers all examples of good practice emerging from periodic reviews, as well as those from QERs, in order that the committee may offer advice on effective dissemination.

112 It was clear to the audit team that the QERs were indeed functioning, alongside periodic reviews, as a source of good practice and that the information was being disseminated, both within each faculty, for instance by faculty learning and teaching committees, and across the University by the University Quality Office and the LTEC. The team also looked for evidence that this knowledge was being utilised, through the actual transfer of good practice to other departments and faculties, and found examples in the QERs themselves, and in evidence provided by the University Quality Office during the audit visit. The team, therefore, 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.

113 It was apparent to the audit team that individuals with a special responsibility for quality at departmental or faculty level are of key importance for the University's quality enhancement strategy. The Departmental Quality Officers' Network was established in 2008, to strengthen communication between departments, and between them and the University Quality Office. It is open to any member of staff with a special responsibility for quality and standards, and is intended to operate in an informal manner. However, as there has been only one forum so far, in November 2008, the audit team concluded that it was too soon to judge how effective it may be.

114 The Annual Learning and Teaching Conference was inaugurated in 2007. The most recent conference, in January 2009, was attended by 151 people, and nearly all of those who returned an evaluation form had found it useful. The University has taken care to maximise the accessibility of this and similar events to staff on the Scarborough campus.

115 The conference is chaired by one of the three members of staff who have been seconded, part-time, to the University's Learning and Teaching Support Unit (LTSU), which the University describes as the operational arm of ULTAC. Each has a defined area of responsibility: academic professional development; peer support for learning and teaching, and for the increased engagement of students with personal development planning. In a note about quality enhancement on the University Quality Office website it is stated that the Office and LTSU are working closely to identify and disseminate good practice, which will be facilitated through a revised website managed by the LTSU. The Unit's website was not fully functional at the time of the audit visit, but the University explained to the team that the LTSU is still in the process of setting itself up. The audit team would encourage the University to expedite this process, including the completion of the website.

### **Staff development and reward**

116 The Briefing Paper listed several ways by which the University seeks to recognise, and encourage, excellence in learning and teaching. It operates its own Teaching Fellowship scheme, which has two strands. Under the first, up to seven University Teaching Fellowships may be awarded in any one year to individuals, each of whom receives an award of £2,000 to fund a specific project or some other form of personal development. The project strand enables an existing Fellow, or a team led by a Fellow, to bid for a grant of up to £3,000 for the purpose of improving the student learning experience. Both are administered by the LTSU, as is the Innovations in Student Learning Scheme, which provides a number of grants each year for which any member of staff may apply.

117 The University Teaching Fellowship Scheme is overseen by the LTEC which is chaired by one of the University's National Teaching Fellows and is responsible for promoting enhancement-led approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. Another of the University's National Teaching Fellows has been seconded to the LTSU as the part-time Senior Adviser, with a special

responsibility for academic professional development. The audit team read about the Teaching Fellows' work in the first issue of a newsletter, *Innovate*, which will appear four times a year. The 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.

## Conclusion

118 The Briefing Paper expressed the University's view that enhancement is, 'not about a set formula or a focus on measurement', but, about creating an environment in which enhancement can prosper through the activities of individual staff members engaging with their students. The University has sought to foster this environment through the combination of its Learning and Teaching Strategy, concerned with practice, and its Approach to Quality and Standards, focused on systems. Such a dual framework entails close liaison between the two parts and the audit team was satisfied that this exists, for instance through the arrangement whereby the Chair of ULTAC is the deputy Chair of QSC and vice versa.

119 Some key elements of the implementation of this dual framework, including the departmental action plans, the new round of thematic initiatives and a fully-functioning LTSU, were not completely in place at the time of the audit visit. However, all these are recent developments and the audit team noted the progress that had been achieved up to that point. 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

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

121 HYMS was established by the University of Hull and the University of York in response to the national demand for more doctors and graduated its first cohort of MB BS students in July 2008. Among the declared aims of the 2008 HYMS Strategic Plan is the delivery of an innovative and distinctive medical curriculum that will be subject to constant review and revision.

