

Coventry University

November 2008

Annex to the report

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Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance for Higher Education (QAA) visited Coventry University (the University) from 3 to 7 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.

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

As the University will be subject to a separate audit of its collaborative provision, these judgements do not apply to that provision.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University has a strong commitment to quality enhancement, introducing the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) in September 2005. The audit team noted that the new framework had produced a more streamlined approach by establishing a more focused system of course approval and review.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

In 2005 the University adopted an Applied Research Strategy with much emphasis on external income generation and work with partner organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors. In 2008 the University introduced a new framework for research and professional degrees. The audit team formed the view that these arrangements should strengthen the already comprehensive structures of the previous arrangement and would meet the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Published information

The audit 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.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the establishment and commitment to the continued appointment of the Student Representative Coordinator that contributes to the improvement in communication between course consultative committees, the student body and the University (paragraphs 86, 88 and 93)
- the University's response to the diverse learning needs of its students, as evidenced by the quality of the support offered by bodies such as the Centre for Academic Writing (paragraph 133)
- the work of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, most notably the role of the teaching development fellows and the investment made by the University in supporting this work (paragraph 143)

- the ongoing work of the Leadership Action Team for student retention (paragraphs 95, 146, 155 and 156).

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:

- the University to clarify the delegation of authority between Academic Board and its subcommittees, and strengthen the accountability and reporting arrangements (paragraph 22)
- the University to establish a formal procedure for the discontinuation of courses that will safeguard the quality of learning opportunities for students (paragraph 75)
- the University to review the management of placement learning in the light of its intention to expand this type of provision in order to ensure that it remains effective (paragraphs 116 and 138).

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- the University together with the Students' Union explore further ways of enhancing the systematic dissemination of information from course representatives to ensure all students have access to key information (paragraphs 90 and 97).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 The University was granted University title in 1992, changing its name from Lanchester Polytechnic to Coventry University. Figures for 2007-08 show that there were 17,446 students studying on its campus in the centre of Coventry, a further 839 students on collaborative degree programmes in the United Kingdom (UK) and about 3,000 drawn from overseas collaborative provision. Adjacent to the main city centre campus is the Technology Park which houses a number of University organisations focusing on enterprise activities.

2 The majority of the student population is at undergraduate level and full-time study is the predominant mode with almost two-thirds in this category. Postgraduates, who account for 15 per cent of the total student body, have dedicated space in the Graduate and Continuing Professional Development Centre which opened in September 2005. The number of UK students drawn from the sub-region of Coventry and Warwickshire has declined in recent years from over 40 per cent in 2003-04 to circa 34 per cent in 2007-08. Approximately 10 per cent of the student population are from outside the European Union (EU) and a further 6.4 per cent are non-UK students from within the EU.

3 The mission states that the institution is 'a dynamic, enterprising and creative university committed to providing an excellent education enriched by our focus on applied research'.

The information base for the audit

4 The University provided the audit team with a Briefing Paper and supporting documentation. The Briefing Paper referenced sources of evidence to illustrate the institution's approach to managing the security of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its educational provision. The team had access to hard copy of selection of documents referenced in the Briefing Paper, access to electronic versions of the referenced sources and to the institution's intranet.

5 The Students' Union produced a student written submission that presented the students' views on the accuracy of information provided to them, the experience of students as learners and their role in quality management. In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the previous Institutional audit (April 2004)
- the report of the review by the QAA on the collaborative provision with the City University of Hong Kong (May 2007)
- reports produced by other relevant bodies (for example professional, statutory and regulatory bodies)
- the University's internal documents
- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students
- the report by the QAA Foundation Degree reviews (April 2005)
- the report by the QAA Review of postgraduate research degree programmes (July 2006).

Developments since the last audit

6 The University was previously audited by QAA in April 2004. The subsequent report expressed broad confidence in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards.

7 The report noted a number of features of good practice including the effective engagement with the Students' Union representatives, the continuing development of local and central student support services and the considered approach to the management of collaborative provision.

