

**Annex to the report****Contents**

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## Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance for Higher Education (QAA) visited University of Hertfordshire (the University) from 16 March to 20 March 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

### Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

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

### Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit found that the University has a comprehensive range of activities which constitute a strategic, thorough and effective institutional approach to quality enhancement.

### Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The audit found the University's arrangements for postgraduate research students met the precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, and are effective in securing academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities.

### Published information

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

### Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the Student Performance Monitoring Group, which analyses the information provided to better inform the processes for monitoring retention and achievement (paragraph 47)
- the comprehensive support for international students prior to joining, during induction and while on their programmes (paragraph 93 )
- the engagement of the Graduate Futures office, both inside the University and with external stakeholders, to further the University's business-facing mission (paragraph 96, 105)
- the support for research students, including the generic training programme and the comprehensive information available via StudyNet (paragraph 173).

## Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- to revise the process by which short courses that contribute to University awards are developed and approved, to include input external to the University, in order to ensure the appropriateness of level, content, learning outcomes and assessment (paragraph 23)
- to develop further, implement and publish protocols for ensuring that the academic standards of programmes delivered and assessed in languages other than English are equivalent to those delivered and assessed in English; in particular, and in the light of its risk-based approach to the oversight of modules delivered by partner institutions, to introduce and publish protocols for the moderation by University staff of modules judged to be of medium or high-risk (paragraphs 40 to 42)
- to revise the generic grading criteria so that the grades align with those in the University's grading and marking scale, to further develop these grading criteria to differentiate between all levels and to ensure their consistent use and communication to students (paragraph 45).

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- to revise its plans for making awards based on credit-bearing short courses and/or the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) so that appropriate attention is paid to external reference points, including subject benchmark statements, in determining the name of such awards, and, in doing so, to review APEL protocols in support of the process (paragraph 35).

## Section 1: Introduction and background

### The institution and its mission

1 Originally established in 1952 as a technical college, the institution was identified as one of 25 Colleges of Technology in 1959. Further growth, accompanied by the development of strong links with industry and commerce in the county and region, were recognised in 1969 when the College was designated one of the first three polytechnics in the country. The reputation of The Hatfield Polytechnic increased during the following two decades, and in 1989, following the passage of the *Education Reform Act*, it ceased to be maintained by the Hertfordshire County Council and became an independent higher education corporation. In 1992, the University of Hertfordshire was established.

2 The University now has over 3,000 staff and is one of the largest employers in the area. It has a financial budget of over £200 million per annum, with a significant part of its income being earned through research, consultancy and business services activities.

3 The number of students registered with the University has increased substantially, rising from approximately 5,000 in 1987 to over 22,000 in 2007-08. This growth reflects not only the diversification of activities within the University itself but also the increasing participation rate in higher education, both by school leavers and mature entrants.

4 The majority of these (over 18,500 students) are based at the University's home campuses in Hatfield (College Lane and De Havilland campuses) and St Albans. Almost 1,500 students are at four Hertfordshire further education colleges (Hertford Regional College, North Hertfordshire College, Oaklands College and West Herts College, along with the University, collectively termed the Hertfordshire Higher Education Consortium, or HHEC), and almost 2,500 students studying at collaborative partner colleges abroad. Around 84 per cent of students are following undergraduate programmes, 14 per cent taught postgraduate programmes and 2 per cent postgraduate research programmes.

5 The University's vision for 2012 is 'to be recognised as a new model of a university through far-reaching engagement with business, community and international partners, shaping the future success of its graduates by operating in the global environment and advancing the prosperity of its region'.

6 The University's Mission is to:

- help students achieve their maximum potential, with graduates distinguished for being innovative, creative, highly employable and equipped for future careers
- play a key role in the region's economic prosperity and cultural development, by working closely with businesses, the public sector and the wider community
- continue investing in its people, courses, partnerships and facilities, and to be the leading University in enhancing the student experience
- undertake and exploit research, creating new knowledge that is disseminated, transferred and applied; achieving international standing in key research areas
- prepare its students to operate in the global economy, and to engender international and multicultural understanding both within the University and beyond
- provide an outstanding service and to ensure a rewarding experience for all who engage with the University.

7 The University's vision and mission are an integral part of the 2007-2012 Strategic Plan, which was approved by the Board of Governors in December 2006. The strategy builds on the vision set out in the 2004-2007 plan: widespread engagement with businesses and employers, excellence in learning and teaching and research, and accelerating the widening participation agenda. The focus, however, is now sharper. Engaging with business and the professions is the foundation for many of the institution's activities. The Strategic Plan, 2007-2012, takes account of the changing external environment, especially government policy in relation to the skills agenda and widening participation. The University is currently embarking on a review of its strategy, with the development of a 2009-2014 strategic plan, and a 2020 visioning exercise to inform the strategic review.

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

8 The University provided the audit team with a Briefing Paper and supporting documentation, including that related to the sampling trails selected by the team. The briefing paper contained references to sources of evidence, to illustrate the institution's approach to managing the security of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its educational provision. The team had a hard copy of all documents referenced in the briefing paper; in addition, the team had access to an electronic copy of most supporting documentation, including key committee minutes and papers for the previous year.

9 The Students' Union produced a student written submission (SWS) setting out the students' views on the accuracy of information provided to them, the experience of students as learners and their role in quality management.

10 In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the previous Institutional audit (2004) and Collaborative provision audit (2006)
- reports of audits by QAA of overseas provision since the previous Institutional audit, including the in-country audit at IST Athens (2008)
- reports of reviews by QAA at the subject level since the previous Institutional audit

- reports produced by other relevant bodies (for example, professional, statutory or regulatory bodies)
- the institution's internal documents
- the notes of the team meetings with staff and students.

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

11 Changes to Management and Committee structures that have taken place since 2004 include the following:

- a new Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) was appointed in September 2008
- two new senior management groups have been established: the Chief Executive's Group (CEG) and the Vice-Chancellor's Group (VCG) both within University's management structure
- the introduction of Strategic Business Units within the University as the core of its management structure
- the introduction of three new academic schools (School of Film, Music and Media, School of Pharmacy and the Postgraduate Medical School with Bedfordshire and Cranfield)
- staff development is now identified within all university-level committees and the Academic Quality Enhancement Committee (AQEC) has responsibility for all staff development arrangements for teaching, learning and academic quality
- a student performance monitoring group (SPMG) established in 2005 to consider student entry and performance data and the establishment of a Working Group on the Student Voice in 2007.

12 Significant developments have taken place in estates. A new building for Digital Arts and New Media was opened in 2006, the Health Research Building also opened in 2006 to house the postgraduate Medical School; almost all teaching rooms have been refurbished between 2006 to 2008; and currently the south end of the campus is being developed to create a new student forum as a centre for all student activity outside of studies.

### **Response to 2004 Institutional audit**

13 The University was given an advisable recommendation to: 'establish, in the full implementation of its Assessment Strategy, the consistent use of a single University-wide marking scale, so as to provide clear information to students, staff and external examiners'. The audit team found evidence of the approval of a grading marking scale at Academic Board in March 2006, and also found evidence of its implementation. The University was also given a desirable recommendation to 'develop and publish generic criteria so as to clarify the University's broad expectations of student academic performance at different levels'. While this was approved by the Academic Quality Enhancement Committee (AQEC) in June 2006, the team noted that the grades used do not wholly align with those used in the grading and marking scale approved at Academic Board, nor does it differentiate between levels other than undergraduate and postgraduate. Additionally they do not always appear in student handbooks and local contextualisation is allowed from these at faculty level, which leads to some variation (see paragraph 45).

### **Institutional framework for managing academic standards and learning opportunities**

14 The responsibility for academic standards and quality lies with the University's Academic Board. It is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, with all deputy vice-chancellors, deans and the Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement in attendance. Below Academic Board, the key committee with responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement of taught undergraduate and

postgraduate programmes is the AQEC, chaired by a deputy vice-chancellor (DVC). This committee also has a subcommittee, the Academic Quality Audit Committee (AQAC), which audits compliance across the University with University Policies and Regulations (UPRs) and standard procedures, and evaluates their effectiveness and makes recommendations to appropriate parts of the University. This subcommittee is chaired by the Deputy Director of Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement. The AQEC has two standing working groups: the Student Performance Monitoring Group (SPMG) to consider student entry and performance data and a Working Group on the Student Voice (WGSV). The Academic Development Committee (ADC) is the other key Academic Board committee, responsible for overseeing all of the University's awards and approving collaborative partners, and is chaired by a DVC.

15 The University's framework for managing quality and standards is based upon its University Policies and Regulations, with associated guidance offered by the Academic Quality Office (AQO). The University Policies and Regulations are published online on an open-access website (StudyNet). The principal University Policies and Regulations are reviewed and amended annually as necessary by Academic Board, following recommendations from a standing working party.

16 Faculty committees play a key role in the maintenance of both standards and quality and all faculties are required to have faculty academic quality enhancement committees (FAQECs), which are responsible for approval and monitoring of programmes and improving the student learning experience. Additionally, every programme of study has a programme committee, which is a subcommittee of the relevant FAQEC.

17 Within faculties, deans are ultimately responsible for the quality of the student learning experience and the maintenance of academic standards. They are assisted by associate deans (Academic Quality) who have a range of responsibilities, including chairing FAQEC, and membership of AQEC. Associate deans work closely with central Academic Quality staff and heads of school inside the faculty to ensure a shared understanding of quality assurance and enhancement. Heads of School are responsible for the standards and quality of the programmes and associated modules delivered in their schools.

18 At the core of the University's management structure are Strategic Business Units (SBUs) which are the main management units within the University. There are two main types of SBU, academic, which are termed schools, and professional, which are the main non-academic service units, such as Finance, Human Resources, Marketing and Communications, Academic Registry. These SBUs report to the Office of the Vice Chancellor (OVC) and all prepare an annual report to the OVC.

