

University of Kent

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Annex to the report

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Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) carried out an Institutional audit of Kent University (the University) from 10 to 14 November 2008. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's management of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. To arrive at its conclusions, the team spoke to members of staff and students and also read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the University manages the academic aspects of its provision. In Institutional audit, the institution's management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities is audited. The term 'academic standards' is used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the United Kingdom. The term 'quality of learning opportunities' is used to describe the support provided by an institution to enable students to achieve its awards. It is about the provision of appropriate teaching, support and assessment for students.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the 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 its awards
- 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 University's approach to quality enhancement places an increasing emphasis on enhancement within its normal quality assurance processes and seeks to identify, and provide support for, practices and projects which are likely to enhance the student learning experience.

Postgraduate research students

The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for securing and enhancing the quality and standards of its research degree programmes are sound and reflect the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA.

Published information

The University has implemented systems which ensure that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy of the information it publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following features of good practice:

- the development, coordination and provision by the Unit for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching of a broad range of advisory and support services and development opportunities for staff and students (paragraphs 20, 21, 83)
- the University's approach to facilitating staff engagement in quality assurance and quality enhancement through the extensive use of its information management system (paragraphs 28, 39)

- further developments in the scope and utility of the University's Progression Analysis Tool (paragraph 50)
- the development of programme specifications for research degrees (paragraph 107).

Recommendations for action

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

It would be advisable for the University to:

- revisit its approach to the Personal Academic Support System in order to ensure that all students are made aware of the personal support available to them (paragraph 82).

It would be desirable for the University to:

- articulate more explicitly its strategic approach to quality enhancement for the benefit of staff and students (paragraph 103)
- specify a minimum level of training or development which research students should undergo before they may contribute to teaching (paragraph 121).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 The University of Kent (the University) was granted its Royal Charter in 1965 as the University of Kent at Canterbury, and admitted its first students in October of that year. In 2003 the University changed its name to the University of Kent to reflect its expansion at other campuses.

2 Most of the University's provision is delivered on a 300-acre campus close to Canterbury city centre. It also has campuses in Tonbridge, Brussels (known as the University of Kent at Brussels) and Medway (shared with the University of Greenwich, Canterbury Christ Church University and Mid-Kent College).

3 Teaching and research takes place across a broad range of disciplines, which are organised into 18 departments, grouped into three faculties: the Faculty of Humanities, the Faculty of Science, Technology and Medical Studies, and the Faculty of Social Sciences. The University has created a number of centres to support specific research areas or themes. Some centres within the faculties are responsible for teaching academic programmes which are aligned to the research area of the centre but do not have a cognate disciplinary home within an existing department.

4 In 2007-08, the University had a total of 15,878 students enrolled on higher education programmes (13,679 full-time equivalent), shown by programme level and mode of study below.

Level	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Undergraduate	11,061	2,745	13,806
Taught postgraduate	820	640	1,460
Research postgraduate	446	166	612
Total	12,327	3,551	15,878

5 According to the University's Institutional Plan 2006-09, 'The University of Kent provides higher education of excellent quality...enlarges knowledge by research...is an intellectual and cultural focus for Kent and Medway, supports national and regional economic success [and] builds vigorously on its close ties within Europe and continues to develop wider international relationships'.

The information base for the audit

6 The audit team had access to the reports of the following QAA reviews: the Institutional audit of the University, March 2004, and the Review of postgraduate research degree programmes for the University, July 2006.

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

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

9 The audit team was given full access to the University's internal documents through a dedicated 'QAA Audit Team Webpage', which it found to be extremely helpful and user-friendly. The team met groups of staff and students, according to a programme agreed with the University.

Developments since the last audit

10 QAA's last audit of the University in 2004 resulted in a judgement of broad confidence in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The report noted three features of good practice and made two recommendations where action was considered advisable and one where action was considered desirable. The advisable recommendations related to the development of the University's internal Code of Practice for Quality Assurance to ensure that it engages with the Academic Infrastructure in its entirety; and considering the relationship between its internal Code of Practice and its other regulatory frameworks and their operation within individual departments, in order to ensure equality of student experience and assessment across the University as a whole, in all its locations. The desirable recommendation related to revisiting the University's approach to issues of variability in operational procedures across all areas of its work, particularly where this impacts upon the student experience.

11 In considering the University's response to the recommendations of the 2004 audit report, the audit team noted that the University had developed a detailed action plan describing how it had responded (or was continuing to respond) to each recommendation, who was responsible for each action and progress to date. The action plan indicated that the University had responded to all of the recommendations and many other comments embedded in the text of the report. In particular, the University had reviewed, revised and extended its own Code of Practice for Quality Assurance such that it now reflects the Academic Infrastructure in its entirety; and audited and revised those aspects of the design and operation of its Code of Practice and other regulatory frameworks which had given rise to concerns about inconsistencies in the student experience across the institution. The team's scrutiny of documentation and meetings with staff demonstrated that these actions had indeed been carried out as indicated in the plan. They are discussed in detail under the relevant headings in this Annex. The team, therefore, concluded, that the University had responded fully to the recommendations of the 2004 audit report, with the exception of that element of the desirable recommendation on the variability of operational procedures which concerned student academic support. This is discussed in Section 3 below.

12 In its Briefing Paper, the University highlighted a number of important recent developments beyond the response to the 2004 audit report. These included the appointment of a Dean of Flexible Learning and the creation of a Centre for Flexible Learning to lead and provide a focal point, respectively, for developments in this area; the expansion of its operations in Europe, including at the Brussels campus; and the appointment of a Dean of Graduate Studies to manage the establishment of a Graduate School.

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

13 The Code of Practice for Quality Assurance is the University's primary quality assurance document. It sets out the principles, structures and procedures through which the University monitors academic standards and improves the quality of its programmes, and defines the responsibilities of individuals, departments, faculties and of the institution as a whole for standards and quality. The Code applies to all programmes leading to an award by the University of certificates, diplomas and degrees at all levels, regardless of how, where and by whom the programme is delivered.

14 The Code is separated into two parts: the Code of Practice for Quality Assurance for Taught Programmes (Taught Code) and the Code of Practice for Quality Assurance for Research Programmes (Research Code). The Taught Code was introduced in 1997 and extensively revised in 2000-01 in response to a number of internal and external changes (including the publication of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA). The Research Code was first developed in 2002 and substantially

revised for republication in September 2005, following the release of the revised *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

15 Senate has ultimate responsibility for the standards and quality of the University's academic programmes. It delegates strategic and operational responsibility for taught and research programmes to the Learning and Teaching Board (LTB) and the Board for Research and Enterprise (BRE) respectively. As directed by these two Boards, regular revisions to the Code of Practice and Credit Framework are undertaken by the Working Group on Regulations and Conventions. Areas of strategic development, however, are more frequently remitted to ad hoc working groups established by LTB and/or BRE to meet their respective strategic objectives. Examples of these working groups include the Working Group on Reducing Bureaucracy and the Assessment Review Working Group.

16 The University introduced the Academic Audit Committee in 1998 to commission quasi-independent internal thematic audits, at a rate of approximately one per academic year. Since the 2004 QAA audit, the Committee has overseen thematic audits of placement learning (2004), student induction (2006), the Personal Academic Support System (2006) and student representation and feedback (2007). The Committee makes recommendations to LTB and its reports are also submitted to Senate.