122 The management and governance of the School are overseen by a joint board, which is a committee of the two University Councils and includes members approved by the third element of the partnership, the regional NHS. Academic governance is the responsibility of a joint senate committee (HJSC), which approves regulations, appoints examiners and ratifies the award of degrees on behalf of the senates of the two universities.

123 These two bodies are supported by a number of other academic and management committees, including the HYMS Board of Studies, of which all the other academic committees, including boards of examiners, are deemed to be subcommittees. The Board of Studies reports to the HJSC via a Joint Learning and Teaching Committee of the two universities, the HJLTC.

124 HYMS programmes lead to joint awards by the two universities, for which reason they are governed by a distinct quality and standards framework agreed by both universities and approved by HJSC. The set of regulations and Codes of Practice that constitute this framework are published on the HYMS website.

125 The programme specification for the HYMS undergraduate degree states that, 'the core curriculum will be covered in an integrated, outcome-based programme which emphasises the acquisition of self-directed learning skills in a supported problem-based learning environment'. One of the strategic aims of the School is to have a third or more of its students taking an intercalated degree: that is to say, adding an extra year during which they pursue independent

study at final-year Bachelor's degree level. This goal has not yet been reached, but the opportunity is highlighted on the website and in the online prospectus.

126 The allocation of students to either the Hull or the York campus is by ballot, except in very special circumstances, a policy that applicants must accept before admission. Video-conferencing and a virtual learning environment are used to deliver the curriculum across both University campuses and regional NHS facilities.

127 The audit team read a document, prepared for the General Medical Council (GMC), which gave a detailed overview of the quality assurance processes employed by HYMS, including the gathering of feedback from students and staff and its use for monitoring and enhancement. It also set out the reporting structure and decision points governing the management of quality and standards by the Board of Studies, the HJLTC and the Joint Senate Committee. The team also saw the minutes of these two committees from 2007 onwards and met both a present and a former member of the HJLTC.

128 Annual monitoring, including the oversight of external examiners' reports, formed part of the extensive scrutiny exercised by the GMC during the setting up of HYMS. In November 2007, HJLTC approved a new pro forma for annual monitoring, based on the one devised for general use by the University of York. The audit team saw the 2006-07 and 2007-08 annual programme reports, the latter still in draft form as it had not yet been considered by HJLTC. These included observations by external examiners and the responses to them.

129 The HJLTC carried out a periodic review of HYMS for the Universities of Hull and York in 2008. None of the panel's recommendations were described as critical and it stated that the recommendations that it did make were to be viewed in the context of a 'highly positive' review. The report found that a variety of means was used to elicit the views of students and that they were represented on most committees, including the Programme Evaluation and Quality Committee, charged with ensuring that audit loops are closed.

130 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**

### **Institutional arrangements**

131 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. Much of the work of the Committee is devoted to developing policies and procedures to enhance the experience of research students, including the Postgraduate Research Training Scheme (see paragraph 147). It comprises faculty nominees, including graduate research directors and a representative from the Students' Union. The graduate research directors also have responsibility for individual student matters, including academic appeals. For matters relating to the Postgraduate Research Training Scheme, they have the responsibility for students in their own faculty. For other matters, especially disputes between student and department, they have the responsibility for students in a related faculty.

132 The effectiveness of Research Degrees Committee is discussed in more detail at the end of this section.



133 The Quality Handbook sets out the policies, procedures and regulations concerning research degree programmes, in Section L. It includes a Code of Practice for postgraduate research students, a description of the University's standards and criteria for research degrees and policies relating to research misconduct, termination of programmes and charring viva voce examinations. The audit team confirmed that Section L reflects the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

134 The University reviews its research degree programmes as part of periodic review. However, the audit team noted that periodic review panels tend not to consider research programmes in as much detail as taught programmes. The University has recognised this tendency, and has resolved, as a result of an interim review conducted by the Quality and Standards Committee (QSC) working group in 2008, to make the consideration of research degrees within periodic review more explicit.

### **Research environment**

135 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.

136 The University's Strategic Plan has the aim of expanding and promoting excellence in research, including by developing a larger community of postgraduate research students. This is manifest in the award of 30 University 80th Birthday scholarships in 2008-09 and in the existence of the Graduate School, which 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.

