



**QAA**



# Institutional audit

**University of Central Lancashire**

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## Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

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

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

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

### **Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex**

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

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

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary and the report, without the annex, are published in hard copy. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website. The institution will receive the summary, report and annex in hard copy (*Institutional audit handbook: England and Northern Ireland, 2006* - Annexes B and C refer).

## Summary

### Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Central Lancashire (the University) from 24 to 28 November 2008 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

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

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

### Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

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

### Postgraduate research students

The audit found that the University provides a lively and intellectually stimulating environment for its research students and staff. Learning opportunities and academic standards are ensured via a thorough quality assurance framework. The University makes effective use 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 other external reference points.

### 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 as being good practice:

- the integrated student support service, known as The 'i', for its accessibility and provision of high quality information, guidance and support for students
- the innovative approach to the involvement of students demonstrated in the development and production of the Student's Guide to Assessment

- the strategic, project based approach employed by the Academic Audit Sub-committee, Learning Development Unit and the Business Enhancement Team, which provides an effective model for enhancement across the University
- the role of the Centre for Research Informed Teaching in raising undergraduate students' research aspirations, particularly through the Diffusion journal and the Student Intern Scheme.

### **Recommendations for action**

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

#### **Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:**

- review the Academic Quality Assurance manual, Part 1 Appendix 6, section 3, in order to ensure scrutiny of each level of annual monitoring by more than one person, within faculty quality frameworks
- establish a role for current students at faculty level through direct representation at relevant faculty committees, as distinct from the role of student liaison officer employed as a member of staff by the University.

### **Reference points**

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

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

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

## Report

1 An Institutional audit of the University of Central Lancashire (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 24 November 2008. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of its awards and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team comprised Dr S Hargreaves, Dr M Lyne, Ms J Rice and Ms M Rohr, auditors, and Dr D Dowland, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mr M Cott, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

### Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The University was granted degree and higher degree awarding powers under the *Further and Higher Education Act* in 1992, although it traces its history in adult education back to 1828. Since 1992, the University has incorporated the Lancashire College of Nursing and Newton Rigg College into its activities. The University offers programmes in a broad range of disciplines and has recently developed new discipline areas for the health sector such as pharmacy and dentistry. It provides courses for the regional nuclear industry and has plans to open a new School of Architecture in 2009.

4 With the establishment of the new University of Cumbria in 2007, the University consolidated its location on the Preston Campus and transferred its campuses in Penrith and Carlisle to the University of Cumbria, but retained the Westlakes Research Institute, based in Cumbria. It plans to open a new University Centre in Burnley in September 2009 as part of the Higher Education in East Lancashire initiative in collaboration with Burnley College.

5 The University is organised into four faculties, each including between two and six schools. In 2007-08, just over 32,000 students were enrolled at the University: 27,664 undergraduates; 3,986 taught postgraduates and 384 postgraduate research students.

6 The previous Institutional audit in 2004 found that broad confidence could be placed in the University's capacity to manage effectively the quality of learning opportunities of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards. In response to the areas recommended for action, the University amended administrative and regulatory processes, such as the approval of minor changes to taught programmes, the standard University-wide penalties for late submission of work, minimum criteria for feedback on assessed work and requirements for the moderation of assessment. The implementation of personal development planning was strengthened through staff development, support for personal tutors, offering related resources and highlighting the importance of personal development planning to students through 'The Organiser' and 'The Card' (see paragraph 45). The present audit team found that the University had taken effective and timely action in response to the recommendations in the previous Institutional audit report.

7 Since the last audit, a number of significant changes have occurred, the most notable of these being the development of a new strategic plan and the establishment of schools within faculties, thereby replacing the previous departmental structure. A new committee structure was also introduced in 2005-06.

### Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

8 Academic Board is responsible for the quality and academic standards of the University's awards and carries primary responsibility for all matters relating to research, scholarship and teaching. The Academic Board delegates certain of its responsibilities to four principal committees which are supported by a number of subcommittees. The Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee carries key responsibility for assuring quality and standards for undergraduate and postgraduate awards and reports directly to Academic Board. While the

management and assurance of quality and standards is significantly devolved to faculties and schools, in order to be located as close as possible to the student experience, the University defines and retains control of its policies and processes. These are clearly articulated in the Academic Quality Assurance manual which is maintained by the Academic Quality and Standards Unit which provides guidance and support for staff.

9 The University's quality strategy aims to establish and assure appropriate academic standards for its awards. The institutional quality assurance framework incorporates the use of external reference points, the course approval process, annual monitoring, periodic review and revalidation of courses, institution-wide academic regulations, and the use of external examiners and their reports.

10 For on-campus provision, the management of the course approval process is devolved to faculties, with the Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee maintaining oversight. In designing courses, teams are required to refer to the Academic Regulations to ensure that the most appropriate level of target award is chosen and to consider how the course content needs to respond to subject benchmark statements and the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA. A range of validation documentation was audited and confirmed that these matters were addressed. The audit team found that the University's validation procedures and their implementation are comprehensive and robust, include appropriate participation by independent externals, and contribute effectively to the setting, defining and maintaining of academic standards.

11 Annual monitoring is designed to ensure that the academic standard of awards and the quality of the learning experience are maintained. The process comprises reporting at course, school and faculty levels, faculty reports and annual overview reports by the Academic Quality and Standards Unit being considered by the Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee. The audit team viewed reports across the various levels and found that there was detailed consideration of external examiner feedback at each stage of the process. The audit team concluded that the University's annual monitoring processes were sufficiently robust to secure and maintain academic standards.

12 The University's five to six-year cycle of periodic course review and revalidation of courses is managed by the Academic Quality and Standards Unit and undertaken by a panel drawn from the University review panel, plus two externals. External subject specialists are required to report on the appropriateness of standards set at each level. The process also requires externality through scrutiny of external examiner reports and full responses for the previous three years. From the audit trail documentation, the audit team was able to verify that these requirements were being implemented.

13 The University has clear policies, procedures and guidance to support the operation of its external examiner system. The University established the role of Institutional External Examiner in 2006. The Institutional External Examiner comments on the University's annual overview report of external examiners' reports and advises on the operation of the external examiner system and on issues relating to the Academic Regulations. Recent Institutional External Examiner reports viewed by the audit team demonstrated that this role makes a valuable contribution to the University's external examiner system.

14 The 2004 Institutional audit report commended the University's categorisation of external examiner recommendations as 'essential', 'advisable' or 'desirable', allowing the Academic Quality and Standards Unit to prioritise issues requiring immediate response by heads of school. Figures for 2006-07 showed that a significant number of 'essential' recommendations had not received a response within the University's required timescale, but 2007-08 figures indicated that the position had improved. The University will wish to continue its efforts to improve further the timeliness of responses to essential recommendations of external examiners.