17 The Executive Group is the University's senior management team. It comprises the Vice-Chancellor, the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor (with responsibility for learning and teaching), the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (with responsibility for planning and physical resources), the Director of Finance and Commercial Services (Deputy Vice-Chancellor from 1 August 2008), the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (External), the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Medway), the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), and the Secretary of the Council.

18 Departments are responsible for devolved budgets and for the quality of learning and teaching and the management of resources. Heads of department are accountable for these delegations to Senate and Council. Line management responsibility for the heads of department rest with the faculty deans. The directors of centres based in the faculties also report to the faculty deans. The faculty deans report to the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

19 For each programme or group of cognate programmes, there is a Director of Studies and a Board of Studies with responsibility for day-to-day quality management. Boards of studies report to a Department Learning and Teaching Committee, which is responsible for ensuring that the department discharges its responsibilities as described in the University's Code of Practice. Department learning and teaching committees, in turn, report to faculty learning and teaching committees, which are responsible for discharging faculty-level responsibilities for standards and quality (such as reviewing departments' annual monitoring reports and organising periodic reviews). Faculty learning and teaching committees report to faculty boards, which report to LTB.

20 Operational responsibility for maintaining the University's quality assurance processes and procedures, and for servicing the University's central committees with responsibilities in this area, lies with the Office for Quality Assurance and Validation. The Office is part of the University's central facility for the professional development of academic staff, educational innovation and development, and advice and guidance for students: the Unit for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (UELТ). Alongside the Office for Quality Assurance and Validation, UELТ comprises the Student Learning Advisory Service, a free advice and guidance service about all aspects of learning and study skills for students; Academic Practice, which provides a range of support for academic staff, such as postgraduate teaching qualifications; and Curriculum and Educational Development, which supports innovation in teaching and learning in areas including e-learning and personal development planning.

21 The audit team noted several instances where the work of UELТ's constituent teams had led to demonstrable improvements to the student learning experience, such as in the support

provided by the Student Learning Advisory Service to stage one students at risk of not progressing to stage two (discussed in Section 3), and in the advice and guidance given to academic staff in departments by Curriculum and Education Development about the development of e-learning (also discussed in Section 3). Taken together, UELT was clearly providing a highly effective, integrated facility both for maintaining the University's quality assurance processes, and for enhancing students' learning opportunities, in particular, for students with specific learning needs. The team, therefore, identified the development, coordination and provision by UELT of a broad range of advisory and support services and development opportunities for staff and students, as a feature of good practice.

Effectiveness of the framework

22 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities enabled individuals, departments, faculties and the institution as a whole to discharge their various responsibilities as set out in the University's Code of Practice. The team's scrutiny of various committee papers and minutes, and meetings with staff, confirmed that the framework was operating effectively.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

23 The University's Code of Practice describes its procedures for assuring academic standards and the reporting structures through which the management of these standards is secured. The Code applies to all programmes leading to an award of the University, including those delivered collaboratively. It encompasses programme approval, programme specification; annual monitoring; periodic review; meetings of boards of examiners; and external examining.

24 Alongside the Code, the University's Credit Framework for Taught Programmes sets out the conventions for assessment, marking, progression, classification and the awards of credit for students on taught programmes of study. Both the Code and the Framework are subject to regular review by the Learning and Teaching Board (LTB).

25 The audit team regarded the Code and the Credit Framework as providing a robust foundation for the management of academic standards. Furthermore, the team's meetings with staff and scrutiny of other documentation demonstrated that the Code and Credit Framework guided practice in all the areas listed above.

Programme approval

26 Procedures for the approval of new taught programmes are described in Annex C of the Taught Code. It is an iterative process in four stages, based on the principle of discrete, successive layers of responsibility for quality assurance. At the first stage departments are required to seek approval in principle from the Executive Group. The proposal is then subject to detailed scrutiny by department and faculty learning and teaching committees, before being submitted for approval to LTB's Programme Approval Sub-Committee and, finally, for notification to LTB itself. Externality is provided by an external adviser, who should be an academic in a relevant discipline, a member of a professional or statutory body, an employer with strong links in the subject area or a key person from a relevant business or industry. They are expected to provide expert subject area advice, including comments about the level of the proposed programme and its relevance to any applicable subject benchmark, prior to consideration by the Department Learning and Teaching Committee.

27 The audit team saw several examples of programme approvals which demonstrated that the process operated in accordance with the University's published procedures.

28 Although the programme approval process succeeds in ensuring that the academic standards of new programmes are appropriate, nonetheless it has, according to the Briefing Paper, been criticised internally for being, '...unwieldy and potentially protracted'. In response the University is piloting the use of a new information management system which enables staff to engage with programme approval more flexibly (for example, not only during formal meetings) and also highlights any delays. The audit team saw a demonstration of the new system that confirmed that it could expedite programme approval without any compromise in the management of academic standards. Staff whom the team met expressed their support for the new approach. This contributed to the team's identification of the University's approach to facilitating staff engagement in quality assurance and quality enhancement through the extensive use of its information management system as a feature of good practice.

29 If a department wishes to withdraw an existing programme, it must prepare a formal proposal for doing so (to include arrangements for allowing existing students to complete their studies) and present it to the Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee for its consideration. The Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee will make a formal recommendation to the Programme Approval Sub-Committee, which will formally record the programme withdrawal and notify LTB.

Annual monitoring

30 Annex E of the Taught Code sets out the University's requirements for the routine monitoring of programmes. Every programme director of studies is required to produce an annual report drawing on a range of evidence specified by the Code, including student feedback, Staff-Student Liaison Committee minutes, external examiner comments, progression and achievement rates and module reports (although module reports are required only where one or more risk indicators are triggered, for example, where the proportion of students passing the module falls below a specific threshold). Through the consideration of external examiner comments and progression and achievement data, the exercise is primarily concerned with the maintenance of academic standards. However, directors of studies are also expected to identify areas of potential good practice in order to contribute to quality enhancement.

31 Department learning and teaching committees receive and consider annual programme reports for all the programmes under their purview, normally at their first meetings of the academic year. They are responsible for highlighting any important issues for the attention of the Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee which may, in turn, report these to LTB. The audit team's scrutiny of Committee minutes confirmed that this process was operating according to the University's published procedures and that information was filtered appropriately as the results of annual monitoring were reported through the Committee system.

Periodic review

32 The University conducts periodic reviews at maximum intervals of six years. The reviews can be confined to one subject area or may span a whole department, depending on the size of the provision. They serve the primary purposes of providing assurance about the standards of the department's programmes, its effectiveness in delivering them and supporting students, identifying areas of good practice and suggesting any areas for improvement. The reviews are conducted by a panel appointed by the relevant faculty dean, two members of which must be external to the University. Reviews normally last two days and include three themed meetings with department staff on teaching, learning and assessment, quality of learning opportunities and the maintenance and enhancement of quality and standards. The panel also holds a meeting with students. The outcome of the review is a written report, which culminates in a recommendation as to whether or not the programme under review should continue. The Head of Department must respond to the report within three months. The report and the response are considered by department and faculty learning and teaching committees and reported to LTB.

One year after the department has responded to the report, it must submit a follow-up report to the Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee commenting on the implementation and progress of any actions taken to satisfy any conditions.

33 The audit team saw two examples of periodic reviews as part of the audit sampling trails, both of which demonstrated that the process operated effectively.