137 The University has also established a Virtual Graduate School, originally confined to the Business School, but now being rolled out across the rest of the University. It is intended to augment and enhance existing research methods training provision. The audit team read the evaluation of the Virtual Graduate School in 2008, which contained evidence of planning for future growth.

### **Selection, admission and induction**

138 The University's criteria for admission are described in chapter 12 of its Programme Regulations, which are published within the Quality Handbook. Applicants normally make their initial enquiries to the Admissions Office and then submit a detailed research proposal to the relevant department, assisted by an online guide to preparing a research proposal. Departmental admissions officers determine whether the applicant should be offered a place. Successful applicants register directly with the department, although the central coordination and record keeping is carried out by the Graduate School.

139 The Graduate School offers an induction programme at the Hull Campus, supplemented by departmental induction, whose scope is described in the University's Code of Practice. Research students whom the audit team met confirmed that their induction had been satisfactory, with departmental induction being particularly useful.

### **Supervision**

140 The University's Code of Practice describes arrangements for research degree supervision. Departments are responsible for appointing principal and second supervisors for each research student and for ensuring that supervisors have sufficient expertise in the field of the research project and in supervision, including a familiarity with the relevant University policies and regulations, to perform the role effectively. Inexperienced supervisors have the opportunity to attend a University training programme. The programme comprises a series of four workshops, covering all aspects of

supervisory role. The audit team met staff who had attended this programme, all of whom commended it. Supervisors may further their training by compiling a reflective diary after attending the workshops, leading to the award of the Certificate of Training in Research Supervision. The team noted, however, that very few staff had taken advantage of this opportunity.

### **Progress and review arrangements**

141 The University Code of Practice expects supervisors to meet students on a regular and frequent basis, face-to-face or by email/written contact, to discuss problems and progress. In the first year of study, for full-time students, these meetings should normally be at least once a fortnight. In subsequent years, the Code states, the minimum number of meetings is nine per year for full-time students and six for part-time students, unless special circumstances pertain, for example, if a student is on fieldwork overseas. The content and outcomes from meetings should be recorded by the supervisor, in consultation with the student, and be made available for departmental files and the student's Progress File.

142 In addition, the Code expects supervisors to report annually in writing to the Research Degrees Committee on the progress of each student. Following a recommendation in the 2006 QAA Review of postgraduate research degree programmes that the University should ensure that this process provides a sufficient degree of independence, the University introduced separate reports by supervisees and supervisors. A supervisee may request that their report is kept confidential from the supervisor.

143 Annual reporting is the principal formal mechanism by which the Research Degrees Committee discharges its responsibility for monitoring students' academic progress. It plays a particularly important procedural role in highlighting any instances where the relationship between supervisor and research student is not working well; the research student handbook states that students should be aware that, '...an appeal would be very unlikely to succeed if your grounds for appeal was inadequate supervision, if you had not reported such problems through this annual monitoring process, or by other means'. 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.

144 The University publishes criteria for the transfer of master's students to doctoral programmes in its programme regulations. All transfers are subject to approval by Research Degrees Committee through the chair.

### **Development of research and other skills**

145 The University requires all its doctoral students to follow the Postgraduate Training Scheme and acquire a minimum of 60 credits, which will qualify them for the award of the Postgraduate Certificate in Research Training, before they submit their thesis; students following one or two-year research degrees are required to obtain 20 and 40 credits respectively. The Scheme, which is managed and run by the Graduate School, offers modules in a range of generic skills, including communications and information technology. Supervisors and students are expected to undertake a training-needs analysis at the start of the programme to determine the selection of modules. Students whom the audit team met commended the Scheme and confirmed that the training they had received was timely and helpful.

146 For research students who teach, the Postgraduate Training Scheme offers a module called, 'Introduction to Teaching and Learning in Higher Education'. The audit team noted that no more than three students took this module 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 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.

147 Research Degrees Committee is responsible for overseeing and developing the Postgraduate Research Training Scheme. The audit team found that the Committee was discharging this responsibility effectively, for example, through its planning for, and consideration of the outcomes of, a review of the Scheme in 2008. This review led to a number of recommendations which have now been adopted in the Postgraduate Research Training Scheme Action Plan.