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

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

19 New programme development is initiated by a proposal submitted to the ADC. Two standard templates for such proposals are employed: one for University-based provision and the other for new collaborative provision. The use of standard templates ensures that, at the proposal stage, consistent information on the market for the proposed provision, the resource implications of the development and the relationship with existing provision and the University's strategic plan are considered. New proposals can either be initiated by schools or faculties, may arise from university-wide discussions or may be the result of other opportunities which may arise from time to time.

20 Once initial approval has been given by the ADC, a planning meeting chaired by an Associate Dean (Academic Quality) (ADAQ) is convened with the purpose of agreeing the development and validation processes. Such meetings are informed by a standard agenda to ensure consistency. The outcome of these meetings is the establishment of a programme development committee at school level, which is then chaired by a member of academic staff.



21 During the programme development phase, a variety of stakeholders may be consulted, including current students, employers, collaborative partners and external examiners. Programme development teams are also encouraged to seek the advice of 'Interim Consultants' who have an appropriate technical, industrial or academic background. This consultation is not mandatory, but advised by the University. Approval panels must contain at least one external academic expert, and may also contain additional experts with an industrial or professional background. These external panel members are approved by the Director of Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement (DAQAE). The audit team found evidence of appropriate and extensive consultation during the development phase of new or revalidated programmes. Similarly, evidence was found of an appropriate role being played by external members of validation and review panels in the maintenance of academic standards.

22 Most validation events are managed by faculties, and chaired by a senior academic from a faculty not connected with the programme under scrutiny. Exceptionally, validation events are managed by the Academic Quality Office (AQO), for example, when the programme represents a substantial new area of activity or where there is to be a conjoint validation with a professional, statutory and regulatory body. Comprehensive guidance to all staff involved in the approval and review process is provided in the Programme Reviewer's/Developer's Handbook. This is one of the ways in which the University ensures that consistent processes are applied during the review, validation and development processes. Additionally, mandatory training events are provided by AQO for staff who chair or act as secretary to validation or periodic review events. The AQO provides validation and review 'checklists' as a further measure to aid consistency.

23 The University has recently developed procedures for the approval of credit-based short courses. Although based upon the existing framework, these new procedures allow the development of short courses, based on the achievement of credit rather than the achievement of awards in the traditional sense. The process that the University has adopted for the approval of short courses resides at Faculty level, and involves the completion of standard templates (the Short Course Descriptor), one at each academic level. These can be initiated at any time and are approved by the Head of School and ADAQ and, in the case of short courses involving partner institutions, a resource manager from that institution. They are signed off by the Dean. Furthermore, credit-bearing short courses can be used in a portfolio for a University award at undergraduate or postgraduate level. While it is clear that this streamlined approval process is a helpful innovation from the point of view of responsiveness, the audit team was concerned that the onus for ensuring the availability of adequate resources, appropriateness of level, content, and assessment is placed entirely on two senior members of staff from the originating faculty. It was the view of the team that by seeking external input at the approval stage of short courses, the University would have the potential further to secure the standard of the awards. Consequently, the team recommends it advisable for the University to revise the process by which short courses that contribute to University awards are developed and approved, to include input external to the University, in order to ensure the appropriateness of level, content, learning outcomes and assessment.

24 Annual monitoring of programmes takes place through the production of annual monitoring and evaluation reports (AMERs). AMERs are produced by programme committees to standard templates, which ensure that key themes relating to academic standards are addressed. These reports contain statistical information on admissions, progression and achievement, and comparisons of performance by students studying at the University and partner institutions where applicable. Statistics are provided centrally, and derived from the University's common data management platform, Genesis. AMERs also contain an action plan, which frames the programme's planned development over the coming year. The common templates that are employed in the production of AMERs ensure that these reports are comprehensive and self-critical, and are consistent in content and style across the institution. In some cases, where provision is large or complex, subject monitoring and evaluation reports (SMERs) are produced, which supplement the AMER with reflection at the level of the discipline.



25 The responsibility for the production of the AMER rests with the Programme Tutor, and the finished reports are considered by the relevant Faculty Academic Quality Enhancement Committee (FAQEC). At this stage, AMERs can be either accepted, referred back to the Programme Committee or referred to the responsible Head of School. On behalf of the Faculty, the ADAQ can also, if necessary, refer any matters directly to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor responsible for academic quality if there is cause for concern in relation to academic standards. AMERs are sent by Faculties to external examiners, with a response to their reports. On receipt of the AMERs, submit, for their faculty, an annual quality report to the Academic Quality Enhancement Committee (AQEC) detailing strengths and weaknesses across the faculty, together with items that need to be brought to the attention of the University centrally. Through this mechanism, the University ensures both that issues requiring attention centrally are addressed, and that examples of good practice are identified and disseminated. The Vice-Chancellor's Group receives a summary report on the annual monitoring process which is used to inform future planning and the dissemination of good practice throughout the institution.

26 The University has recently agreed processes to ensure that credit-bearing short courses are also subject to annual monitoring. Under this process, each time a short course is run it will be evaluated using a standard short course evaluation form, and these evaluations will be informed by student feedback. Any significant issues can be reported to the ADAQ or Head of School immediately, and annual School reports will contain a commentary on short-course activity. In this way, short-course activity will feed into the University's framework for annual monitoring. These processes have only recently been developed as part of the University's Flexible Credit Framework, and hence no examples of annual monitoring were yet available to the audit team. Overall, the team found that the University's approach to the annual monitoring of its programmes is robust and effective.

27 All University taught provision is subject to periodic review every six years. The periodic review process is based on the process for initial validation, but also incorporates consideration of a review document which discusses the experience of operating the programme since last review or initial validation. The periodic review determines whether the programme will continue subject to satisfactory annual monitoring, continues for a further specified period, or is discontinued. A report of the periodic review is sent to the DVC, who approves it as Chair of the AQEC and the Vice-Chancellor, who ratifies the decision on behalf of Academic Board. The audit team found evidence of thorough and comprehensive periodic review, which demonstrated that the process is robust and effective.

### **External examiners**

28 A key feature of the University's approach to the maintenance of both quality and academic standards is its external examiner system. Ultimately responsibility for the appointment of external examiners rests with Academic Board. Initially, proposals for appointment are generated within schools and then considered by the Faculty AQEC. From there, the proposal is passed to the AQO and is scrutinised by the DAQAE before finally reaching Academic Board for ratification. Clear criteria exist for the appointment of external examiners, and these have been developed to ensure that appointees have both the appropriate level of expertise and experience and are sufficiently objective to be able to make robust independent judgements on academic standards. The University provides a mandatory induction and training programme for new external examiners.

29 External examiners are required to complete their annual reports to a standard template. Reports are sent to the AQO and scrutinised in the first instance by one of three senior members of staff with responsibility for quality and standards: the Deputy Vice-Chancellor with responsibility for academic quality and standards, the DAQAE and the Deputy Director of Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement. This process ensures that there is central institutional oversight of all external examiners' reports and that issues of an institution-wide nature are identified. Reports are then sent from the AQO to the relevant faculty where they are

read by the ADAQ, and programme committees are required to respond to the reports. The audit team found evidence that this process works well and is effective in securing the maintenance of academic standards.

30 Student representatives engage with the external examiners' reports when they are appended to the appropriate programme AMER. They are given full and detailed consideration by the Programme Committee, whose reactions to the external examiner's comments and appropriate actions are documented within the AMER prior to them being passed on to the Faculty AQEC.

31 External examining arrangements are also in place in respect of short courses. Each short course will be assigned an appropriate external examiner, who is responsible for assuring standards. These external examiners are appointed according to the same process as for module external examiners. External examiners for short courses receive assessment tasks, and also moderate samples of student work. Module boards of examiners, or in cases where volume justifies this, short-course boards, will consider results in the light of external examiner comments. As with the situation for annual monitoring, (see paragraph 26) the processes for externally examining credit-bearing short courses have only recently been approved and so the audit team were unable to see examples.

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

32 The University's awards are compliant with the FHEQ, and the University gives guidance on this issue to staff involved in programme development in the Programme Developer's/Reviewer's Handbook. The University has plans to review its academic levels from 2010-11, in line with the *Higher education credit framework for England* of 2008.

33 The development and monitoring of the University's policies is informed by the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, and the implications of the *Code* are formally considered by AQEC and through its subcommittee, the Academic Quality Audit Committee (AQAC). Evidence was found by the audit team of AQAC systematically reviewing University policies against the *Code*, and of identifying action plans where appropriate.

34 Evidence was found that course design, validation and review are appropriately informed by subject benchmark statements where available. Confirmation that courses have taken account of subject benchmark statements is sought both from external examiners and from validation and review panels. Through its newly introduced Open Studies awards, students are able to gain credit, and awards, for a range of activities which fall outside the University's taught course frameworks. For example, limits to accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) have been removed. The management of APEL entitlement is conducted by Schools in line with the institutional framework and guidance and the APEL procedure has been developed with a view to making the award of credit for prior experiential learning easier to administer. This can lead to a student achieving an open award that requires no further study within the University; it is possible that a student can gain sufficient credit solely from APEL and/or short-course credit (see paragraph 23) for the award of a degree at undergraduate (unclassified) level or postgraduate level.

35 Under these circumstances, when the credit does not map directly onto a named University award, but where in the view of the relevant School (and ratified by the Board of Examiners) there is an appropriate measure of coherence within the APEL or credit being offered, awards may be made with a more specific title. The audit team was concerned that this possibility could allow named awards to be made without appropriate reference to subject benchmarks, and without appropriate external scrutiny of their alignment with the subject benchmarks. Consequently, the team recommends it desirable for the University to revise its plans for making awards based on credit-bearing short courses and/or APEL so that appropriate attention is paid to external reference points, including subject benchmark statements, in determining the name of such awards and, in doing so, to review APEL protocols in support of the process.

36 Further external referencing of the University's programmes comes through a significant level of engagement with professional statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). PSRB reports are considered at faculty level and reported to AQEC, where any university-wide issues, or examples of good practice are noted and addressed.