34 In 2008 the University piloted a new approach to periodic review in four areas, which merged the reviews of taught and research programmes. Early feedback suggests that this approach has been very beneficial in providing a more holistic view of a department's provision. In addition, the University invited students to take part in these pilots as full panel members, which has generated similarly positive feedback.

External examiners

35 The University appoints at least one external examiner to all programmes leading to an award. Annex K of the Taught Code describes the University's expectations of its external examiners, the criteria for their nomination and appointment and their roles and functions in securing the academic standards of taught programmes. The audit team regarded Annex K as being consistent with of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*.

36 The University informs external examiners about their roles and responsibilities through the Handbook for External Examiners, which is amplified by further information on a dedicated part of the University website. In addition, all external examiners are encouraged to attend annual training sessions provided by the Unit for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (UFLT) in the spring term, although attendance is not compulsory.

37 External examiners normally submit their reports to the Quality Assurance and Validation Manager, rather than directly to the department concerned (although they may submit to the Head of Department or the Vice-Chancellor if they have particularly strong concerns). The Department Learning and Teaching Committee is then responsible for preparing a written response to each report, which is monitored by a faculty officer before final submission, to make sure it addresses any concerns. Where a report suggests significant problems, the module and programme annual monitoring reports will contain a summary of the issues raised and the actions taken or proposed to remedy them. Faculty learning and teaching committees highlight and summarise emerging issues in their reports to faculty boards which in turn report to LTB.

38 The audit team saw several external examiner reports along with evidence of how these reports were addressed by the relevant departments, including how any issues were reported through the University's committee structure. All of the evidence demonstrated that the process operated effectively.

39 In 2008 the Working Group on Regulations and Conventions reviewed Annex K of the Taught Code in response to the abandonment of the external requirement to publish summaries of external examiner reports. The review led to several changes, including a modified report form which separates recommendations into recommendations for consideration by the department and matters for attention at institutional level. In addition, the revised Annex K now seeks assurances from external examiners that the University's awards are not only comparable to the cognate awards of other institutions (for which confirmation was always sought) but that they are set at the right level with respect to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), published by QAA. To support external examiners in making this judgement, the External Examiner's Handbook now includes the level descriptors of the FHEQ as a standard reference point. Finally, one faculty has begun a new approach to processing external examiner reports utilising the information management system mentioned in paragraph 28. This new approach enables the automatic collation of recommendations by category and theme. The audit team regarded all of the modifications outlined in this paragraph as likely further to secure the operation of an effective external examiner system. Furthermore, the use of

the information management system to process external examiner reports contributed to the team's identification of the University's approach to facilitating staff engagement in quality assurance and quality enhancement through the extensive use of its information management system as a feature of good practice.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

40 According to the Briefing Paper, the University continues to develop its Code of Practice and other related guidance and procedures, '...to ensure that the University maintains a comprehensive engagement with the academic infrastructure, other external reference points and any revisions to these'. The audit team encountered much evidence to substantiate this statement, notably in the close alignment between the University's Code and the *Code of practice*, published by QAA; in the use of the FHEQ in designing, approving and naming new programmes, and in external examining; in the role of subject benchmark statements in designing, approving and reviewing programmes; and in the use of programme specifications in providing definitive statements of module and programme level intended learning outcomes and assessment strategies.

41 The primary use of programme and module specifications is as quality assurance documents and the University acknowledged in its Briefing Paper that these documents probably hold little appeal for students. In consequence, it encourages departments to convey more accessible programme information through student handbooks.

42 Many of the University's programmes are accredited by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), including in Forensic Science, Architecture and Pharmacy. Responsibility for engaging with these bodies rests primarily with individual departments, although the University maintains a central database of PSRB accreditation to support oversight of these links. In addition, LTB has recently approved a new procedure for ensuring that departments' responses to PSRB reports are appropriate and timely, and that any recommendations which may have ramifications for the institution as a whole are more easily identified.

43 The University considers that its comprehensive engagement with the Academic Infrastructure means that it is also aligned with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*. LTB is currently considering the implications of the European Higher Education Area for the University's integrated master's degrees and has asked the Working Group on Regulations and Conventions to consider the recommendations of the Universities UK Europe Unit on the proposed restructuring of these programmes, so that they might retain their status as second cycle awards.

Assessment policies and regulations

44 The University has internalised the qualification level descriptors expressed in the FHEQ in its Credit Framework which has been in place since 2002. The descriptors provide benchmarks for the overall threshold generic standards which students have to reach in order to be successful in modules and programmes. Strategies for assessing student achievement at an appropriate level are contained in individual module and programme specifications and detailed grading criteria are provided by departments.

45 The University prepares an annual digest of the Credit Framework each spring and circulates it to all examiners in hard copy and on the University website. The University also uses its Guidance to Examiners document to highlight any amendments that may have been made to the Credit Framework's conventions and procedures since the previous round of examiners' meetings.

46 The 2004 QAA Institutional audit report raised concerns about the variability of assessment practice and recommended that the University considered the relationship between its own internal Code of Practice and other regulatory frameworks and their operation within

individual departments, in order to ensure equality of student experience and assessment across the University as a whole. The University responded by creating the Assessment Review Working Group to review assessment practice across the institution on the basis of feedback from staff, students, employers and QAA. The review led to the development and publication of the University's Assessment Framework, which aims to provide a statement of the principles and processes that should underpin assessment methods throughout the University; ensure that the University's assessment methods are transparent and applied fairly and consistently; encourage the use of a range of assessment techniques; and promote the identification and dissemination of good practice. The Framework's principles echo the precepts of the *Code of practice* in many respects; it also provides extensive guidance to departments in developing and reviewing their assessment practices. In order to promote staff engagement with the new Framework, and to address the relatively lower satisfaction rates in the National Student Survey for assessment and feedback, the University made assessment an enhancement theme for the 2007-08 academic year. UELT is providing further support in several ways, including through the Academic Practice Forum and by providing case-studies on a dedicated part of the website. The audit team concluded that the University had responded fully to this aspect of the previous audit report.

47 The procedures for the conduct of boards of examiners' meetings are described in Annex J of the University's Taught Code. All board chairs are required to convene a representative group of examiners prior to the Board meeting to agree recommendations on concessionary cases.

48 In order to assure itself of the fairness of the University's assessment procedures, LTB established a Working Group on Classification Methodologies. The interim report of the Working Group, presented to LTB in June 2008, found that, overall, the University's procedures and classification methodologies were fair and consistent, and that the profile of degree results was also generally consistent with the University's peer group. However, the Working Group also reported that, in the interests of further limiting variability, it would investigate the possibility of limiting the application of discretion by boards of examiners in classifying borderline candidates. The Group's final report was expected in late 2008.

Management information - statistics

49 The University's Student Planning Data Office is responsible for managing and providing a wide range of statistical information on admission, progression, retention and achievement. These data play an important role in the University's main quality assurance processes: in periodic review, departments are required to provide panels with information about entry qualifications, progression and completion rates, student achievement, degree classifications and first employment destinations; and in annual monitoring, while statistical data is not included in annual monitoring reports, the Taught Code states that it must be available to department learning and teaching committees to assist with the evaluation of those reports.