8 The previous audit team also made recommendations for action in the following areas: improving the consistency and comprehensiveness of annual reports from school boards, reviewing arrangements for the contribution of external examiners to course-level decisions and streamlining quality assurance processes. It was also suggested that the University should encourage a more timely response to the recommendations of committees and give central consideration to the reports of professional and statutory review bodies.

9 In response to one of the key recommendations arising from the previous audit, the University improved the breadth and consistency of faculty annual monitoring by introducing a report template from 2005-06 and increasing the focus on data provided from the central student records system, UNIVERSE. Evidence from a meeting of the Quality Assurance Committee which considered faculty board reports shows that a more consistent and wide-ranging process has been introduced, including oversight of action plans and identification of cross-institutional issues.

10 The University introduced a new, course-based Undergraduate Curriculum Framework in September 2006, thereby providing a more appropriate context for external examiners to comment on student attainment across the entire breadth of a course rather than purely at module level (see paragraph 50).

11 The introduction of the Quality Enhancement Framework from September 2005 was in response to the recommendation by the previous audit regarding a more streamlined approach to quality assurance. The present audit team noted that the new framework had produced a more streamlined approach by establishing a more focused system of course approval and review.

12 The audit team formed that the view that timeliness in implementing the decisions of committees may remain problematic. The previous audit report had noted some delay in the implementation of changes to procedures in areas covered by the University's programme of internal themed audits. In May 2004 the Quality Assurance Committee had re-iterated its commitment to an annual cycle of thematic audits as part of the University's quality enhancement framework. However, the arrival of the new Vice-Chancellor in September 2004 and the restructuring which followed (see paragraph 13) introduced a planned delay to the cycle of thematic audits. The work started on this new round in 2006-07 and a summary report was presented to Quality Assurance Committee in May 2008.

13 A key driver to recent change has been the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor. This appointment was followed by major restructuring to create three academic faculties and two academic schools: Business, Environment and Society; Engineering and Computing; Health and Life Sciences; Coventry School of Art and Design; and the School of Lifelong Learning. This structure reflects the academic direction of the institution. In addition, 13 service areas were established to provide professional support for the University's activities. The evidence of the student written submission supports the University's view that the impact of these structural changes on students has been carefully minimized.

14 Other aspects of this significant period of change, described collectively as the '2010 Agenda', encompass the research and physical infrastructure of the University. In 2005 the University adopted an Applied Research Strategy with much emphasis on external income generation and work with partner organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors. The audit team also noted the claim that 'the application of research to the learning environment is one of the nine priorities for the Learning and Teaching Strategy' to be monitored by the Teaching and Learning Committee.

15 At the time of the previous audit visit, the University had established the Centre for Higher Education Development to promote innovation in teaching, learning and assessment through a team of teaching fellows. This academic unit has now become the Centre for the Study of Higher Education with strategic oversight of the more recently-established Centre for Academic Writing and the e-Learning Unit. Further development of e-based teaching and learning occurred in 2005 when the University secured funding from HEFCE for three Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning: the Centre for Inter-Professional e-Learning in Health, jointly with Sheffield Hallam University; the Centre for Product and Automotive Design; and the Centre for Excellence in Mathematics and Statistics Support, jointly with Loughborough University.

16 The evidence presented to the audit team made it clear that a number of other processes had been modified or introduced since the previous audit visit. These included changes to the course planning process with the establishment of the Strategic Academic Planning Group; implementation of a new assessment strategy and associated curriculum frameworks and, from 2005, the introduction of a biennial survey of the student experience at Coventry University. The team also learned that there had been a gradual shift towards sets of minimum standards of delivery in areas such as personal tutoring and use of the virtual learning environment. It is evident that the University is undergoing a significant degree of culture change driven by deliberate executive action.