### **Assessment policies and regulations**

37 The University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy sets out the principles that underpin the University's approach to assessment. The University's 'Academic Regulations for Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes' contains the principles of assessment and regulations which cover the conduct of boards of examiners and the making of awards. The publication 'Assessment Guidance', published by the University Learning and Teaching Institute contains detailed advice and guidance on how academic staff should interpret both the formal assessment regulations and implement good assessment practice. This document is clear and available to all staff through StudyNet.

38 'Assessment Guidance' provides comprehensive guidance on assessment practice, including how to achieve validity and reliability in assessment, the University's policy on turnaround times for coursework and alternative forms of assessment for students with disabilities. Programme leaders are expected to plan and monitor assessment loads across programmes, and advice on this is given in 'Assessment Guidance'. Evidence was found that assessment loading is considered at the design, validation and review stages.

39 The use of standard templates for annual monitoring and for gathering external examiner comments ensures that the University is able to maintain oversight of the conduct and effectiveness of assessment. Feedback from students, which forms part of the annual monitoring process, also contributes to the University's supervision of the students' experience of the assessment process.

40 The University has developed a risk-based approach to the supervision of standards in modules delivered by partner institutions and this is promulgated through the Collaborative Working Practices (CWP) Handbook. This means that the level of scrutiny required by University staff is variable, dependent upon the level of risk identified. Moderation of modules judged to be low-risk is undertaken by suitably trained staff from the partner institution, with the University staff maintaining oversight of the moderation process, while in the case of modules judged to be medium or high-risk, moderation is undertaken by the University staff. While the audit team judged this overall approach to be appropriate and fit for purpose, the team noted that there are no clear protocols for how modules delivered in partner institutions in languages other than English, and judged to be of medium or high-risk, were to be moderated. Advice given in the CWP Handbook does not cover such programmes. While the University does have measures in place for assessment of the one programme that is currently partly delivered and assessed in a language other than English, this programme does not fall into the high-risk category, and in any case such measures as are in place would not satisfy the University's requirements for moderation of high-risk provision, which requires staff within the University to moderate that provision. In the case of provision assessed in a language other than English, the University does not articulate the measures that it would require to achieve this. The team was of the view that the University's measures for the moderation of high to medium-risk provision delivered in a language other than English were not clearly articulated, and recommends that such protocols should be developed, introduced and published without delay, paying attention in particular to paragraph 20 of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

41 The 2006 Collaborative audit provision made an advisable recommendation that the University should 'continue to implement the policy of phasing out, in international partnerships the use of...assessment in languages other than English'. The University has chosen not to act on this recommendation. It has introduced a new policy in 2008 which sets out the conditions under which partner institutions are permitted to deliver and assess material in languages other than English at levels 0, 1 and 2. In addition, it specifies further conditions that would allow

extension of this practice to level 3 and M. Although the University has yet to apply this extension, the revised policy permits, in principle, and under certain circumstances, an entire programme at either undergraduate or master's level to be delivered and assessed in languages other than English. At the time of the audit, the articulation of this revised policy had yet to appear in the Academic Regulations for Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes, which are published annually and delivered to all staff.

42 In consideration of this and the issue of moderation of modules (see paragraph 40), the audit team recommends it advisable for the University to develop further, implement and publish protocols for ensuring that the academic standards of programmes delivered and assessed in languages other than English are equivalent to those delivered and assessed in English; in particular, and in the light of its risk-based approach to the supervision of modules delivered by partner institutions, to introduce and publish protocols for the moderation by University staff of modules judged to be of medium or high risk.

43 Clear guidelines exist through the University Policies and Regulations on the composition and conduct of boards of examiners, and on the remit and terms of reference of each type of board. Comprehensive guidance exists with respect to progression, grading and classification of awards. External examiners are asked to comment on the ways in which boards are conducted and their role in the maintenance of academic standards, and thus the University is able to maintain effective oversight of this through its annual monitoring process and the systems in place for receiving and responding to external examiners' reports.

44 The University maintains a comprehensive set of University Policies and Regulations that govern the management of quality and standards. These are reviewed annually by Academic Board on the basis of recommendations from a standing working party. The audit team found clear evidence of regular review and updating of the University Policies and Regulations to take account of changes to the Academic Infrastructure, other external developments and developments in the University's strategic direction.

45 The 2004 Institutional audit of the University made a desirable recommendation that the University 'develop and publish generic criteria so as to clarify the University's broad expectations of student academic performance at different levels'. While AQEC did approve such a set of criteria in June 2006, the audit team found that these did not wholly align with the grading and marking scale previously approved by Academic Board, nor did they differentiate between undergraduate levels. It was also found that these criteria did not universally appear in course handbooks, and that some variation in their use was permitted at faculty level. The team therefore recommends it advisable for the University to revise the generic grading criteria so that the grades align with those in the University's grading and marking scale, to further develop these grading criteria to differentiate between all levels, and to ensure their consistent use and communication to students.

### **Management information - statistics**

46 The University seeks to make full use of management information in its approach to ensuring and maintaining academic standards. Underpinning this approach is the University's central information management system, Genesis. This record system is comprehensive, covering student information from the point of entry, together with all assessment information throughout the student's course. All student data that feeds into the annual quality monitoring process is generated from this single source. AMERs include an analysis of, and commentary on, a range of statistical data, including admissions and progression statistics and module and cohort performance data. Through this mechanism, the University ensures that data of a consistent quality on key indicators relevant to the maintenance of standards is considered in a systematic way across the institution.

47 The University also has a student performance monitoring group (SPMG), which monitors student entry and performance data across the University. This group provides reports on trends to faculties and schools and other University committees as appropriate. The audit team found evidence that this process was effective in monitoring, and reporting on, a range of statistical indicators that assist in the University's oversight of academic standards, and considers it a feature of good practice.

48 Overall, the audit team considered that the University makes effective use of statistical management information in the oversight of its academic standards.

### **Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities**

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

49 The audit team found evidence that effective use is made by the University of the *Code of practice* in its management of learning opportunities. Formally it is the responsibility of the Academic Quality and Enhancement Committee (AQEC) to consider revisions to the *Code* and how they impact upon the University, and it discharges this responsibility through its subcommittee, the Academic Quality Audit Committee (AQAC). The team found evidence that the University is systematically responsive to the *Code* in the way in which it manages learning opportunities. For example, the document 'Assessment Guidance', issued by the Learning and Teaching Institute (see paragraph 69), makes explicit reference to Section 3 of the *Code*, which deals with the assessment of students with disabilities. This document provides advice and guidance to staff on how to implement the recommendations contained within the *Code*. Similarly, university-wide guidance on placement learning emerged in response to a gap analysis carried out by the AQAC in relation to the *Code*, *Section 9: Work-based and placement learning*.

50 Engagement with professional statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) is another way in which the University makes use of external reference points in its management of learning opportunities. PSRBs frequently specify competencies or standards, and these will inform the way in which the University approaches the management of learning opportunities for those programmes. Placement learning for health or education students are illustrative examples of this.

#### **Approval, monitoring and review of programmes**

51 The University's requirements for the approval of programmes is set out in its 'Programme Developer's and Reviewer's Handbook'. This is a comprehensive document that sets out the rationale underlying the University's approach to programme development and which gives thorough guidance on the process for all those involved in the development and review of academic programmes.

52 Both programme development and review require input from appropriate experts external to the University. The requirements for this are set above (paragraph 21). The audit team saw evidence that external experts add value to the programme development and review process in terms of the learning opportunities for students. External experts comment on all aspects of programme structure, design, delivery and assessment, and as such are well placed to comment on key aspects of the quality of learning opportunities on programmes. The team found clear evidence that external experts do indeed fulfil this role.

53 Validation events, although organised mainly at faculty level, are chaired by a senior academic external to the faculty in question. This, together with the input of external experts, ensures that decisions concerning approval and review are made independently of the interests of the faculty or school in which provision is housed.



54 The annual monitoring and periodic review processes employed by the University are discussed above in relation to academic standards (paragraphs 24 to 26). Just as the systems described provide a robust framework through which academic standards are assured on an annual and periodic basis, so the same systems function to ensure that the quality of the student learning opportunities provided are monitored both annually and at longer intervals. Through the sequence of reporting, from programme, to school, faculty and University AQECs, the University is able to ensure that central oversight is maintained over the quality of the student learning experience.

55 The University has in place appropriate systems and processes for assuring the quality of the student learning experience once a decision has been made to suspend or discontinue a course. Oversight of these processes resides with the Academic Development Committee and, ultimately, with Academic Board.

56 Comprehensive arrangements exist for monitoring the quality of the learning experience for students engaged in modes of study other than traditional full-time. The annual reporting system systematically receives and reviews feedback from students studying in partner institutions, including those abroad. Similarly, the learning experience of those students of the University engaged in distance learning is monitored systematically through both the annual monitoring and evaluation reports (AMERs) and periodic review processes. Overall, the audit team found that the review and monitoring processes in place were effective in ensuring a high quality student learning experience.

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

57 The University collects a range of feedback from its students, and employs this data to inform its approach to the management of the student learning experience. Results from module feedback questionnaires and the 'university questionnaire' are considered through the AMER at programme level, and through School reports. The Working Group on the Student Voice (WGSV) considers student feedback at University level, and reports to AQEC and the Vice-Chancellor's and Students' Union Group (see paragraph 64) on issues arising.

58 Students complete both the student feedback questionnaires (SFQ), which are module feedback questionnaires, and the University of Hertfordshire Student Feedback Questionnaire (UHQ). Summaries of both UHQ and SFQ are placed on StudyNet. These are completed by both undergraduates and taught postgraduates, although final-year undergraduates are only invited to complete the SFQ and the National Student Survey (NSS). The content of the questionnaires and their administration are reviewed annually by the WGSV. The results of the SFQ and the UHQ are published on the 'Student Facts and Figures' pages of StudyNet for the purposes of School and programme annual reports, when they are shared with student programme representatives in the Programme Committee AMER process. Results from the SFQ, in relation to individual modules also feeds into the staff appraisal process and inform the Strategic Business Unit plans drawn up by heads of school.