50 In 2003 the Student Planning Data Office created a Progression Analysis Tool (PAT) to analyse trends in student progression. The PAT was regarded as a feature of good practice at the last QAA Institutional audit in 2004. Since then, the University has made significant improvements to the PAT, including by broadening its scope to include all University students (regardless of mode of study or campus) and simplifying the user interface so that staff in departments can interrogate the data according to their own particular requirements without the need for specialist training or knowledge of the system. The audit team saw a demonstration of the system which confirmed its view that the further developments in the scope and utility of the PAT represented a feature of good practice.

Conclusion

51 The audit team concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of the quality of learning opportunities

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

52 The 2004 QAA Institutional audit report recommended that the University continue to develop its own Code of Practice to ensure that it engaged with the Academic Infrastructure in its entirety. In response, the University reviewed, revised and extended its Code, and developed a number of published policies on inter alia admissions and flexible learning. The audit team's scrutiny of these documents confirmed that the recommendation of the last audit had been fully met.

53 The Learning and Teaching Board (LTB) is responsible for receiving revised sections of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA. Normally it then refers the revised sections to the relevant subcommittee for a detailed view about how the University should respond. An appendix to the Briefing Paper described in detail how the University had responded to each section of the *Code*. The documentary evidence referenced by this appendix confirmed the audit team's view about the soundness of the University's management in this regard.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

54 The University's procedures for programme approval, monitoring and periodic review, described in Section 2 of this Annex, each expect programme teams, and external experts where they are involved, to consider the availability of appropriate learning opportunities for students, alongside academic standards. Salient features of these processes include the requirement within programme approval for an external adviser to provide comments before the proposal is submitted to the Department Learning and Teaching Committee; the activation of a full module report within annual programme monitoring where students raise significant issues about learning opportunities (either through course evaluations or at Staff-Student Liaison Committee meetings); and the requirement for periodic review panels (which must include at least two external members) to report on the quality of learning opportunities, including the availability of appropriate learning resources, student progression and the effectiveness of the department's Personal Academic Support system for all students, including those with disabilities. The audit team's scrutiny of a range of documents associated with these processes confirmed that they were operating effectively, with the exception of one periodic review report which did not report on the Personal Academic Support system. This is discussed in more detail in paragraphs 80 to 89.

Management information - feedback from students

55 Annex M of the Taught Code, entitled 'Student Evaluation', sets out the University's expectations regarding the identification of the views of students on matters related to learning and teaching and for consideration of these views. The Code identifies two main vehicles for identifying students' views: module evaluation questionnaires and staff-student liaison committees. It stipulates that module evaluation questionnaires should cover a range of areas, including advance information, teaching methods, timeliness of marking and feedback, and the provision and achievement of intended learning outcomes; and directs departments to establish at least one staff-student liaison committee, to include at least one student from each stage of the programme or group of programmes falling within the committee's purview, and which should meet at least once per term.

56 The University reviewed student representation and feedback through a thematic audit in 2007-08 conducted under the auspices of the Academic Audit Committee. The audit recommended that the guidance in Annex M on staff-student liaison committees be redrafted to emphasise to departments that agendas should provide scope for the discussion of all aspects of student learning, and that students should be informed of how their views have been considered following each meeting. These recommendations were adopted by LTB in June 2008. In addition, the University

has initiated a review by an ad hoc module evaluation form working group of module evaluation questionnaires. The working group's report will be considered by LTB in late 2008.

57 In addition to module evaluation questionnaires and staff-student liaison committees, the University gathers student feedback through the results of the National Student Survey (NSS) and a University-wide student questionnaire which reflects the structure of the NSS but asks more detailed questions. The University publishes the results of these questionnaires on the Student Portal of the University website along with any actions it has taken in response. The recent thematic audit of student representation and feedback outlined above regarded this work as best practice. The Student Data Planning Office is responsible for analysing the results of student questionnaires and reporting them to departments, faculties and University committees.

58 The audit team saw data in the student written submission to suggest that the great majority of students believed that the University listened to the student voice. The team discussed this issue with students at the briefing and audit visits; these discussions broadly confirmed the views set out in the submission. In addition, the team was able to confirm, through its scrutiny of department, faculty and University committee minutes, that the University regarded the results of the NSS and its own student questionnaire as highly important, and that systems were in place to respond to any concerns which these surveys exposed.

Role of students in quality assurance

59 Students are represented at every level of the University's committee system. At institutional level, they are represented by sabbatical officers on Council, Senate and Senate's major subcommittees including LTB and many of its ad hoc working groups. At Kent Union's invitation, senior staff reciprocate students' membership of the University's committees by attending two Union committees with a close interest in the quality of the student experience: the Education Forum and Education Committee.

60 At faculty and department level, the University manages student representation in partnership with the Kent Union. The Union employs a Representation and Democracy Manager who is responsible for organising the election of programme representatives and the provision of training. The student written submission suggested that the large majority of student representatives were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the way individual departments deal with issues they raise. This view was endorsed by the students whom the audit team met, including students from campuses outside Canterbury. At faculty level, however, representation is not as strong; the University acknowledged in its Briefing Paper that further action will be required to strengthen representation at this level.

61 LTB has agreed to amend the Taught Code to make it a requirement for recommendations from external examiners to be shared with student representatives at staff-student liaison committees. This will be implemented from the 2008-09 academic year.

62 Alongside the University's formal committee structure, students have been involved as full panel members in the pilot procedure for the joint periodic review of taught and research programmes described in paragraph 34 above. The audit team met two student panel members who confirmed that they had been adequately prepared for the role, and had been able to contribute to the review and make an impact.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

63 Part of the University's mission is to, '...provide higher education of excellent quality informed by research and scholarship'. The Briefing Paper stated that the University sought to further this aspect of its mission in a number of ways, including by encouraging academic staff to bring their research interests to bear on new programme proposals. The audit team noted, however, that Annex C of the Taught Code on the Approval of New Programmes makes no mention of the links between teaching and research and scholarship, apart from a reference in

Appendix A to the Annex, which suggests that staff involved in developing new programmes consider current research or other advanced scholarship carried out by academic staff in demonstrating how the proposed new programme has currency within the academic community. The team also noted from the evidence provided as part of the audit sampling trails that, while periodic review panels are asked to conclude whether or not the programme under review remains current in the light of developing knowledge in the discipline, there is no explicit question about the relationship between research and teaching. Against the backdrop of the pilot joint periodic reviews of research and taught programmes, the team concluded that there may be an opportunity for the University to make the links between research and teaching more explicit.

Other modes of study

64 The University's Institutional Plan 2006-09 includes a number of themes which rely to some extent on the development of flexible learning. These include the provision of higher education of excellent quality (particularly in the context of a growing market for part-time students); the provision of an exceptional student experience (regardless of students' location and mode of study); and supporting national and regional economic success (which includes extending opportunities for work-based and work-related learning).

65 Recognising the importance of flexible learning to the delivery of the Institutional Plan, the University has adopted a Flexible Learning Strategy which repeats and amplifies the relevant themes from the Plan, and a Flexible Learning Operational Plan which lists objectives and targets against each of these themes (for example, removing 'unnecessary' restrictions on the availability of modules; creating new programmes in applied professional practice; and developing generic work-related learning modules). The delivery of the Strategy and Operational Plan is led by a Dean of Flexible Learning, who reports to the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor, and is supported by the staff of the Centre for Flexible Learning. Institutional oversight of this area is provided by LTB's Flexible Learning Sub-Committee.