- 15 The audit team saw evidence of appropriate consideration of external examiner reports. Course and heads of school annual reports recorded analysis of and response to external examiner comment and the Academic Quality and Standards Unit annual summaries of institutional issues raised in external examiner reports were comprehensive and evaluative. Schools are expected to share external examiner comments (as a minimum the recommendations and section 7 of the external examiner's report and the good practice) with students at staff-student liaison committees, although it was unclear to the team whether the entirety of the reports was generally shared with students.
- 16 The audit team noted, and concurred with, the Institutional External Examiner's view that the external examiner system appears to be robust and rigorous, fully supporting the University's approach to securing and maintaining academic standards.
- 17 The Academic Infrastructure is embedded in the University's quality assurance procedures. Course design must incorporate *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), respond to the *Code of practice* and subject benchmark statements and other external reference points, and use the programme specification as a tool early in course development. Validation panels are required to address issues relating to academic standards against threshold criteria for validation. The range of validation documentation viewed by the audit team confirmed that the various requirements were being met.
- 18 In periodic course review, the audit team noted that external subject specialists reported, as requested, on the academic standards set at each level, with reference to the FHEQ, and their experience of similar awards elsewhere; the extent to which the aims and outcomes of the programme articulate with the relevant subject benchmarks; and the extent to which the assessment strategy allows learning outcomes to be appropriately tested at module and course level.
- 19 Early in 2008, the University initiated a project on Awards and Assessment to ensure adherence with Bologna Principles, including the regulations for a European Diploma Supplement. The audit team also noted that Academic Board had approved the recommendations of a University Working Group in response to the final reports of the Burgess Group.
- 20 The audit team found that the University was making effective use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points, in relation to the academic standards of its awards.
- 21 Assessment must be conducted according to institutional policies and procedures and in line with the Academic Regulations. The Academic Regulations Sub-committee is charged with considering and consulting on any changes to the Regulations, and the audit team noted examples of matters arising from external examiners' reports being directed to the Sub-committee for action.
- 22 The Academic Regulations set out the principles of assessment practice, devolving to schools the responsibility for the definition of some of the detail of the processes, which must be specified in school manuals. The audit team viewed a sample of school manuals and found that these met University requirements. In other areas of assessment policy, the Academic Regulations set out detailed rules and procedures, for example, on assessment boards, extenuating circumstances and late submission of work. At the time of the audit, some of these areas were undergoing review by the Academic Audit Sub-committee.
- 23 Students commented positively on the assessment information provided to them in module information packs/guides and module descriptors. They have access to additional information in the Student's Guide to Assessment. This guide was the outcome of a project initiated by the Learning Development Unit and was produced by students, working with the Unit, academic staff from across the institution and student liaison officers.

24 The audit team concluded that the University's assessment policies and regulations made an effective contribution to the institutional management of academic standards.

25 Student data is collected centrally on Banner (the University's central database) and standard reports can be produced both centrally and locally. All faculties have a faculty information officer who can extract reports and provides statistics locally for annual monitoring. These reports also form part of the institutional-level statistical reports prepared for University committees. The audit team heard of examples of the use of data to identify matters for investigation, for example, modular performance, student deferral and the needs of students at risk of academic failure.

26 The course and school-level annual reporting templates require analysis of data. The audit team found that completed reports included commentary and evaluation, with actions taken and planned in response to data analysis. While generally endorsing the University's view that it had made considerable progress over the past four years in the provision and use of statistical management information, some faculty reports recorded continuing difficulties, such as the inability to produce standard reports on individual subjects in combined honours programmes and the constraints of recording student progression information in Banner.

27 In March 2008, the University initiated the Pulse Project which aims to evaluate the information needs of heads of school and to develop an information service that supports them in the delivery of their academic plans. The key information to be provided relates to staff, students, finances and performance. At the time of the audit, the first of the three project phases had been completed.

28 The audit team found that, overall, the University's approach to and use of management information contributed effectively to the management of academic standards.

29 The audit team concluded that confidence could be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

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

30 Students' learning opportunities are managed through the same structures and procedures as academic standards. The University's approach to quality assurance entails responsibility being located as close as possible to the student experience. Accordingly, the University has where appropriate, devolved operation of processes to faculties, while retaining control of the essential principles, policy and procedures, as set out in the Academic Quality Assurance manual.

31 To provide a focus for the delivery of the student experience, the University's strategic guiding document, the Medium Term Strategy, is supported by four key strategies: Learning and Teaching, Student Experience, Employability and Enterprise, and Internationalisation, each underpinned by an implementation plan delivered by faculties, schools and centralised services.

32 The University makes effective use of the *Code of practice* and other external reference points in the management of students' learning opportunities. Course development teams make use of the *Code* and other reference points when creating or modifying courses. Programme specifications are a key tool in course approval and review, the University's template requiring information on relevant subject benchmark statements, professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements and occupational standards.

33 The Course Developer's Guide sets out fully and clearly the principles to be considered in programme design, the approval criteria and documentary requirements. The audit team found that there was appropriate consideration of these elements. Chairs, vice-chairs and new members of University review panels are fully briefed. Recommendations arising from validation are considered in annual monitoring and institutional oversight is maintained through annual reports on validations by the Academic Quality and Standards Unit to the Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee. The team concluded that the course approval process was operating satisfactorily.