### **Feedback mechanisms**

148 The Briefing Paper stated that the University uses the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and the International Student Barometer to solicit feedback from research students, and the audit team confirmed that Research Degrees Committee received and considered the results of both surveys.

149 The representative structure for research students is the same as that for undergraduates and taught postgraduates, described in Section 3 of this annex. However, the audit team found little mention in the minutes of departmental staff-student committees of any discussion of issues raised by research students, and none of the students whom the team met were aware of these committees or their purpose.

### **Assessment**

150 The arrangements for the assessment of research degrees are described in the Programme Regulations, supplemented by the Standards and Criteria for Research Degrees. Thesis-based degrees are examined by one internal and one external examiner, or two externals where the candidate is a member of staff. Viva voce examinations must be chaired by a member of staff independent of the student presenting the thesis and the examiners, appointed by the Research Degrees Committee, from a list of approved staff. The Chair's duties are described in the Quality Handbook. The audit team regarded all of these arrangements as consistent with the precepts of the *Code of practice*.

### **Representations, complaints and appeals**

151 The University has a comprehensive set of procedures for handling complaints and appeals from research students, described for students in the Postgraduate Research Code of Practice and on the University's website. The Research Degrees Committee monitors the number and outcomes of appeals and complaints, with a view to identifying opportunities for improvements in provision.

### **Conclusion**

152 The Research Degrees Committee's terms of reference state that it is accountable for monitoring research degree provision and the research student experience, including the supervision of research students. These are amplified by the introduction to the research student handbook, which describes how the Committee is, 'responsible for all matters relating to the academic progress of research students - including appeals - and for the award of degrees and

other research-based qualifications'. In considering the effectiveness of the committee in discharging its responsibilities, the audit team noted that the only formal mechanism by which it could track the progress of research students was the annual reporting process, whose implementation was not consistent (see paragraph 143). Other potential sources of information about students' progress, including data that could illustrate differences among different subjects and faculties, 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.

153 With the exception of tracking the progress of research students, and that of supervision of the process of preparing research students to teach, the audit team concluded that the University's management of its research degree programmes met the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1*.

## **Section 7: Published information**

154 The University publishes a wide variety of information for prospective students, in both electronic and paper form. This includes the prospectus, the website, and a wide range of handbooks at departmental level, the latter being produced separately for undergraduate students, for taught postgraduate students and for research students.

155 The prospectuses, prepared separately for full-time and for part-time students, offer information about the University's programmes and the facilities available at each campus. Students whom the team met expressed the view that the information contained in the prospectuses was helpful and accurate. The student written submission (SWS), however, criticised the prospectus for failing to give applicants an accurate impression of the differences between the two campuses. In the action plan that the University prepared in response to the SWS, it is committed to keeping this issue under review and to draw upon student feedback as it does so.

156 The University offers additional information and guidance to students in a variety of forms including welcome guides for each campus, the International Students' Welcome Guide, the University's Student Diary ('Year Guide'). The audit team heard from students that the information they receive about the University's support services and the learning environment, is detailed, accurate and timely.

157 The Code of Practice for Publicity and Marketing of On-campus Academic Provision describes responsibilities for ensuring accuracy and completeness of publicity materials prepared by departments and faculties.

158 The University's developing web policy affirms the main function of the website as being to inform and attract prospective students. The policy is intended to aid the development of the website by including a statement of principles underlying its development, and detailing responsibilities for managing content. The Marketing and Communications Web Team, deans and heads of department are responsible for the maintenance of web pages, which relate to the University, to a faculty and to a department respectively.

159 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 postgraduate research students and for taught programmes as comprehensive, detailed and helpful.

160 The University's Code of Practice specifies that external examiners' reports and departmental responses should be shared with students through staff-student committees (SSCs). The audit team was provided with the minutes of several departmental SSCs from which it was evident that this requirement was not always fulfilled. Student members of SSCs who met the team confirmed that they had not seen external examiners' reports. The team, therefore, 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.

161 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.

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