Resources for learning

Physical accommodation

66 The provision of appropriate and well-equipped teaching, learning, research and support spaces for staff and students is one of the main 'enabling activities' recorded in the University's current Institutional Plan. Each enabling activity is 'owned' by a member of the Executive Group; this activity is owned by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Planning and Physical Resources), guided by the Estates Strategy and supported by the Estates Department.

67 The audit team noted from the papers and minutes of LTB that a scarcity of appropriate teaching space had been raised by at least one faculty in its draft Learning and Teaching Plan for 2008-09. LTB responded by asking the Pro-Vice-Chancellor to consider the creation of a new group to focus on the systematic improvement of University teaching space. This proposal was still under discussion at the time of the audit, but it was clear to the team from the papers and minutes of LTB, and in meetings with staff, that the University was taking the issue extremely seriously and indeed had already commissioned an audit of teaching space by the Timetabling Office.

Library and computing resources

68 Information Services is responsible for providing information technology (IT) and library services, training and user support. Information Services has a strategy to guide its work (the current version runs from 2006-07 to 2008-09), which is underpinned by an annual Operational Plan. Both the Strategy and Operational Plan are informed by an annual IT and library student survey, which is tailored to each separate campus, and by the results of the NSS and the University's student questionnaire.

69 The audit team noted a number of criticisms in the student written submission regarding the University's provision of library and computing resources which concerned, in particular, a shortage of core text books, a lack of training for students in the use of online resources and a scarcity of flexible study spaces in the Templeman Library. The team further noted the findings of the 2004 QAA Institutional audit report regarding students' perceptions of an inequity in the provision of learning resources between the Medway and Canterbury campuses; and the University's 2006 and 2007 NSS scores for library resources, which were 0.2 and 0.1 points below the average for the sector respectively.

70 Against this backdrop, the audit team scrutinised a range of evidence relating to the provision of library and computing resources, including the results of the annual IT and library student survey for each campus, the relevant sections of external examiner reports and the results of the two periodic reviews provided as part of the audit sampling trails (periodic review panels are required to investigate the provision of learning resources). The team also discussed the issue with students from each of the University's campuses.

71 The audit team concluded that the University's management of the provision of library and computing resources was sound. While it identified some concerns, such as the loan periods for books at the Tonbridge campus, it found the evidence from student surveys, external examiner reports, periodic review reports and meetings with students to be, in the main, very positive and indicative of an appropriate level of consistency across the different campuses. Furthermore, the team found in the IT and library student survey that the University had a robust mechanism for identifying students' concerns and saw in committee minutes that it sought to respond to any concerns quickly. Indeed, the willingness of Information Services to listen and respond to students' concerns was commended in the student written submission. This seemed to be reflected by a rising trend in the relevant NSS scores.

e-Learning

72 The University adopted an e-Learning Strategy in 2007 to guide developments in its virtual learning environment (VLE), which had been in place since 2005. The Strategy emphasises ownership of e-learning by academic staff and departments and avoids setting targets or prescribing the use of the VLE in a particular way. This approach is reflected in the appointment of three faculty learning technologists (FLT), part of the Unit for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching's (UEL) Curriculum and Education Development team, who provide support for departments and staff in e-learning development through regular training sessions, bespoke 'FLT days' and ad-hoc advice and support. In addition, the University has created an e-Learning website as a central source of advice and information, including the support available from the FLTs. The e-Learning Strategy is overseen by the e-Learning Strategy Group which reports to LTB.

73 In its Briefing Paper, the University stated that the adoption of the e-Learning Strategy precipitated a substantial increase in the use of the VLE by staff and students. However, as usage increased, the system became increasingly unreliable, leading to complaints from students. In response, UEL and Information Services conducted a review of the VLE and recommended to the e-Learning Strategy Group that the University should migrate to an alternative VLE platform from September 2009. The Executive Group endorsed this recommendation in early 2008.

74 The audit team noted the careful and deliberate way in which the University was managing the transition to the new platform, which included providing full support for the outgoing platform until the end of the 2008-09 academic year, while at the same time providing staff and students with a phased introduction to the new system. The staff and students whom the team met expressed their support for the migration to the new platform.

Admissions policy

75 The University has a formal Admissions Policy, which expresses its wish to, '...admit students who have the capacity to benefit from study at degree level, and the capacity to complete their courses in the time and with the teaching and other support that the University can reasonably be expected to make available'. The policy reflects the principles of fairness, transparency and equality of opportunity described in the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education*, and emphasises the University's commitment to widening participation and internationalisation.

76 The Information, Recruitment and Admissions Office processes all applications and admissions to the University. The selection of applicants for undergraduate programmes is the responsibility of designated admissions officers within academic departments; selection of applicants for postgraduate programmes is managed by directors of graduate study/research, also within departments.

77 The roles and responsibilities of departments' admissions officers are set out in a Code of Practice for Admissions Officers, which is published on the University website, along with the protocols and procedures for admissions. The Information, Recruitment and Admissions Office provides a bi-annual training programme for new admissions officers. This is augmented by ad hoc meetings and one-to-one sessions when particular training needs are identified or when admissions officers are appointed outside the normal admissions cycle. The Information, Recruitment and Admissions Office reports to LTB's Student Recruitment Sub-Committee.

78 The audit team regarded the University's Admissions Policy and its underlying Code of Practice for Admissions Officers and related protocols and procedures as consistent with the *Code of practice, Section 10*. The team also discussed the implementation of the policies and procedures with the Head of Admissions and an admissions officer from a department, which confirmed that the University had appropriate procedures for ensuring that admissions officers were competent to undertake the role.

79 The University's Widening Participation Strategy 2007-10 describes its ambition to diversify the student body, including by increasing the proportion of students from socio-economic groups which are under represented in higher education. Much of the work underlying this ambition is focused on the University's partnership schools programme with 19 non-selective schools in the region. The programme has three key elements: 'Stepping Up', which aims to raise demand for higher education generally among under-represented groups; subject-based events provided by departments; and a regional scholarship scheme which provides two students per school, per year with scholarships to study at the University.

Student support

80 Annex G of the Taught Code, entitled Personal Academic Support System (PASS), stipulates that each department should, '...establish and publicise a clear system of academic support and advice on progress for all its students', which must, at a minimum, '...ensure that students can consult named officers in the department...' on a range of issues including module choices, study skills, learning resources and academic problems.

81 The Code does not prescribe precisely how this system should operate and different departments have responded in different ways to the Code's requirement to identify named officers for the provision of academic support. In some departments, each student is assigned a personal tutor from academic staff, while other departments have appointed dedicated student support officers. The Briefing Paper maintained that this flexibility had a positive impact, '... in that it allows departments to operate systems which are appropriate to their size and subject area', and also because it encourages innovation which could be disseminated to other areas. The student written submission, however, reported that some departments had not succeeded in making all students aware of local arrangements. These concerns were amplified by students

whom the audit team met, many of whom clearly did not understand the academic support which the Code says should be 'clearly and fully' communicated to them. Furthermore, the team noted variability in the way PASS is considered during periodic review, in spite of a statement in the Briefing Paper that, 'There is a meeting with staff members during the review which is dedicated to the investigation of learning resources, student progression and the effectiveness of PASS for students'. Of the two periodic review reports which the team read, one concluded that PASS was a 'striking feature' of the department's provision, but the other did not mention it at all.