34 The University regards the annual monitoring process as the opportunity to evaluate and improve course quality and to identify and disseminate good practice. The Academic Quality Assurance manual sets out the key elements of the process and further guidance is produced by the Academic Quality and Standards Unit. There is a process to collate items of good practice and share them across the University. Any matters that cannot be dealt with at each level are referred up to the next level. The Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee takes an overview of faculty reports and the Academic Quality and Standards Unit's composite report on emerging issues, recommendations and good practice. The Academic Quality and Standards Unit also reports on progress of faculty identified institutional recommendations.

35 The Academic Quality Assurance manual sets out the key elements of the monitoring process but does not explicitly require every level of annual monitoring to be scrutinised by more than one individual. In this regard, while the audit team was able to establish that, in practice, heads of school reports were scrutinised by faculty quality groups or their equivalent, it appeared that the respective faculty annual monitoring processes did not consistently entail similar collegial scrutiny of annual course/subject reports. The team formed the view that, under the current provisions of the Academic Quality Assurance manual, the scrutiny of an entire level of annual monitoring could be undertaken by a single individual. The team concluded that the lack of a specific requirement for collegial scrutiny of all levels of annual reporting carried a risk that faculties and the University could place their reliance on individuals rather than on a group of school or faculty staff, and that this had the potential to reduce the rigour and consistency of the annual monitoring process. The team therefore recommends that it is advisable for the University to review the Academic Quality Assurance manual, Part 1 Appendix 6, section 3, in order to ensure scrutiny of each level of annual monitoring by more than one person, within faculty quality frameworks.

36 Periodic course review is managed by the Academic Quality and Standards Unit and the process is clearly set out in the Academic Quality Assurance manual. The panel comprises University review panel members who have the opportunity to meet with students. The audit team found the periodic review documentation was comprehensive and met the manual requirements, with evidence that review conditions were met and signed off. The team verified that institutional oversight of the periodic review process is maintained through annual reporting by the Academic Quality and Standards Unit to the Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee, informed by faculty annual reports. The team concluded that the periodic course review process was sound.

37 The University makes effective use of student feedback. The University requires student feedback to be collected through a module evaluation questionnaire, the outcomes being fed into annual monitoring. Students are also able to have their voice heard through student representation in staff-student liaison meetings. Annual course and heads of school reports seen by the audit team addressed student feedback from module evaluation questionnaires and staff-student liaison meetings.

38 The results of the National Student Survey are used to measure performance against the sector top quartile. Issues are identified and an institutional action plan drawn up, schools being expected to address issues through the production of their own action plans. Similarly, the University provides an institutional overview of both the academic and service related results of the (internal) student satisfaction survey, breaking down academic results by school to allow for more detailed analysis and to enable schools to respond to the most pertinent issues.

39 Student representatives are members of key university-level committees. The Students' Union Executive has regular meetings with the Senior Management Team. Within faculties there is student representation at course level on staff-student liaison committees. The University has also introduced the role of the student liaison officer to facilitate the course representative system and to be a bridge between staff and students by sitting on faculty-level committees and coordinating course representatives. Student liaison officers are current students on placement or are recent graduates of the University. The Students' Union emphasised that these were not elected student representatives but paid members of staff. Students were enthusiastic about student liaison officers

and the audit team concluded that the role provided a very supportive link for students. Training as course representatives is provided by the Students' Union and the faculty student liaison officers. Students are also members of university and faculty-level working groups. Student representatives may sit on course approval and review panels. The team found that the University ensures student representation on key University committees and on a range of working groups. At faculty and school levels, the team concluded, however, that opportunities for students to participate directly in the quality management processes could be increased, and considered this to be especially important in the context of devolved responsibilities for quality assurance. The team therefore recommends that it is advisable that the University establishes a role for current students at faculty level through direct representation at relevant faculty committees, as distinct from the role of student liaison officer, employed as a member of staff by the University.