59 The University makes extensive use of data derived from the NSS as part of its approach to quality management. Results from the NSS are considered at University level, at the Employment Committee of the Board of Governors, AQEC and Academic Board. These committees identify appropriate priorities and courses of action, and responses to students on key issues raised are made by poster campaigns and, in a more detailed way, through StudyNet. At school level, action plans in response to NSS results are drawn up and comparisons are made with competitor institutions and national benchmarks. Faculties have oversight of the responses made by schools to NSS results and these are monitored through the annual reporting cycle.

60 Other surveys are directed at particular groups of students; examples include a student induction survey and a research student admissions survey. The University also participates in the International Student Barometer and bi-annually, postgraduate research students participate in the National Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES). The team raised the potential

problem of questionnaire fatigue and were assured that the University and Students' Union were examining this issue.

61 On behalf of a consortium of six universities, of which Hertfordshire was one, a survey was undertaken by DVL Smith Group in 2007-08, to provide an overview of first-year, home undergraduate students' experience of arriving at University. While most students were satisfied with the look, feel and tone of the website, satisfaction for the content, navigation and helpfulness of the website during application stage was lower than the average score for all universities in the study. A review of the University's website took place during 2007-08 and the website was relaunched in May 2008. In line with the other universities in the study group, 95 per cent of students were satisfied with their experience of using the prospectus. Focus groups with current students form a component of the prospectus' annual review.

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

62 The University's mission statement and values places 'students first'. The University has considered the effectiveness of student engagement at all levels through the establishment of the WGSV and a Student Voice strategy. The impact of this strategy was further evidenced during meetings with the Vice-Chancellor, students, and staff. The student written submission (SWS) recognised the value of the WGSV and other mechanisms for students to contribute to the quality assurance processes.

63 During 2006 to 2008, the University reviewed the position of the student voice in policy making and feedback. The importance of the student voice in quality assurance and enhancement is evidenced in both the Academic Quality and Enhancement Strategy and in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. The University has taken deliberate steps to enhance the effectiveness of student engagement at all levels.

64 The University demonstrated how students were represented on all appropriate committees within the Academic Board structure. In addition, the President of the Students' Union is a member of the Board of Governors. The University invites the Students' Union Sabbatical Officers, Chief Executive and other invited officers to meet with the Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC), the Dean and Deputy Dean of Students four times per year in the Vice-Chancellor's and Students' Union Group. The committee provides a forum for discussion/progression/review of current student issues. From 2007-08, it has provided an annual report to Academic Board. Additionally, sabbatical officers are linked with a member of Office of the Vice-Chancellor (OVC) in a two-way mentoring process focused on strategic and development issues. The audit team felt this to be a potential area of good practice although, at present, it is too recent a development for its effectiveness to be fully assessed.

65 The audit team found evidence that students were represented on subcommittees, working groups and projects. Examples include the University working closely with the Students' Union on the Student Forum and the involvement of research students in the development of resources and support. The University had also engaged in meeting with disabled students through the Disability Consultative Group, established to help the University better understand and anticipate the requirements of disabled people and promote disability equality, taking advice from disabled students, staff and members of local disability groups.

66 The University of Hertfordshire Students' Union, with University support, coordinates the programme representative system and provides training for programme representatives. Students appeared confident that this process was appropriate. Students also contribute to validation and periodic review processes through attendance at the student meetings, which form part of each panel event. Students are also engaged in periodic reviews and student programme representatives are also involved in the AMER process through membership of programme committees.

67 Overall, the audit team found that the role of students in the processes for quality assurance was effective in ensuring the quality of the student learning experience.



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

68 The University provides an annual allowance for all academic staff to have self-managed time for scholarly activity. Staff are actively encouraged to engage with Higher Education Academy Subject Centre activities and to attend relevant conferences funded from school budgets. Individual development activities are monitored through the staff appraisal process.

69 The University further supports the relationship between scholarly activity and learning opportunities through the Learning and Teaching Institute (LTI), which hosts the Blended Learning Unit (BLU) and StudyNet. The LTI runs a weekly Practice and Scholarship seminar series orientated around learning, teaching and assessment, staff are able to engage in person or online via Elluminate (a web-based virtual-classroom software). The University also holds an annual learning and teaching conference and the International Blended Learning Conference. In addition, faculties organise their own workshop/seminars and/or annual learning and teaching conferences.

70 The University has a cross-faculty Research Institute structure that involves all schools (see paragraph 165). The University also hosts postgraduate research conferences, with 81 staff currently registered for University doctorates.

71 The audit team found that the work of the LTI and BLU was embedded in University practice, with support for the value of the work of the Research Institutes being referenced by students and staff.

## **Other modes of study**

72 The University has a proactive approach to flexible and distance learning. Graduate Futures (see paragraph 96), programme specifications (for example, engineering, forensic science, education) and AMERs reference work-based learning, as does the University Strategic Plan.

73 There are several examples whereby programmes are offered in partnership with other organisations and delivered online. For example, the 'DfES Gateways Development Fund Project: Flexible Pathways to becoming a Professional Engineer' has led to the development of postgraduate access programmes; a distance-learning Postgraduate Certificate in Education programme hosted by the School of Education; and programmes in computer science and law. Additionally, some professional programmes have an element of internet-based learning for placement activity or sandwich components.

74 Work-based learning ranges from two weeks to a full year. The audit team found that, in a number of areas, the University relates part-time employment to degree modules and has established a process whereby distance-learning programmes are subject to the same quality processes as on-campus taught awards. The University systems for the delivery and assessment of student work are detailed in student handbooks as required by University Regulations. Outcomes are reported to Academic Board.

75 Distance-learning students are supported by online resources mainly through StudyNet and by online registration. The appropriateness of the flexible and distance-learning programmes was further evidenced by Ofsted reports and professional bodies. Students on flexible/distance-learning programmes are also fully engaged in student feedback and quality assurance mechanisms. Boards of examiners consider students' work from a range of study as reported in AMERs, summarised to Faculty AQECs and the University AQEC.

76 In the audit team's view, the University has effective communication systems in place to support learning. The team considered that the University's approach to the provision, distribution and enhancement of its e-learning facilities was effective and appropriate.

## Resources for learning

77 The University has been engaged in significant investment in resources for learning including estate, library and computing. These include: a new building for Digital Arts and New Media, opened in September 2006; the Health Research Building, opened in September 2006, to house the Postgraduate Medical School; from 2006 to 2008, the refurbishment of almost all teaching rooms, with remaining teaching rooms due for refurbishment over the next two years; a park-and-ride facility completed in September 2007; and from autumn of 2007 until autumn 2009, redevelopment of the southern end of the campus to create the Student Forum. The Student Forum will comprise state-of-the-art facilities for student entertainment and services, including a 2000 capacity event space.

78 In addition, in 2005, the East of England Development Agency supported the University in the development of the BioPark Hertfordshire, a research and development centre helping bioscience and health technology companies to grow as they develop new technologies and products. Close links between firms located at BioPark provide opportunities to collaborate, including the provision of work placements for students.

79 Strategically, the University began 'UHEvolution' in 2005 to develop the University resources as a business-facing institution, and this part of the mission was in evidence throughout the audit process.

80 Student satisfaction with the level of resources for learning, including campus network, StudyNet, computing and library facilities was reported in UHQ and NSS. In addition, qualitative evaluation sources such as validation events and course representation on programme committees indicate the overall satisfaction of students with the learning resources.

81 Overall responsibility for maintaining the quality of learning resources lies with the Dean of Learning and Information Services, who submits an annual report to Academic Board. The University has a well-established, fully integrated approach to the provision of learning resources. Communications technologies are used to blend on-campus physical facilities with online anywhere, anytime service availability. Feedback is also evidenced from qualitative evaluation sources, including validation events and targeted surveys.

82 The StudyNet Development Group has overseen StudyNet enhancements, which encompass a comprehensive range of resources that engage and facilitate learning. These include lecture slides, interactive discussion boards and accommodation and room lettings. StudyNet is available for use by staff and students delivering the University's programmes overseas and in the Hertfordshire Higher Education Consortium (HHEC) Colleges on agreement of the necessary data transfer and administration arrangements. The University Learning and Information Service (LIS) Consultants provide training for staff at partner organisations in preparation for StudyNet implementation and ongoing support is provided through Faculties. All students are fully inducted into StudyNet. Further support is provided by online self-help guides and a helpdesk at each campus learning resources centre (LRC). The Assistant Disability Officer provides advice and help to students with using assistive technology, working with Faculty disabled student coordinators to implement study-needs support agreements.

83 The University's three LRCs are open to all students, providing 2,900 study spaces. The University recognised that balancing the wide variety of student study preferences and assumptions with appropriate use of the range of study environments has been challenging. However, students and staff were positive about future developments and the opening of the Student Forum.

84 The University central services work in partnership with schools ensuring relevant resources, services and support for students and staff and their integration into learning and teaching processes. The SFQ provides feedback to Academic Board on an annual basis, as does the NSS and AMERs. Students and staff are consulted on learning resource developments through programme, school and faculty reporting and working groups.

85 Based on its scrutiny of documentation and meetings with students and staff, the audit team were in agreement that the University's arrangements for the provision and management of learning resources were appropriate and effective.

### **Admissions policy**

86 The University's policies for the admission of students are set out in its University Policies and Regulations. However, a more detailed treatment of widening participation is to be found in the Access Agreement, which has been submitted to the Office for Fair Access (OFFA). The widening participation strategy is being revised in collaboration with Action on Access which will encompass the Access Agreement and extend into such areas as the support for students who have been recruited to the University, and the monitoring of the impact of the strategy. The University submits an annual report to OFFA on its performance in relation to widening participation targets, including comparison with the Higher Education Statistics Agency performance indicator benchmarks. To date, the University has matched or exceeded these benchmarks. Operational guidance and the University's general principles governing the admission of students to undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes are set out in the University Policies and Regulations.