82 Variability in the departments' provision of academic support was raised in the 2004 QAA Institutional audit, which encouraged the University to ensure that, '...students enrolled in different departments receive an equivalent threshold of guidance and support', and in an internal audit of PASS by the Academic Audit Committee in 2006, which confirmed that students did not have, '...equal and consistent access to a coherent, complete and current description of local level PASS arrangement'. Although the audit team acknowledged that the University had made some improvements to the system in response to these findings (such as the development of guidance for personal tutors), it was clear from its meetings with students that some departments were still failing to make all students aware of local arrangements for academic support. This presents the risk that some students may find it difficult to access advice and guidance on important academic issues. The team therefore concluded that it is advisable for the University to revisit its approach to the Personal Academic Support System in order to ensure that all students are made aware of the personal support available to them.

83 PASS is supplemented by a range of programmes provided centrally by the Student Learning Advisory Service which is part of UELT. These programmes include Value Added Learning in University Education (VALUE), which provides advice and support on topics including revision and examination techniques to stage one students who are concerned about failing to progress to stage two; the Advantage Initiative, aimed at helping departments embed study skills within core modules; and VALUEMap, a free programme of study skills development for mature and part-time students to help them succeed in fulfilling their assessment criteria. Staff and students whom the audit team met praised the Student Learning Advisory Service and the programmes it provides. The team noted in particular the success of the VALUE programme in supporting the overwhelming majority of participants to progress to stage two. This contributed to the team's conclusion that the development, coordination and provision by the Unit for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching of a broad range of advisory and support services and development opportunities for staff and students constituted a feature of good practice.

84 Student Services coordinates a wide range of non-academic student support services encompassing careers advice, counselling and disability and dyslexia support. The Student Services Committee, which is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Medway and reports to Senate, is responsible for monitoring the performance of each service section and formulating new policy. It discharges this responsibility mainly by considering annual reports from each section, some of which are informed by annual user surveys. The audit team saw the minutes of the Committee's recent meetings which confirmed that the Committee was fulfilling its responsibilities.

85 The University has identified a need to provide some local student services at campuses outside Canterbury in order to ensure a consistent level of support. Thus, it has established a dedicated Student Services Unit at the Medway campus, and contracts with a local careers advice and coaching organisation in Brussels.

86 Since the last Institutional audit the University has increased its efforts to reduce plagiarism by students through the publication of a generic guide to academic integrity and good practice, augmented by discipline-specific guidance produced by departments as appropriate, and by increasing the use of plagiarism detection software. The student written submission reported a lack of awareness, particularly among stage one students, about the meaning of plagiarism, which was reflected in a rising number of requests from students to the Kent Union for representation at appeal hearings. However, the consensus among the students

whom the audit team met was that the University provided them with an abundance of information about the meaning of plagiarism and guidance on how to avoid it.

87 The University's approach to personal development planning (PDP) reflects its more general emphasis on enabling academic staff in departments to take ownership of pedagogical developments without setting targets or prescribing the use of new tools or systems in particular ways. In consequence, different departments have adopted or responded to PDP in different ways: a 2006 internal review of PDP reported that the School of Law, for example, was piloting an optional skills module provided through the VLE, while the Business School was piloting a 'Business Tools' module for stage one students which was worth 30 credits. More recently, 12 departments have trialled the use of a proprietary e-portfolio tool to support PDP. LTB received a report on the pilots in early 2008 which demonstrated that, while the tool had been successful in departments including Sport Studies and Social Work where e-portfolios are an established means of assessment, staff and students in departments which did not attach credit to PDP were more reluctant to engage with it. In response, LTB agreed to continue the pilot until the migration to the new VLE platform in 2009, and asked UELT to work in collaboration with departments to produce subject-specific online PDP learning and teaching resources, prioritising those departments which achieved relatively low scores on PDP in the NSS.

88 The University describes itself as, 'The UK's European University', on its website and in other corporate material. This description is manifest in part through its participation in the ERASMUS programme. The European Office provides advice and support for students before, during and after their studies abroad, as well as for the incoming students from exchange partners. The audit team noted that in 2004 the University was one of seven institutions in the UK awarded the E-quality label for the quality of its European exchange programmes.

89 The International Office provides guidance and administrative support to degree-seeking, diploma, study abroad and exchange students from non-European Union countries at the University. It also supports Kent students embarking on periods of study abroad outside Europe by managing exchange partner relationships, coordinating exchange programmes, offering pre-departure information sessions and generally providing advice and support to students before, during and after their period of study abroad. The audit team noted that the links between the International Office and the Centre for American Studies in relation to year abroad placements were commended in the periodic review of the Centre in March 2007.

Staff support (including staff development)

90 The Briefing Paper stated that the University, '...is committed to providing support and opportunities for staff at all levels to engage in continuous professional development and to promoting a culture of lifelong learning and enhancement of the services it provides'. The audit team encountered much evidence to substantiate this claim from documentary evidence and in meetings with academic staff.

91 The University offers a generic monthly induction programme for new staff which covers working at the University, pay and pensions, health and safety, equality and diversity and IT services. New academic staff are also assigned a mentor within their department and must study for, and achieve, a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education, provided by UELT's Academic Practice team, in order to pass their probation. The audit team met academic staff who had been recruited to the University within a year before the start of the audit who commended these induction procedures.

92 Beyond induction, the University has an appraisal policy for academic and research staff, which applies to all academic and research staff who are employed on a permanent contract or fixed-term contract of at least one year's duration. The policy stipulates that appraisals must take place at least once a year in order to review the appraisee's past performance and identify development needs for the future. The appraiser is normally the head of department.

93 Appraisals inform a central staff development programme coordinated by the Staff Development Office. The audit team noted that in 2007-08, the staff development programme comprised 55 workshops almost all of which were fully subscribed. The central staff development budget also supports staff to participate in external development activities ranging from academic programmes to conferences and seminars. At the audit visit, the team heard that UELT maintains a record of which staff have been involved in developmental activities. The team concluded that the University may wish to consider disseminating this information to the deans as a matter of course in order to inform their staff development planning activities.

94 The promotion procedures for academic and research staff have been revised since the last audit to more appropriately recognise and reward excellence in all aspects of research, teaching and learning and enterprise. As a result, applications can now be considered according to performance in teaching, research and/or enterprise. The University also recognises that key leadership roles and/or managerial responsibility may play a part in the assessment of the overall impact a member of staff is able to demonstrate. However, there is still some concern that the criteria may not adequately recognise excellence in all areas equally and this is currently being reviewed through the University's Promotion Committee. An institutional continuing professional development framework is under development that the University hopes will reflect all aspects of academic work and articulate effectively with professional standards, inform promotion criteria and support the planning of staff development and training.

95 Some postgraduate students have the opportunity to contribute to undergraduate teaching. This is discussed in Section 6 of this Annex.

96 Since 2002, the University has awarded teaching prizes to individuals or small teams for, '...excellence in the promotion and enhancement of the student learning experience'. These broad criteria are designed to encourage a wide range of applications, while reflecting the requirements for the national teaching fellowship scheme. The value of the awards has increased from £1,500 to £5,000 over the past two years. The Academic Practice Team in UELT promotes these awards and works to support staff throughout the application process. This has led to successful applications for national teaching fellowships (at the time of the audit the University had five national teaching fellows) and for related project funds. In addition, the Board for Research and Enterprise has established a prize for excellence in postgraduate research supervision. The inaugural prize will be awarded in 2008-09.