40 The Learning and Teaching Strategy aims to encourage research-informed teaching and learning. The Centre for Research Informed Teaching was established in 2007 in the Learning Development Unit to support staff to create the curriculum underpinned by research and to give undergraduates experience of research activity. The University has set up a HEFCE-funded Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning: the Centre for Employability through the Humanities whose research focuses on embedding employability in the curriculum. Human Resources offers sabbaticals and secondments to staff as part of its strategy for all academic staff to undertake research or knowledge transfer by 2012, and the Information Strategy aims to provide research targeted technologies and designated research library facilities to enable staff to more easily pursue teaching related research. Staff who met the audit team were positive about the available opportunities to carry out research. The team found that the University has developed a number of approaches that can enable it to realise its aim to link research and scholarly activity to students' learning opportunities.

41 The University has integrated e-learning within the Information and Learning and Teaching Strategies but it will take cognisance of the new HEFCE e-Learning Strategy in any further developments. The Information Strategy includes developing further mobile services to enable off-campus access, building on the current availability of course materials on its virtual learning environment, 'elearn'. The Learning Development Unit offers support to staff delivering e-learning that includes a starter pack of training to blend traditional learning with e-learning. The Learning Development Unit also offers funding through e-Learning Development Projects. These support faculties in developing programmes with either full or partial online study. There is as yet no institutional policy on the materials that courses should make available electronically.

42 The Learning and Teaching Strategy and Estates Strategy have addressed the quality of learning environments and, as a result, the £1.1 million HEFCE-funded Tech Tick project has successfully provided new technical equipment in 200 teaching rooms. A key structural change to support the implementation of these strategies has been the decision to bring together the Library and Learning Resources Service and the Information Systems Service to create a new Learning Information Services in 2008. The library has been refurbished to provide a 'Learning Zone' for group activities and a quiet postgraduate area. A new research centre for staff and postgraduates is currently being set up. The students' written submission praised the University for the new refurbishments. The audit team concluded that the impact of the Medium Term Strategy on students' learning opportunities is becoming apparent, particularly through the considerable improvements to the facilities for learning.

43 The Head of Admissions is responsible for implementing, monitoring and reviewing the Admissions Policy. There is a code of practice that provides detailed requirements for admissions procedures and the audit team found that it reflected the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education*. The admissions system is centrally organised in the Student Affairs Service with some processes such as interviews dealt with at faculty level. The admissions team includes an applicant guidance officer who gives assistance to students during the admissions process. The Graduate Research Office supports the process of applications to research degrees. The International Office liaises closely with the admissions team to offer a more streamlined process

for overseas students. At faculty level, the Student Access Committee and faculty student access committees take a strategic view of matters that impact on admissions policies and practices.

44 The University has a well-structured arrangement for student support, with a network of central and distributed facilities in The 'i', the Students' Union and faculties. The 'i' is the key central provision for student support through a face-to-face service and a comprehensive website. The number of students using The 'i' since its establishment in 2003 has grown considerably, and students see it as a great source of help. The 'i' offers a range of support at key stages in students' engagement with university life. 'Flying Start' provides an introductory course during the summer and was highly praised by students met at the audit. The 'i' organises a comprehensive induction programme and provides students with high quality resources, such as the Organiser and 'i' Handbook. The 'i' runs study skills provision through its Wiser programme, and has a student mentor scheme. 'Fresh Start' offers support to students considering changing their course or withdrawing from the University. The audit team identified, as a feature of good practice, the integrated student support service, known as The 'i', for its accessibility and provision of high quality information, guidance and support for students.

45 Support for students in faculties is provided primarily by personal tutors whose role is defined in a guide for personal tutors. Tutors introduce students to the Card, a code of conduct for staff and students that has proved to be valued by students, and are expected to encourage students to use their Organiser as a tool for personal development planning. There is a faculty international coordinator who acts as a point of contact for international students and is involved in their induction process. International students can also have the support of a team of buddies.