87 The University uses statistical data to monitor its admissions procedures. Annual surveys of new entrants to both taught and postgraduate research programmes are conducted to obtain student feedback on the pre-entry service.

88 Programme admissions tutors are responsible to the Faculty Dean for the management of student admissions. They work in close liaison with the University Admissions Service to admit students under the University's guidelines (taking account of any programme-specific policies, regulations and procedures) and within the framework agreed between the admissions tutor and the manager of the University Admissions Service. There is an induction process for staff on the University admissions processes.

89 The Office of the Vice-Chancellor Advisory Recruitment and Admissions group, chaired by a DVC, is responsible for student admissions. The Recruitment and Admissions Policy Committee (RAPC) monitors and reviews the operation of the University Policies and Regulations and practices for the recruitment and admission of students and related matters, and also monitors the University's admission services. RAPC considers reports from the Head of the Equality Unit on a regular basis, designed to identify any potential discrimination in the University's admissions policies or their implementation. The RAPC also commissions reports from the Student Performance Monitoring Group (SPMG) to aid evaluation of its admissions policies. This allows RAPC to decide if admissions requirements are resulting in the admission of students who are not adequately prepared for their higher education programme, so that either entry requirements can be modified or additional support can be provided for such students.

90 The University has established accreditation of prior certificated learning and accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) regulations for both undergraduate and postgraduate levels (see paragraph 34).

### **Student support**

91 The University mission, policies and values underpin student support on-campus, at a distance and online for all students, including full and part-time, those with a disability and international students. Annual feedback and monitoring in parallel with a strong relationship between the University Students' Union and OVC enables a sharing of expectations and entitlement. This SFQ provides a mechanism for all students to comment, as do AMERs and student representatives.

92 The University provides a range of services beyond the academic provision and these are managed through the Office of the Dean of Students. They include the Chaplaincy, Community Partnership Office, Counselling Service, Equality Unit, (which provides central disability services), and day nursery. The Office of the Dean of Students also provides a link with the on-campus Medical Practice. The Student Support StudyNet website enables students to access a wide range of information about all the central student support services. StudyNet hosts a great deal of essential and highly valued information for students. The audit team found that StudyNet has now become so important to students that they feel it underpins the culture of their learning experience at the University. It includes sections providing guidance about such matters as appeals, extenuating circumstances, plagiarism and collusion, council tax liability and data protection. There is also a 'ToolKit' for placements. The guidance is annually updated by the Dean of Students Office. While enthusiastic about StudyNet as a resource, students were critical when study information was not appropriately current to their learning requirements. Students were also critical of the slowness of the email system.

93 In the case of the University's international students, there is a significant induction programme beginning from the point of recruitment. International student activities are monitored through an annual barometer event and schools also have specific academic support for students. The University also provides specific pastoral support for international students through central services and the tutorial system in schools. The audit team regarded the comprehensive support for international students prior to joining, during induction and while on their programmes, as a feature of good practice.

94 At the time of the audit, a review of academic support was being undertaken by AQAC in response to 2007-08 NSS scores. In autumn 2008, a 'Customer Care' project aimed at improving interactions between staff and students and other stakeholders was launched. It involves common commitments underpinned by agreed service standards

95 Personal development planning (PDP) for students is at programme level and features within each programme in ways pertinent to that programme. Since 2005-06, the University has provided an online facility, known as MAPS, which includes an introduction to PDP and incorporates a process for students to audit, action plan and review their own personal development. PDP systems are monitored through the University student feedback questionnaire.

96 The University 'Graduate Futures' office provides students with careers and employment support. Designed to make it easy for employers to find the right graduates to join their organisations, it gives University students and alumni help, not only in finding jobs, but also in developing their careers. In addition, Graduate Futures, together with the LTI, supports staff in developing students' employability by providing staff with an 'employability' tool kit to help them embed employability skills into programmes and to make it easier for employers to meet their graduate resource needs. The team concluded that the engagement of the Graduate Futures office, both inside the University and with external stakeholders, to further the University's business-facing mission and to make an effective contribution to the management of the quality of the student learning opportunities, was a feature of good practice.

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

97 The University attaches great importance to valuing and developing its staff. It has an extensive programme of staff development, coordinated by the People Development Unit (PDU) which takes account of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) standards and guidelines for assuring teacher quality, and is pro-active and responsive to both individual and institutional needs. The University has strategic objectives for staff development which are developed in consultation with deans, heads of Strategic Business Units (SBUs) and other senior managers and are noted annually by Academic Board and by the Employment Committee of the Board of Governors. At an institutional level, staff development needs are regularly reviewed by committees of Academic Board.

98 The relationship between the LTI and the Learning Technology Development Unit (LTDU) is particularly significant for staff development plans for academic staff. The LTI develops and embeds strategies to enhance learning and teaching across the University. The LTDU manages the technical aspects of StudyNet. The LTI offers Learning and Teaching Enhancement awards, which are available each year for staff undertaking innovative projects to improve the student experience and graduate success. Another initiative operating at the University is the Change Academy Blended Learning Enhancement (CABLE) project, which aims to develop and apply the change management process needed to embed blended learning in schools and faculties.

99 The University operates peer review of teaching, which has recently been changed to make it more effective in facilitating the enhancement of learning and teaching and the dissemination of good practice. Staff development and reward is considered as pivotal to enhancement and has recently replaced Teaching Fellowships, with new criteria for Reader and Professor, which have been developed to provide a more clearly identified and recognised career progression route.

100 The University Continuing Professional Academic Development Programme (CPAD) in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education has been developed to raise the standard and status of expertise in, and research into, learning and teaching in higher education, in line with institutional and national policies. The CPAD Programme is aligned with the Professional Standards Framework and the University's strategic plan, and is accredited by the HEA and the Nursing and Midwifery Council.

101 University appraisals are conducted against the University's Strategic Plan as identified in PDU staff development objectives. All appraisers receive thorough initial training, and are provided with comprehensive guidance, which is also available online. An agreed outline action plan, which is not confidential, is produced as a result of the appraisal discussion and is used for resource planning purposes.

102 The PDU website has a specific induction section for all new academic and professional staff, including an online induction manual containing useful links to faculties, central units and services. New staff are expected to attend short 'Induction' and 'Equality and Diversity' workshops during their probationary period, and new managers undertake the New Manager Programme as part of their induction.

## **Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement**

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

103 The University states in its briefing paper that it is building on its sound quality procedures to create a forward-looking enhancement culture. To this end, the University has put in place an Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Strategy (AQAES), which defines quality enhancement as 'the process of taking continual and systematic steps at all levels, to improve the quality of learning opportunities for students and to respond to the changing needs and interests of stakeholders'.

104 The University also claims that 'at institutional level enhancement occurs by Academic Quality Enhancement Committee working to an annual set of AQAE priorities emerging, on one hand, from the University strategic goals and on the other hand from development arising out of programmes, Schools and Faculties'. These Annual Priorities are developed and approved at the Academic Quality and Enhancement Committee (AQEC) and then an Action Plan is drawn up to address these. However, the audit team was unable to ascertain the formal process for monitoring the Annual Priorities from the previous year nor was it clear how the Annual Priorities had been determined for the current year.



105 In addition to the AQAES, a range of other initiatives have been put in place to aid enhancement, including UHEvolution, the Student Voice Strategy, and more recently, Graduate Futures. In addition, AQEC has set up working groups to take forward and embed current enhancement themes. The audit team was particularly impressed with the enhancement potential of the Graduate Futures initiative (see paragraph 96).

106 The University uses a number of methods to ensure the input of external examiners contributes to enhancement. At programme level, all recommendations made by external examiners must be considered by the programme team and feed into the action plan of their annual monitoring and evaluation report; these action plans are then monitored by the Faculty Academic Quality and Enhancement Committee. Any common enhancement themes are identified by the Faculty AQEC, who then bring them to the attention of the University AQEC. Additionally all external examiner reports are read by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC), the Director of Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement or the Deputy Director of Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement, where any University issues or good practice that can be usefully disseminated are highlighted.

107 The University claims that the revalidation and periodic review of programmes promotes enhancement by requiring teams to critically review performance and effectiveness to date and develop actions planned to improve the quality of learning opportunities, which feeds into the annual monitoring and evaluation report (AMER) process. Additionally, student and other stakeholder input into validation and review undoubtedly contributes to the enhancement of the programmes. The audit team identified that the University is currently running a pilot scheme where students participate in the programme review process as part of the Student Voice Strategy. From its scrutiny of the available documentation and meetings with staff, the team was able to support the University's view of the enhancement role of periodic review.

108 The Academic Quality Office (AQO) provides guidance to schools, faculties and various committees on external aspects relating to quality assurance, through direct contact and through a range of training courses. These include chairing boards of examiners, chairing and being a member in validation and review, external examining, and quality-related teaching and learning. Additionally, through StudyNet, the AQO provides links to external quality assurance agencies and also contains a best practice section, which includes examples of well-written documents and a report that summarises key strengths and good practice identified in the annual Faculty AQEC reports. These annual reports draw upon matters raised and on good practice identified in AMERs, validation and review activity, learning teaching and assessment, student feedback and external examiner reports across all faculties.

109 The University has put in place, since the last Institutional audit, two new standing working groups of the AQEC. These are the Student Performance Monitoring Group (SPMG) and the Working Group on the Student Voice (WGSV, see paragraphs 62, 113). Both consider University data, and identify issues that need to be addressed to improve the student learning experience. In particular, the SPMG considers student entry and performance data at university, faculty and programme level, including collaborative provision and any trends or areas of concern are reported to University committees or faculties for action.