Conclusion

97 The University's management of the quality of students' learning opportunities is guided by a comprehensive and coherent set of published policies, in particular the Code of Practice, which reflect the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points. The implementation of these policies and procedures is not entirely consistent; in particular, students continue to experience some variability in academic support. Overall, however, the University's management of learning opportunities is sound. The management, coordination and provision of student support by UELT is particularly strong, and the University has developed structures for identifying and responding to students' views which students regard as effective. The audit team, therefore, concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

98 The Briefing Paper stated that the University has adopted a threefold approach to enhancement: incremental, using existing quality assurance mechanisms, such as annual monitoring, as vehicles for the enhancement of student learning; innovative, identifying new projects and practices which are likely to enhance the student learning experience; and developmental, which the Briefing Paper defined as providing support and recognition for strategic developments in learning, teaching and research.

99 Turning first to the University's incremental approach to enhancement, the Briefing Paper stated that, '...institutional quality management processes aimed at ensuring continued quality and standards have been reviewed and revised to incorporate a more explicit focus on enhancement in line with the University plan and related strategies'. Thus, the University has changed the structure of department annual monitoring reports, adding a section describing the mechanisms the department uses to identify, disseminate and import good practice and any improvements made to enhance the learning experience; and now asks periodic review panels to evaluate the effectiveness of departments' procedures for enhancing the quality of provision, such as peer observation, appraisal and staff development.

100 Examples of good practice identified through these processes may inform institution-wide changes in various different ways, including through ongoing developments to the University's Code of Practice and other published procedures, and by dissemination via a number of formal networks or groups. These networks or groups include a weekly Academic Practice Forum which enables staff to meet, exchange ideas and discuss academic practice, normally around a particular theme and often with the benefit of an external speaker. The audit team noted from the University's website that the themes for the 2008-09 academic year included assessing practical and creative work, a briefing for mentors of students on the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education (PGCHE) and teaching students about references. Other University networks include the Mentor Network, which provides support for academic staff mentoring PGCHE participants; a Web Strategy Forum, to consider developments in the portal technology and e-learning; Student Services Network Groups at Medway and Canterbury, which are forums for staff who provide support to students; and a Staff Development Network, to enable those involved in the planning and provision of staff development to share their experiences and coordinate their activities.

101 The University describes the second strand of its approach to enhancement as 'innovative', which the Briefing Paper defined as identifying new projects and practices to enhance the student learning experience. This is manifest in a number of areas, including the development of the new Graduate School, the Challenge Fund, which awards small grants to support innovative teaching practice, and funding for a Representation and Democracy Manager in the Kent Union to oversee the election of student representatives and their training. The audit team noted that the appointment of the Representation and Democracy Manager has coincided with an increase in the number of student representatives.

102 The third strand of the University's approach to enhancement is 'developmental', which the Briefing Paper characterised as providing support and recognition for strategic developments in learning and teaching and in research. This strand is exemplified through the existence of the networks and groups outlined in paragraph 100 above, the University's central staff development programme described in Section 3 of this Annex, the revised promotion criteria, also described in Section 3, and in the rising number and value of teaching prizes awarded to individuals or small teams for, '...excellence in the promotion and enhancement of the student learning experience'.

Conclusion

103 The audit team found some evidence that the University's threefold approach to quality enhancement was working successfully, notably in the ongoing development of the University's Code of Practice, in an increase in student engagement in quality assurance processes and in the creation of the Graduate School. However, many of the staff and students whom the team met were not aware of the threefold approach described in the Briefing Paper. Given that the success of this approach depends to some extent on the ideas of individual staff and students (particularly where the University is pursuing enhancement by supporting innovative teaching practices pioneered within departments), their lack of awareness may lead them to contribute fewer ideas and suggestions than they might do if the approach was more widely recognised. The team, therefore, concluded that it is desirable for the University to articulate more explicitly its strategic approach to quality enhancement for the benefit of staff and students.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

104 The University's collaborative provision will be the subject of a separate audit in the future.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

Institutional arrangements and the research environment

105 The University's framework for the management of the quality and standards of its research degree programmes mirrors its framework for taught programmes. The Board for Research and Enterprise (BRE), which reports to Senate, has primary oversight of research programmes which are governed by the Code of Practice for Quality Assurance for Research Programmes (Research Code). The University revised the Research Code in 2005 to reflect changes to *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*. The University's Code is subject to regular review by BRE through its Working Group on Regulations and Conventions.

106 Faculty boards are responsible for recommending approval of research programmes, reviewing the annual monitoring of research programmes by departments and conducting periodic reviews.

107 The approval document for research programmes is known as a programme specification. It describes, inter alia, the need for the programme, the entry requirements, aims and objectives, learning outcomes, any associated training courses, the approved supervisors, the research environment and the arrangements for student support and guidance. The process of developing and approving research programme specifications ensures that the University admits research students only in those areas where it can guarantee a high quality learning experience. The audit team regarded the University's use of programme specifications for research degrees as a feature of good practice.

108 Responsibility for the approval of research programmes lies with the Research Programmes Approval Sub-Committee. The management of selection, supervision and examination of postgraduate research students is devolved to departments, which are also responsible for delivery of programmes as approved.

109 Research programmes are subject to annual monitoring at department level. Annual monitoring reports are considered by faculty graduate studies/research committees. Periodic reviews are carried out normally every five years by review panels nominated by the Dean. In a recent pilot, these have been combined with periodic reviews of taught programmes. Under the pilot, a separate meeting is held with research students as part of the review visit, and a dedicated section of the report deals with research supervision, the development of transferable and research skills and the research environment.

110 The Research Code is supplemented by faculty research codes which set out additional minimum standards of procedure and guidelines in connection with supervision of research students. In some cases these are further supplemented by departments' codes of practice or handbooks.

111 As part of its broader Research Strategy, the University is seeking to increase the number of research students by awarding 30 fully-funded research studentships per year and creating a Graduate College and Graduate School led by a Dean of Graduate Studies.

Selection, admission and induction

112 The Research Code describes the procedures for selection, admission and induction of research students, which are governed by the Regulations for Research Programmes of Study. The responsibility for selecting applicants rests with the Director of Graduate Studies in consultation with a further member of staff. The Information, Recruitment and Admissions Office issues letters of acceptance. Research students are formally attached to a named department, although many study primarily in one of the University's new interdisciplinary research centres.

113 Induction arrangements are multilayered. The University provides information on support services and the Graduate School is responsible for the provision of transferable skills training. Research students are entitled to up to two weeks transferable skills training per year. Faculties and departments provide training in research skills and techniques. Supervision arrangements and subject-specific training are the responsibility of departments.

Supervision

114 The Code of Practice strongly encourages team supervision (although sole supervision is permitted where it is explicitly approved by the University). The Code states that a supervisory team should comprise a main supervisor who is the student's main point of contact for support and advice, and a supervisory chair who is responsible for ensuring that the programme meets the requirements of the Research Code. The Code allows for the same individual to perform both roles. In order to act as a supervisory chair, members of academic staff must satisfy the faculty that they have been research active in an area cognate to the programme within the past five years, and have experience of previous successful research degree supervision or co-supervision. The University's Office for Quality Assurance and Validation maintains a central register of approved supervisory chairs.