46 To give students support in enhancing their career perspectives, the Student Employability and Enterprise Strategy aims to prepare students to succeed in future learning or employment. To do this, the University has consolidated various centres and initiatives into one centre: the Futures Team. As part of Futures, the Northern Lights Business Incubation Unit offers students and graduates facilities to engage in start-up businesses.

47 The student written submission expressed praise for the University's mechanisms for student support and this was confirmed by students who met the audit team. The team concluded that the University's arrangements for student support were effective in maintaining the quality of students' learning opportunities.

48 The University's approach to staff support is shaped by two supporting strategies: Human Resources and Learning and Teaching. The Human Resources Implementation Plan includes procedures to select appropriate new staff and develop and enhance the capabilities of existing staff to meet the envisaged needs of the future University, including procedures for induction, appraisal and mentoring, supporting all academic staff to be research active or involved in knowledge transfer by 2012, and developing potential senior staff through the Future Proof project. All teaching and learning-related staff are expected to take part in peer support for learning and teaching through the observation scheme. The Learning Development Unit provides initial teaching development for new members of staff and a Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, accredited by the Higher Education Academy, is also available. The Learning Development Unit offers a further range of staff development courses. Staff can apply for support from the teaching, learning and assessment fund to carry out specific projects, and the Harris Awards for Excellence offers staff the opportunity to undertake their own project in learning and teaching. The audit team found that there were effective arrangements for staff support and development for academics engaged in teaching and learning.

49 At the time of the audit, the application of the implementation plans for the various supporting strategies to the Medium Term Strategy appeared to be well developed. The audit team found that this process was having a positive impact on the management of learning opportunities. The audit team found that confidence could reasonably be placed in the University's present and likely future management of the quality of learning opportunities.

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

50 The University's approach to enhancement has evolved out of its experience over a number of years of targeting strategically important projects for implementation across the University as a whole. It has now embedded a number of enhancement themes at institutional level within its Medium Term Strategy. Alongside these themes the University operates a project based approach to academic and business enhancement through the activities of the Learning Development Unit, the Academic Audit Sub-committee and the Business Enhancement Team.

51 Through the Medium Term Strategy the University has committed to addressing the three enhancement themes of Employability and Enterprise, Internationalisation and Sustainable Development throughout its curricula. In order to achieve this, the Course Developer's Guide used by schools, places a requirement for the themes to be considered at validation and periodic course review. The audit team was given a range of often interesting and innovative examples of the ways in which the themes had been implemented in different courses. In cases where it has not been appropriate to embed all of the themes within the formal curriculum, an alternative informal curriculum provides opportunities to engage with them. These include bursary schemes for students to study abroad and an international language programme with an emphasis on non-European languages. The development of the themes is supported by funding for specific course based projects and through guidance provided by the Learning Development Unit. With HEFCE support the University has also established a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning: the Centre for Employability through the Humanities. The remit of this centre has been to develop the employability and enterprise theme within non-vocational courses.

52 The Academic Audit Sub-committee was established to target University-wide procedures or mechanisms which contribute to the quality of the students' learning experiences, with a view to improving their effectiveness and consistency. It does this through a programme of an average of four audits each year covering a variety of topics.

53 The Business Enhancement Team was established to facilitate the quick, effective and efficient delivery of the University's services to its customers and to enhance its business tools and systems to improve the working environment. It has employed a project-based approach, working closely with academic stakeholders and with a clear focus on improving the student experience.

54 Another complementary, project-based approach to academic enhancement is the support by the Learning Development Unit of a series of Academic Enhancement projects. In line with the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the need to address current issues such as feedback and assessment these projects focus on continuing personal and professional development; learning, teaching and assessment; student retention and e-learning. Of the eight projects conducted so far, the Learning Development Unit has been proactive in initiating two which have been student-led: the Application to Assessment project intended to support students new to the University and the Student's Guide to Assessment. The production of a guide to assessment by students for their peers not only provided an excellent learning resource but also offered the Learning Development Unit a valuable insight into the concerns that students have over assessment and feedback. The audit team found the innovative approach to the involvement of students demonstrated in the development and production of the Student's Guide to Assessment, to be a feature of good practice.