110 The University operates module student feedback questionnaires (SFQs) and a University of Hertfordshire Student Feedback Questionnaire (UHQ) for all undergraduates and taught postgraduates, whereas the National Student Survey (NSS) is conducted with final-year undergraduates (see paragraphs 58, 59). Summaries of both the SFQ and the UHQ results are published on StudyNet. The audit team was able to confirm some direct improvements to the student experience, such as the implementation of longer learning resource centre (LRC) opening hours that has resulted from this process.

111 The Research Institute structure (see paragraph 165) has been developed to ensure that research activity is spread across the University, which means that all staff have the opportunity to attend postgraduate research degree conferences or major research showcase events. Research staff are involved in teaching at undergraduate or postgraduate level.

112 Pedagogic research is supported by the Learning and Teaching Institute specifically by the funding of a number of learning and teaching enhancement projects, the outputs of which are disseminated at the University's Annual Learning and Teaching Conference.

113 The University Student Voice Strategy is seeking to maximise the potential of the student voice in enhancing the total student experience and the quality processes. It makes the shift from seeking the student voice as an expression of satisfaction to enabling students to work together with staff to continually improve the student experience, and defines the role of students as partners in the management of quality enhancement. The strategy has a clear list of actions to be achieved and is being implemented by the WGSV, led by the Deputy Director of Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement. (DDAQAE).

### **Good practice**

114 The University defines good practice as enhancements that are proven to be effective in one context but which are identified as having transferable potential. The University Annual Learning and Teaching Conference is seen as a key tool for the dissemination of good practice, as is the annual Blended Learning Unit (BLU) conference, which has now grown to have an international flavour. The Learning and Teaching Institute takes a lead in the dissemination of good practice with regard to learning, teaching and assessment. Facilitating the sharing of good practice at faculty level is the responsibility of the Associate Dean (Academic Quality), associate deans (Learning and Teaching), or Learning and Teaching Groups, together with Faculty Blended Learning Champions.

115 The audit team found that the University has a range of activities that constitute an effective institutional approach to quality enhancement.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

116 The University aspires to the development of a new global strategic network of academic institutions aligned with the University of Hertfordshire's business-facing positioning. It sees its overseas collaborative provision as part of this broader strategy to deliver distinctive programmes and curricula with an international dimension.

117 The University has seven different types of collaborative arrangements:

- franchise, where the programme is provided by a partner but is substantially the same as one offered at the University and, in some cases, is the final year of a programme
- external validation, where the University validates a partner's programme as being of an appropriate standard for a University award
- Hertfordshire Higher Education Consortium (HHEC) provision, where programmes are jointly developed by the University and its HHEC partners
- articulation agreements that refer to partnerships where credit obtained at the partner is recognised for guaranteed entry with advanced standing to a University programme
- recognition agreements, where the University recognises the award of another institution such that the University would welcome applicants for entry with advanced standing to an appropriate programme



- academic support agreements, where partners provide additional support for University programmes which are wholly delivered and assessed by the University, often in an online mode.

Academic Board approved a seventh mode for external providers of short courses, in June 2008.

118 A major part of the University's approach to widening participation is its collaborative partnership with the four colleges of further education in Hertfordshire which, with the University, form the Hertfordshire Higher Education Consortium (HHEC). The Consortium provides progression from further education to higher education in a coherent fashion across the county and diverse and accessible opportunities for higher education for Hertfordshire residents, to build the skills of the regional workforce to meet the needs of small and medium-sized enterprises.

119 The University's regulations allow it to make awards in association with its collaborative partners. Under these regulations, dual awards are managed through a Memorandum of Agreement. While the University does not have any joint awards at present, the University has developed a number of criteria for such an award.

### Programme approval

120 The University's quality assurance procedures for the approval and monitoring of Collaborative Partnerships are contained in a suite of Academic Quality Policies and Regulations (AQPRs) within the University Policies and Regulations and related Academic Quality Office (AQO) guidance.

121 Partner approval requires an initial endorsement from the Academic Development Committee (ADC), following which the University undertakes an institutional and financial audit of the partner to assure itself that the partner is compatible to the University's strategic aims and status and has the financial stability, appropriate standing and resource to deliver UK higher education programmes. Approval of a partner is for a maximum of six years when the partnership must be re-approved by both the Chief Executive's Group (CEG) and ADC.

122 The University's policies and procedures for collaborative provision reflect the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* as documented in the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) for collaborating partnerships. A draft agreement is initiated by AQO and developed with the faculty within the University's template of the Memorandum of Agreement, for signing by the Vice-Chancellor and prospective partner.

123 The procedures for the validation of collaborative programmes are described in University Policies and Regulations. Programme approval requires an initial endorsement from ADC, following which a Planning Meeting is convened to agree how to carry out the different component parts of the approval process and to agree the timetable to validation. Membership of the planning meeting must include the Director of Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement (DAQAE) and a representative from AQO. The Meetings work to a standard checklist. Following a preliminary assessment of the ability of new partners and new disciplines in existing partners to deliver the programme, and to offer appropriate student support systems, a formal University validation event is organised by AQO. Validation panels are chaired by a member of staff external to the faculty from a list of approved Chairs, and include the DAQAE (or nominee) and at least one external subject specialist. The faculty plays an important role in supporting the partner in preparing for a validation event and facilitating partner ownership of the programme.

124 An important difference between home provision and collaborative provision is that the latter is approved for a fixed term and that term is renewed at revalidation, while internal provision is in continuous approval, subject to satisfactory periodic review. Annual monitoring is part of the ongoing process of review. Where necessary and appropriate Faculty academic

quality and enhancement committees or the University Academic Quality and Enhancement Committee (AQEC) may require a review and/or remedial action to be taken before the formal period of validation has expired.

125 A key part of the (re)validation process for collaborative provision is to ensure that academic staff at the partner have appropriate qualifications, expertise and experience. The University requires partners to provide information about ongoing staff changes teaching on its programmes and the current MoA requires that new staff are approved by the University.

126 Franchised programmes are required to be equivalent to comparable University awards and compatible with the FHEQ and relevant subject benchmark statements recognised within the UK. However, within those constraints, the University recognises that adjustment within a partner's provision may be required to take account of local cultural, legal and/or business and industry practices. For externally validated provision, development teams are required to use FHEQ and subject benchmark statements as reference points. In all collaborative provision, an understanding of academic levels is required among partners' staff, for the purpose of learning, teaching and assessment.

127 All collaborative programmes have their own programme specifications approved by the relevant Faculty AQEC. Franchised collaborative programme specifications are the same as for the home programme but may reflect differences in detail such as the arrangements for the local management of the programme. All collaborative provision programme specifications and student handbooks are published on StudyNet, with hard copies distributed on request.

128 The (re)validation process also aims to ensure that the physical resources provided by the partner are satisfactory. Where it is agreed at validation that resources will be developed by the partner as the programme develops, the validation panel may impose staged conditions in relation to those resources or require a written commitment from the partner that the specified resources will be provided. The development of resources is then monitored by the link tutors and reported within both visit reports and annual monitoring and evaluation reports (AMERs).

129 The University and its partners are keen that students acquire access to StudyNet, in order that they may benefit from the enhanced learning opportunities that it supports. The University has overcome significant practical, technical, and software licensing difficulties to achieve this for most overseas partners for the commencement of the academic year 2008-09. Within the HHEC, a cross-college blended learning group, reporting to the Consortium Quality Committee (CQC), is in place to support college staff in the use of StudyNet and other learning technologies.

### **Management of collaborative programmes**

130 Quality management procedures for the University's collaborative programmes, and guidance on their implementation, are defined in the University Policies and Regulations and the Collaborative Working Practices Handbook. Unless otherwise agreed between faculties and the AQO, a link tutor will be appointed to oversee each collaboration with a partner institution. While the role description of a link tutor is documented in the University Policies and Regulations, it also appears together with the role descriptor for a key account manager in the Collaborative Working Practices Handbook. The main function of the Handbook is to give guidance on the Annual Agreement Activity. This is to plan and record an appropriate schedule of activities for the coming year, and to ensure an appropriate resource allocation within a faculty for the operation of each collaborative programme. Due to the complex cross-college aspects of the programmes within the HHEC, additional procedures have been developed, and are published in the Consortium Quality Handbook. The AQO website offers additional operational guidance.

131 The general University Policies and Regulations on assessment and award regulations apply to all collaborative provision; however the protocols for assessment and examination arrangements are differentiated for UK collaborative programmes and non-UK collaborative programmes to reflect different administrative structures.

132 The key committees covering the University's management of quality and standards are Academic Board, AQEC and the ADC. However, there is an additional committee structure for HHEC provision. While the HHEC structure of committees is under review, the structure currently includes the following: the Consortium Executive Group, a strategic-level group, which is chaired by a University Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) and comprises the principals of the four HHEC colleges, each of whom may be accompanied by a senior member of college staff; the Consortium Management Group reports to ADC and among its responsibilities is the consideration of proposals for new programmes to be delivered in HHEC Colleges; the CQC reports to AQEC and considers all academic quality and enhancement matters related to programmes delivered in Consortium Colleges. The DAQAE chairs CQC, and is a member of the other two committees.

133 Faculty AQECs also report to the relevant Dean's Advisory Group. The Faculty AQEC is responsible for assuring the quality of the Faculty's taught provision and the student learning experience for programmes provided at the University and for the faculty's franchised and validated programmes delivered at other educational institutions. As part of enabling a close operational relationship between collaborative partners and the faculty, Faculty AQECs have devolved responsibility for the ongoing monitoring of provision and the student experience to the level of the subject and programme, both for University and collaborative provision.

134 Link tutors are the main academic point of contact for communication and operational link between the faculty and the collaborative partner. The link tutor is appointed by the Head of School and is an ex officio member of the collaborative partner's relevant programme committee. During visits to the partner, the link tutor will meet students and staff, peer-review teaching and, with other University staff as appropriate, deliver staff development activities. The link tutor monitors the health of a collaborative programme, coordinates administrative procedures and is required to coordinate and review the assessment process. While the link tutor is expected to make at least two visits to the partner per year, other faculty-based staff also visit, in support of a variety of activities such as staff development and the chairing of examination boards, as identified in the Annual Activity Agreement. Inductions for new link tutors and regular link tutor fora where experiences and good practices are shared and issues addressed are arranged by the DAQAE.