115 Early career academics may access training in supervision as part of the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education. Research students' entitlement to supervision is described in the Research Code and summarised in the Student Charter. It includes an entitlement to at least two formal meetings per term. Records of these meetings should be kept by both students and supervisors.

116 The report of the 2006 QAA Review of research degree programmes recommended that the University give consideration to the incorporation of research student supervision into its work allocation model. The audit team noted from recent research programme specifications and meetings with staff that this recommendation had been addressed. The Research Strategy 2008-10 also states that the work allocation model will form part of the dataset for annual research review.

117 The audit team noted that the results of the University's postgraduate research students' surveys for the past three years had been positive about supervision and academic support. This was reflected in the 2008 review of research provision in social sciences by the Economic and Social Research Council's Training and Development Board, which commented favourably on the supervision arrangements and also on the University's quality assurance procedures.

Progress and review

118 The key review stages identified by the Research Code are induction, probation, upgrading and submission. Supervisors and students complete annual progress report forms and an annual report from each department on the progress of research students is considered by faculty research committees. In the event of unsatisfactory progress the department's director of graduate studies will interview the student and, if problems persist, the faculty director of graduate studies will also meet them. Departments are responsible for making decisions on upgrading of registration from MPhil to PhD, normally on the basis of a written submission and a presentation. The audit team saw several examples of these written submissions, which exemplified a constructive process intended to set clear targets for completion.

Development of research and other skills

119 The Transferable Skills Training and Operational Group is responsible for coordinating skills training for postgraduate research students across the University and it reports to BRE. Generic training requirements include research skills and techniques, research environment, research management, personal effectiveness, communication skills, networking and teamworking. From the beginning of the 2008-09 academic year the Graduate School has assumed the responsibility for generic skills training.

120 Generic training is supplemented by faculty research skills training programmes. Individual faculties and departments follow different approaches to the provision and assessment of further training; the faculty and department research students' handbook make the local arrangements clear to students.

121 Research students have the opportunity to develop teaching skills by taking part in the Associate Teacher Accreditation Programme. However, the University does not specify a minimum level of training before research students can contribute to teaching. The audit team found that there was significant variation in the level of training provided in separate faculties and departments. The team, therefore, concluded that in order to improve the quality of learning opportunities for research students it would be desirable for the University to specify a minimum level of training or development which research students should undergo before they may contribute to teaching.

122 The University encourages research students to take part in personal development planning using e-portfolios, augmented by workshops and focus groups. Participation is generally voluntary, although the Department of Biosciences has made it compulsory and credit bearing within their graduate training plan. The audit team encourages the University to continue to develop ways in which postgraduate research students in other departments can reflect on and record their training and personal development to complement the annual progress reports.

Feedback mechanisms

123 The University obtains feedback from postgraduate research students through surveys and staff-student liaison committees.

124 At department level, postgraduate research students' feedback through staff-student liaison committees, and the department's response to it, are reported in annual monitoring. Research students are also represented on the faculty research committees and on the BRE.

125 The University has undertaken three surveys of postgraduate research students in 2006, 2007 and 2008. The 2008 survey was integrated with the Higher Education Academy's Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, which enabled the University to benchmark the experiences of its research students against that of 72 other universities. Initial analysis of the results from these surveys is carried out by the Student Planning Data Office and then considered by the Executive Group and faculty research committees. Free text comments on the surveys are collated by the Student Planning Data Office by department.

126 The benchmarking exercise confirmed the high satisfaction levels with supervision but identified aspects of the infrastructure and research environment requiring attention (although the research students whom the audit team met regarded the infrastructure for research as adequate). Other feedback has also shown that research students are dissatisfied with the availability of dedicated social spaces. The audit team noted that the plans for the new Graduate School and Graduate College responded to these concerns.

Assessment

127 The assessment of research students is governed by the Regulations for Research Programmes of Study. At least one external examiner is involved in all cases. All nominations for examiners involve the relevant head of department and are approved by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research. Reports explaining the decisions of examiners are reviewed by deans and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor before any award is agreed.

128 The 2006 QAA Review of research degree programmes encouraged the University to consider the appointment of an independent chair for viva voce examinations to help enhance procedures for fair and consistent examining, and to act as an independent voice in the case of an appeal. The University gave the suggestion careful consideration, including through consultation with the faculties, but decided to maintain its position of not employing an independent chair both to control costs and avoid making the viva more formal. However, the University's consideration of an independent chair did highlight the need for formal written guidance on the management of the viva and work is now in hand, under the auspices of the Working Group on Regulations and Conventions, to develop guidance informed by internal consultation and good practice in other institutions. The Group proposes that the guidance, when completed, should be included in the Research Code. The audit team encourages the University to expedite the development of this guidance in order that criteria for fairness and consistency in oral examinations are established and implemented as soon as possible.

129 The audit team also noted that the University had revised the assessment criteria for its postgraduate awards to remove a perceived overlap among the research qualification descriptors for each, with effect from January 2009.

Representations, complaints and appeals

130 Postgraduate research students are represented on department and faculty graduate studies/research committees. Detailed arrangements are set out in the Research Code Annex M.

131 Arrangements for appeals and complaints are set out in the Regulations. Appeals are first held at faculty level. Students have further recourse to the Senate Academic Review Committee and, finally to Council. Complaints relating to supervision are raised with the Department Director of Graduate Studies or through the academic complaints procedure with a view to resolving problems at the earliest opportunity.

Conclusion

132 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University's management of its research degree programmes met the expectations of *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*. The team also considered that the new Graduate School and Graduate College have the potential to significantly enhance research students' experiences, particularly in terms of increasing research students' opportunities for interaction with their peers.

Section 7: Published information

133 The Briefing Paper maintained that the University takes steps to, '...ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information it provides to students and other interested parties'. The Communications and Development Office has overall responsibility for publications. The Publications Team manages the production of prospectuses and course leaflets for prospective students and corporate publications such as the Annual Report. Faculties, departments and administrative sections check and sign off their own material before publication.

134 The Web Content and Editorial Team liaises with the Publications Team to ensure consistency of printed and online information. There has been a recent redesign of the website; a significant enhancement is the student portal which aims to provide an overview of personalised data, such as current modules and timetables, and student centred services and information. The University encourages students to manage their own record through the portal.

135 For new students the 'Getting Started at Kent' booklet brings together in a single handbook a range of information relating to enrolment, finances, setting up an IT account and an introduction to services available to students.

136 Programme specifications are available through links from faculty websites. The audit team looked at a sample of specifications for taught programmes, and found them to be accurate and complete. Programme specifications link learning outcomes to the relevant QAA subject benchmark statement.

137 Module descriptors are provided either through course handbooks (humanities and social sciences) or separate listings (science, technology and medical studies). Although the format of these documents differs between faculties and, in some cases between schools or departments within a faculty, the audit team confirmed that they all included the key information which students require.

138 The University plans to develop a content management system which will contain definitive information for all programmes. This system will further secure the accuracy and consistency of all the information that the University publishes about its programmes.

139 The audit team considered that the University has taken significant steps since the last audit in 2004 to ensure the accuracy and completeness of its published information, and noted plans for enhancement through further development of the virtual learning environment and the student portal, and the introduction of a content management system.

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