55 The audit team identified the strategic, project based approach employed by the Academic Audit Sub-committee, The Learning Development Unit and the Business Enhancement Team, which provides an effective model for enhancement across the University, as a feature of good practice.

56 Research informed teaching forms another focus for enhancement based upon the objective within the Learning and Teaching Strategy to develop a curriculum which is underpinned by research. A key vehicle for this has been the establishment of a Centre for Research Informed Teaching. The Centre operates an intern scheme which has in the last year enabled over 40 undergraduates to work with research active staff during the summer. It has also

published a journal, *Diffusion*, to showcase undergraduate research and is supporting a number of projects within schools to publish case-studies of the impact of research on undergraduates. The audit team identified the role of the Centre for Research Informed Teaching in raising undergraduate students' research aspirations, particularly through the *Diffusion* journal and the Student Intern Scheme as a feature of good practice.

57 Enhancement is supported by the Learning Development Unit through a programme of staff development and the distribution of project funding which this year has a focus on technology-based approaches to enhance assessment. The University also has a number of mechanisms for sharing good practice, in particular through the dissemination of innovative and interesting approaches identified in the annual monitoring process.

58 The audit team concluded that together this comprehensive range of activities constitutes a strategic, thorough and effective approach to quality enhancement.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

59 The University will be subject to a separate audit of its collaborative provision.

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

60 Postgraduate research degree programmes play a major part in the new vision and strategy for the University. The University is investing substantially in the creation of new research centres in a variety of discipline areas. In a new Research Strategy, which is in its first year of implementation, the University sets out an ambitious agenda with clearly laid out objectives to enhance the research standing of the University by 2012.

61 The University has developed a comprehensive set of policies and procedures for the operation of its research programmes, supported by the University's Code of Conduct for Research. The Academic Quality Assurance manual clearly sets out all arrangements for the management of research degrees. Institutional responsibility for the quality of postgraduate research rests with the Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee. The Committee holds the responsibility for the research environment and management including strategy and policy and reports directly to the Academic Board. Operational management with regard to registration and monitoring of student progression is delegated to the four faculty research degree subcommittees.

62 The central Graduate Research Office provides administrative support to schools for admissions and examinations. Each school has a research degree tutor who monitors school internal quality assurance processes, the progression of students and the coordination of training. Heads of school and research degree tutors are responsible for admissions. All students are interviewed by a panel. Faculty research degree subcommittees, supported by a pool of referees, approve the programme and confirm the supervisory team. For taught and professional doctorate programmes the University Research Degree Sub-committee takes responsibility.

63 New research students receive a central induction pack and a student handbook. Central and faculty induction programmes are coordinated by the Office of the Director of Research and individual training needs are established at the start of the programme.

64 Generic as well as bespoke research training is provided by the Office of the Director of Research, the faculties and various training providers central to the University. Students are encouraged to attend a yearly training programme, for which they receive certification.

65 Postgraduate research students who undertake teaching are required to attend a one-day Introduction to Teaching session and are offered a week long Higher Education Teaching Toolkit module, although the latter is not taken up by all students. Some research students have continued onto the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education.

66 Students are issued with a progression file which holds their record of supervisory meetings, research and skills training and attendance at conferences. Personal development planning is linked in with the supervisory process and opportunities for students to engage with their own personal development planning are related to their individual programme.

67 There are clear stipulations for supervisory arrangements. Supervisory teams consist of at least two research active and experienced supervisors. Each student is entitled to a minimum number of supervisory meetings each year. Students who met the audit team reported some variability in supervisory arrangements. Research supervisors are supported by training activities such as the Postgraduate Certificate in Research Student Supervision.

68 All students are set progression criteria for the first year on entry. Thereafter the annual progression exercise continues the process of criteria setting and monitors student progress. Students who met the audit team confirmed that they were well briefed on progression requirements with regard to the University's expectations.