135 Key account managers support the DAQAE, deans of faculty and the partner institution in ensuring consistency of approach across different programmes delivered at the partner institution, and in enhancing the quality of the provision. The role offers a strategic liaison between the University and the partner institution to ensure mutual satisfaction of current arrangements and to explore new business opportunities beneficial to both parties. Key account managers produce an annual report for consideration by both the Office of the Vice-Chancellor (OVC) and AQEC on the general health of the partnership, portfolio development and academic quality and enhancement matters arising from AMERs, link tutors or other relevant sources. The report is received by the OVC, AQEC, Link Tutor Forum and relevant Faculty AQECs. The report is also discussed with the senior management of the partner institution.

136 During periods of growth or closure in a partner's University provision, the University may appoint an on-site resident tutor to a Collaborative Partner in order to help the University manage the change process, sustain the learning environment and give ongoing report to the University. A resident tutor was appointed to INTI College Malaysia between 2000 and 2006 to support the partner at a time of growing numbers of collaborative programmes across multiple campuses. A resident tutor is now in place at Fuzhou University, in China to support the withdrawal of provision.

137 There are programme committees for each collaborative programme functioning in a similar way to those at the University, chaired by a senior member of staff in the department delivering the programme at the partner institution. The University link tutor (see paragraph 134) is a member of the Programme Committee, and wherever possible these meetings are arranged to coincide with their visits. Each programme, at each partner institution, has a programme tutor

who, as the principal author of the programme's AMER, is normally supported in this task by the link tutor (see paragraph 142).

138 Module leaders are responsible for effective delivery and operation at module level. For franchised programmes, they have contact with an equivalent module leader at the University, in some cases through the link tutor. Communication between module teams is often through email or StudyNet, but in some cases is through face-to-face contact.

139 The University plans to establish a partnerships office to manage and oversee all academic partnership activity and to work with academic schools to develop a clear strategy for the development and management of academic-related arrangements. Through the Partnerships Office, a strategy is to be developed for academic partnerships based on market analysis, a targeted approach and an understanding of the needs of academic schools.

140 Under the terms of the MoA, partners have delegated responsibility consistent with the requirements of the University Policies and Regulations, for the recruitment of students to collaborative programmes. An exception is the admission of full-time students to the HHEC, who are admitted under the UCAS process via the University. Entry requirements are confirmed at validation and published in the programme specification.

141 Part of the University's strategy for recruiting international students is to formally recognise awards from particular colleges as meeting the entry qualifications for a University programme. These partnerships are termed articulation agreements. To date, the University's only articulation agreement is with the Hertfordshire International College of Business and Technology (HIBT), an external education provider based on the University's campus, which enables students to progress to a range of University programmes, in an environment that allows students to be assimilated into the University culture prior to their registration with the University. An academic advisory group, chaired by a DVC monitors the relationship. A further category of agreement, the Recognition Agreement (see paragraph 117), does not guarantee admission to the University, but instead encourages recruitment from identified partners.

### **Programme monitoring**

142 Collaborative programmes undergo the same process of annual review as home provision. The process is based on the AMER template, although, in recognition of particular requirements for collaborative provision, specific templates have been developed for general collaborative provision at undergraduate, postgraduate and one for the Consortium. Programme tutors are responsible for the production of the programme's AMER on behalf of the Programme Committee. In producing the report, the programme tutor must involve the University link tutor and may wish to involve programme officers or administrators in writing specific sections of the report and to draw on the brief reports written by individual module leaders. The link tutor presents the programme's AMER to the Faculty's AQEC or appropriate subcommittees. The Faculty AQEC annual reports to the University AQEC include a specific section to identify potential university-wide issues arising from the annual monitoring of collaborative provision. The DAQAE responds to these issues and reports to CEG.

143 The University expects all partners who franchise a University programme to contribute to the periodic review of the home programme. On condition that the partner institution has met the minimum requirement, resulting changes are normally introduced in franchised programmes simultaneously with the home programme. If minimum requirements are not met, the collaborative provision programme is revalidated one year after the revised programme commences at the University.

## Assessment

144 The University's policy is that the pattern and nature of the assessment for a module should be the same in a partner's provision as it is in the home provision. However, as there is often a need to reflect local legal systems, practices or financial regulations and the University believes that staff at partner institutions benefit from developing their own assessment tasks, the University does not require partners to use the same assessment tasks.

145 The University defines the implementation of University quality management procedures at the programme level in its Collaborative Working Practices Handbook. As regards student assessment, assessment tasks set by partner institutions' staff are monitored by faculties. While examination papers are moderated by University staff and external examiners, University academic staff do not moderate students' other assessed work unless the University's risk assessment indicates that requirement. The audit team found insufficient explanation as to how this moderation would be done when the programme was taught in a language other than English (see paragraphs 40 to 42).

146 In the HHEC, as in other multiple-site providers where programmes are offered by more than one college, assessment tasks are normally agreed across the colleges and a process of cross-college moderation is followed.

147 Collaborative provision boards of examiners are normally held at the partner institution. They are constituted in accordance with University Policies and Regulations, chaired by a senior member of staff from the faculty, administered by University staff and minuted in English.

148 Student requests for a review of decisions made on assessment, progression and awards are initially dealt with under the procedures that operate within the partner institution, and can lead to the referral of a decision back to a board of examiners. However, in line with procedures for appeals by University-based students, a candidate may make representations to the Vice-Chancellor, once the procedures of the partner institution and board of examiners have been exhausted. These procedures are approved at validation and published to students.

## External examiners

149 The University's procedure for the appointment of external examiners is described in the University Policies and Regulations. External examiners' reports are considered through the AMER process. The University expects that all collaborative provision external examiners have experience of teaching in a UK higher education environment.

## Student support

150 Link tutors monitor the student experience through their meetings with students and staff. The University expects partners to provide appropriate personal support including careers support and guidance. Some students (those in the HHEC and HIBT) have access to a range of University campus-based facilities, and many more have access to resources through StudyNet.

## Staff development

151 University staff regularly provide staff development for partners. Staff in the HHEC receive details of the University's staff development programme and have access to the programme of events. Each faculty is expected to deliver a range of training at each partner annually, as identified in the annual activity agreement. In support of this, AQO provides a range of presentations on the link tutor's website.



152 The Learning and Teaching Institute provides an ongoing programme of staff development for partner institutions, based on the University's Continuing Professional Academic Development (CPAD) programme. The success of this has led to the development of an agreed approach for the delivery of 'enhanced' staff development at all collaborative partners.

153 In addition to the observation of teaching carried out by University link tutors, partner institutions are expected to engage in peer review of teaching. Should this not be possible for cultural or legal reasons the link tutor arranges staff development from his/her own observations. From the evidence provided, the audit team found that partner institutions have generally embraced peer review of teaching.

154 As part of their staff development programme, the University has held an annual Partners' Conference to discuss University strategic developments, learning and teaching developments, quality enhancement and technological developments, since 2004. These have been very well attended by key partner representatives from the UK and overseas. At the 2008 conference, five partners gave presentations on initiatives for dissemination to other partner institutions.

### **Student feedback and representation**

155 At programme level, the MoA requires that there is student representation on the Programme Committee. In some countries, for cultural reasons, this is not possible and alternative and effective arrangements are made for students.

156 It is not usual for collaborative provision students to be represented within the formal committee structure of the partner beyond programme committee level. An exception is the HHEC, where students are represented at the college higher education committees.

157 Link tutors meet students during their visits and this provides a very useful way of gathering student opinion, in addition to formal feedback mechanisms. In addition, every programme revalidation event includes a meeting with current students.

158 The University requires that partners gather student feedback to be routinely considered as part of the AMER. Partners are encouraged to use the same questionnaires as the University, but it is accepted that the format and method of administering questionnaires may vary. When such a questionnaire is not possible for cultural reasons, other robust means of providing student feedback is sought to enable students to express their opinions to the partner institution, and to visiting staff from the University.

### **Management information**

159 The management of student records on a day-to-day basis is the responsibility of partner institutions. For the majority of UK collaborations, Genesis, the University's Student Record System, holds complete student records. All final-award pass lists and award certificates for all partners are produced at the University and recorded on Genesis.

160 The University has an opportunity to confirm the standards of collaborative provision awards by making direct comparisons between University-based and franchised programmes. A comparison of module grade profiles is reported in school annual reports, as well as a comparison of the distribution of award classification grades. Additionally, the Student Performance Monitoring Group (SPMG) compares the performance of students from different collaborative partners.

161 The progression and completion of students on collaborative provision, as with home programmes, is monitored through the statistics provided with each AMER. Guidance is provided in the AMER template about progression norms. Progression from HHEC Foundation Degrees to University programmes is now also considered at the CQC.

162 The University is able to identify students who progress from partners operating articulation agreements, as well as students who progress to University programmes from Consortium College Foundation Degrees, in order to track their performance. SPMG currently monitors this data.

163 The audit team was concerned to find that, during the audit, the University's Collaborative Provision Register was incomplete. Subsequently, this deficiency was corrected. However, the team would strongly urge the University to make certain that it has robust processes for ensuring the University's Collaborative Provision Register is a comprehensive document, and that there is current representation of all partnerships established by the University.

164 Overall, the team was satisfied that the University had sound procedures in place for its collaborative provision which would ensure that academic standards were secure and that the quality of the student learning opportunities was maintained.

## **Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students**

165 All postgraduate research students are located in one of three research institutes: the Science and Technology Research Institute (STRI), which houses research from the Faculty for Engineering and Information Sciences; the Social Sciences Arts and Humanities Research Institute (SSAHRI), which houses research from the Faculties of Business, Creative and Cultural Industries and Humanities, Law and Education; and the Health and Human Sciences Research Institute (HHSRI), which houses research from the Faculty of Health and Human Sciences. In a meeting of the Team with a sample of research students it was clear that where the Research Institute (RI) was physically located in one place, as is the case of STRI, then the students felt a greater sense of being in a dedicated research environment. However, it was clear from conversations that the SSAHRI runs a number of initiatives to help integrate students, such as mini-conferences, to share research experience.