69 Each faculty has a faculty research student committee. The University is making efforts to boost participation and increase the level of student evaluation through various means. At university-level research students are only represented at the Research Student Experience Working Party. The audit team formed the view that student representation at institutional level is to be encouraged.

70 Research students are examined through thesis submission and oral examination, and possibly exhibition and performance for practice-based research projects. For each research degree award there is an external examiner with appropriate standing and expertise. The examiners are supported through the examination officers in the Graduate Research Office and the Information for Internal and External Examiners for Research Degrees. The Graduate Research Office also provides briefings and mock viva examinations which are appreciated by students.

71 In addition to the University's general complaints procedures for progress or examination decisions which form part of the Academic Regulations, students also have access to the Complaints and Grievance Procedure for Research Students with regard to complaints about supervision and their research programme. Students who met the audit team appeared well informed about the procedures.

72 The audit team found that the University provided a lively and intellectually stimulating environment for its research students and staff. The quality of learning opportunities and academic standards are ensured via a thorough quality assurance framework which is set out in the comprehensive Academic Quality Assurance manual. On the basis of the evidence provided, the team was able to verify that processes, as described, were being implemented. The team concluded that the University makes effective use of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes* and other external reference points.

## **Section 7: Published information**

73 The University produces a comprehensive range of documents designed to provide prospective and current students with information regarding their studies, the services provided by the University and the support available for their life as a student. At institutional level these include the University prospectus which was considered by the students who met the audit team to be an attractive publication which gave an accurate picture of what they could expect from their course. When they join the University, all students are given two complementary documents: a student handbook and the student Organiser. Between them these publications provide a wealth of valuable material including information on services such as finance and health and guidance on learning and personal development planning. Students also place significant emphasis on The 'i' as a key source of information and support.



74 At course level students are supplied with course handbooks which are produced by schools based upon guidance provided in the Academic Quality Assurance manual. They are also provided with module information packs or module guides that contain detailed information about learning activities and assessment. The audit team found that together these were effective in providing details of course content and in making academic expectations clear.

75 The University's web pages are currently managed at school and service level. However, users have reported difficulties in using a range of different navigation systems. The University has responded by recently implementing a new web content management system which will be managed centrally and which will provide standard navigation and appropriate access for students with disabilities.

76 The audit team concluded that the University was proactive in providing prospective and current students with a wide range of accessible, attractive and useful information. The team found that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

## **Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations**

### **Features of good practice**

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

- the integrated student support service, known as The 'i', for its accessibility and provision of high quality information, guidance and support for students (paragraph 44)
- the innovative approach to the involvement of students demonstrated in the development and production of the Student's Guide to Assessment (paragraph 54)
- the strategic, project-based approach employed by the Academic Audit Sub-committee, Learning Development Unit and the Business Enhancement team, which provides an effective model for enhancement across the University (paragraph 55)
- the role of the Centre for Research Informed Teaching in raising undergraduate students' research aspirations, particularly through the Diffusion journal and the Student Intern Scheme (paragraph 56).

### **Recommendations for action**

78 The audit team recommends that the University consider further action in some areas. Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- review the Academic Quality Assurance manual, Part 1 Appendix 6, section 3, in order to ensure scrutiny of each level of annual monitoring by more than one person, within faculty quality frameworks (paragraph 35)
- establish a role for current students at faculty level through direct representation at relevant faculty committees, as distinct from the role of student liaison officer, employed as a member of staff by the University (paragraph 39).

## **Appendix**

### **The University of Central Lancashire's response to the Institutional audit report**

The University welcomes the audit team's judgements of confidence in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to its students. It is particularly gratifying that the team found our approach to quality enhancement to be strategic, thorough and effective, and the environment for research students and staff to be lively and intellectually stimulating.

We are pleased that other areas of good practice identified by the audit team recognise the University's commitment to student support and to raising students' research aspirations.

The University appreciates the constructive contribution made by the audit to its ongoing enhancement agenda and will address the report's two recommendations.

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