166 Research Institute activities are coordinated through a central University Research Office. The Academic Board delegates overall responsibility for research degree matters to the Research Degrees Board (RDB), Chaired by the Director of Research Degrees. Each RI has an Institute Research Degrees Board (IRDB) and these collectively deal with the process of registration, progression, annual monitoring, suspension, extension and withdrawal. The University has a single set of regulations for research degrees within the University Policies and Regulations, which have been in place since 2004, and these are focused on three main areas: Admissions, Complaints and Requests for the Review of Examination Decisions.

167 QAA's Review of research degree programmes 2006 identified three areas for further consideration: using external performance indicators in collecting and considering research degree programme data; whether the institutional arrangements for monitoring and reviewing progress might be enhanced by further developments in record-keeping; the introduction of personal development planning for research students. It was clear to the audit team that all of these areas had been addressed, including the introduction of a clear process of record keeping of student/supervisor formal meetings.

### **Admission**

168 The University has a clear and well-documented policy on the admission of research students, the operation of which is reported on annually at the RDB. Research students are only admitted in areas where there is appropriate support and resources for the programme of research, this process being controlled by relevant heads of schools. All students attend inductions, which are provided both locally and centrally by the Research Office in the form of a generic induction programme. A comprehensive Research Degrees Handbook is available to both students and supervisors.



## **Supervision and review**

169 Each student is assigned a supervisory team, which is approved by the Research Degrees Board. This team would normally have supervised at least two successful completions; one member of the team would be designated as Principal Supervisor and will have responsibility for the academic direction of the student's research degree programme. All new and/or inexperienced supervisors must undergo supervisor training, and a series of update workshops are offered through the year for all supervisors. The number of students supervised by individual supervisors is monitored by the IRDBs and guidance offered to Heads of School on balancing workload and student registrations.

170 The University operates two separate, but connected, review processes: annual monitoring and progression assessment. All research students are monitored annually and, in addition, all students are subject to progression assessment at some point of their research programme, depending upon the type and schedule of their research degree programme. The arrangements for both annual monitoring and progression assessment are clearly explained to students in the Research Degrees Handbook. These processes are also fully described in the Universities Generic Regulations for Research Degrees.

171 A research student's progress is examined by an assessment panel proposed by the supervision team and approved by the RDB, and which must include at least one member who is independent of the supervisory team. The outcomes of this progression assessment vary with the nature of research degree programme, but students are made aware of this from their research programme schedule. Outcomes are agreed between the student and the Assessment Panel before going to the RDB for approval, and students are provided with written guidance too. The opportunity is available for a student to appeal against the outcome of a progression assessment.

172 Information for research students is available from the Research Office page on StudyNet, which is extremely well laid out, with access to a rich set of information, including two Codes of Good Practice, one for Research Students and a Code of Good Practice for the Supervision of Research Students, along with a comprehensive generic training programme. All of these facilities were spoken about very positively during the audit team's meetings with research students. The Research Office provides a comprehensive generic training programme, and in addition, offers this as a summer school for part-time students, which it updates annually. This programme is fully detailed on StudyNet, along with the facility for online booking of places on the programme, and some other well-organised supplementary information on training and development.

173 In addition to the generic training programme, a mechanism has been introduced for evaluating individual needs that are outside of the generic training programme. At the audit team's meeting with research students they spoke positively about this, and how often their Research Institute will run special courses on specific areas of topical interest, for example, specialist software. Personal development planning was found to have been introduced and the operation of this is included in the generic research induction programme. The team found that the support for research students, including the generic training programme and the comprehensive information available via StudyNet, was a feature of good practice.

174 Opportunities exist for research students to get involved in teaching and supporting undergraduates, and research students may also attend the Continuing Professional Academic Development in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education programme.

175 The University uses a wide range of feedback mechanisms. Feedback on academic progress has been improved by the introduction of report mechanism for formal supervision meetings. Research degree students are included in the University-wide student feedback questionnaire and the RDB evaluates the feedback from this process. The Director of Research Degrees has set up a forum for recording meetings with research students since 2005, outcomes from which are fed directly to the RDB or University Research Committee.

## Assessment

176 The University has clear criteria for the assessment of each of its research degrees following a review of its research degree regulations in 2004. Clear guidelines on the assessment procedures are provided in the Research Degrees Handbook and the Generic Training Programme also includes a session on examination procedures. All research degree examinations are administered by the Research Office with a designated examinations officer to ensure consistency of process. Examination arrangements are proposed by the relevant IRDB to the RDB, which considers the arrangements for each examination with special attention paid to the suitability of the examiners.

177 Research students are represented on Academic Board and on the University Research Committee but not the RDB. Additionally, students may make representation via the research student forum chaired by the Director of Research Degrees.

178 Research students are explicitly included in the University Complaints Procedure; however students are encouraged to take up an issue initially on an informal basis if appropriate, firstly with their supervisor and then with their Research Institute's Research Tutor. In the audit team's meeting with the students they were clearly fully aware of this process, and in fact one could personally reference using the process to the satisfactory resolution of his complaint. In addition, the University has a procedure for the review of examinations decisions for research degrees, which clearly outlines the grounds and process by which students may appeal against the decisions made by the RDB on the recommendations of the examiners.

179 The audit team considers that the University's arrangements for postgraduate research students provide an appropriate student experience and meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

## Section 7: Published information

180 The University's website is designed to inspire and attract the interest of the University's key external audiences, prospective students, alumni, businesses and the local community. It also provides comprehensive information for students, staff and other associated professionals.

181 The University's Information Management Policy sets out the key principles of managing information within the institution. The regulations, roles and responsibilities for information published within the University's intranet and internet systems, are defined within a University Policy and Registration statement. The Director of Marketing and Communications is responsible for all corporate material published by the University via the Internet, including branding and design, use of terminology and key messages and writing and style guidance, while content creation and updating is the responsibility of deans of faculty and heads of resource centres. In discharging these duties, deans and heads of resource centres appoint appropriate staff and provide training to ensure information content and other materials are current, accurate and relevant to the University's internet, extranet and intranet user groups. Within these arrangements, each school has its own web page to include details of taught undergraduate and postgraduate provision, research, short courses, and details of school events such as Open Days.

182 Academic Registry provide comprehensive information annually on the website for prospective and applicant students. This includes information on fees, bursaries, scholarships, accommodation and joining instructions.

183 Undergraduate and taught postgraduate prospectuses are produced by Marketing and Communications staff, following detailed discussion with individual schools and faculty marketing executives. Prospectuses are available in hard copy upon request via the website, or from the Student Centre. The information within the prospectuses is also available on the course pages of the website. The audit team found that the student experience of the University's published information was that it was on the whole 'accurate, relevant and appealing'.

184 In discussion with the faculties to ensure currency and accuracy, Marketing and Communications staff produce the materials for higher education fairs, in-country marketing and other promotional activity. Academic Registry also provide details of programmes approved by the University on an annual basis.

185 The University's Memorandum of Agreement template for overseas franchised programmes requires all materials using the University's name and/or logo to be approved by the University in writing prior to their use. Currently, responsibility for collaborative provision promotional material in the University lies with the University's Marketing and Communications Office, with discipline-level information considered by faculties. However, the University is considering basing responsibility within the faculties so that all promotional material from its partners is considered by the faculty, with faculty marketing executives reviewing brand conformity.

186 University staff are responsible for the relevance, accuracy and currency of the information contained on the web, extranet and intranet pages which they have created, or for which they have been assigned responsibility. Consequently, responsibility for programme and module sites on StudyNet lies with the programme tutor and module leaders respectively. This information includes programme handbooks, module guides and a range of learning and teaching materials.

187 The 'A-Z of the University of Hertfordshire' is published on StudyNet, and as a pocket-sized booklet that is given to first-year students. It includes a wealth of information for students, such as information on equal opportunities, extenuating circumstances and student loans. A recent audit of the A-Z was carried out by the University's Academic Quality Audit Committee (AQAC) and the Dean of Students has undertaken to consider how the A-Z might be better publicised. The audit team would encourage this initiative, since if A-Z is to be the first port of call for general information, awareness of its existence needs to be raised across the University.

188 The Academic Quality Office (AQO) published guidelines on the content of programme handbooks in March 2008 for both the University home and collaborative programmes. This followed the audit by AQAC (see paragraph 187), which highlighted that the handbooks varied considerably and often overlapped with the A-Z of the University of Hertfordshire.

189 Programme specifications are formally revised at least once every six years during the periodic review process. In addition, they are informally reviewed on an annual basis to enable the approval of minor amendments. Programme specifications are published on the relevant course page of the external website. All signed programme specifications are lodged with AQO, which work with the Marketing and Communications department to publish them on the University website.

190 Definitive Module Documents (DMDs) define the aims and intended learning outcomes of a module together with related module details, to ensure that all data required for validation of the module and for input to the Student Record System is captured and recorded in a consistent manner. Data from the DMD is used for class lists, transcripts, examination timetabling, assessment, award classification, Strategic Business Unit resource allocation and in statutory returns.

191 While DMDs are formally reviewed at least once every six years in the periodic review process, revisions can be made and new DMDs accepted between review events to reflect changes and new discipline developments. The DMD is shared with the relevant external examiner, before and after validation, and is available to students via their module pages on StudyNet.

192 The statistical information on Unistats derives from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student return and the National Student Survey. The University ensures the accuracy and completeness of the HESA student return information on Unistats through careful preparation and thorough checking of the HESA return. To supplement the statistical information, the University publishes its own general commentary on Unistats; this provides an overview of the institution and directs students to the University's website for more detailed information.

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

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