17 After a review of the Estates Strategy in 2007, the University has commenced implementation of an Estates Master Plan. The audit team learned that the planned new buildings for the Faculty of Engineering and Computing had been designed in order to accommodate new approaches to teaching and learning within these subject areas. It was also clear, however, that there had been some shortfall in communication to student representatives about the proposed building programme. Given the central importance of the new Estates Strategy and the significant implications for the Faculty of Engineering and Computing, the team recognised the anxieties apparent in both the student written submission and the meeting with students.

Institutional framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities

18 The University asserts that it aims to offer higher education of excellent quality through a synthesis of management by executive action and collegial processes. It has accordingly developed a framework for managing academic standards which comprises those parts of the University's committee structure which serve this purpose and a set of policies and procedures which support the work of committees and individuals.

19 The University's Academic Board has responsibility for keeping under review the development of the academic work of the University, for formulating proposals for new courses and other academic activities, and for academic standards and the validation and review of courses. In carrying out its responsibilities, the Board is assisted by subcommittees to which it delegates authority to act on its behalf in respect of particular responsibilities.

20 In considering the nature of the delegation by the Academic Board of its responsibilities to subcommittees, the audit team noted some confusion and ambiguity in terms of reference. The team noted that the Quality Assurance Committee, which is a subcommittee of the Academic Board, is described as being the 'ultimate' body of the University for matters within its remit. The team also noted that the Academic Board had failed to secure its recommendation that the Strategic Academic Planning Group should report to it, thus reducing the capability of the Board to keep under review the development of academic work.

21 In considering the manner in which the Academic Board ensures accountability for its responsibilities, the audit team noted that the Board has delegated some responsibilities to the Teaching and Learning Committee, the Quality Assurance Committee and the Strategic Academic Planning Group. The team noted that the Board does not receive any reports directly from these committees which had been considered and approved by them as representing an evaluation of their work in the course of the preceding period, and does not receive minutes or agendas of their meetings, although the Board does receive a report on academic work from the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Student Experience) which describes aspects of the work of these committees. The Board also receives an Annual Report from both the Applied Research Committee and the Research Degrees Committee, which it appears to note without discussion. During the course of 2007-08, the Board had met only twice, on each occasion chaired by the Deputy Chair; a further scheduled meeting had been replaced by email correspondence when the main item on the agenda was the restructuring of the Faculty of Engineering and Computing.

22 The audit team formed the view that the responsibilities of the Academic Board have not been carried out in such a manner as to ensure sufficiently strong accountability on the part of its subcommittees, and hence the Board is at potential risk of not being in a position to carry out the full range of its responsibilities.

23 The audit team found evidence that the Quality Assurance Committee effectively discharges its responsibilities in respect of academic standards through receiving and considering reports from faculties including annual quality monitoring reports, a summary report on external examiners' comments, and an Annual Quality Monitoring Report on UK and Overseas Collaborative Provision.

24 The Strategic Academic Planning Group, chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Student Experience) plays a crucial role in determining and implementing the University's academic strategy by approving new course developments and coordinating the management of new course proposals. The Group is directly responsible for determining the academic portfolio of the University and for advising the academic executive on strategic course developments. The audit team noted that in conducting its business it paid careful attention to internal and external influences on the academic direction of the institution and the team formed the view that the Strategic Academic Planning Group is effective in making and implementing plans for the University's academic development.

25 The purpose of the Teaching and Learning Committee is to advise the Academic Board on the development and evaluation of strategy and policy for the enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment, and to actively promote continuous improvement in the quality of the academic work within the context of the University's Mission and Quality Enhancement Framework. The audit team noted that in the course of 2007-08 the Committee discussed a range of matters pertinent to the student learning experience, including, but not limited to, the activities of the teaching development fellow scheme and the future development of the Lanchester Library. However, the team found little evidence of instances of the Committee fulfilling its purpose by offering advice to the Academic Board. The team formed the view that the Teaching and Learning Committee is a forum for useful debate and discussion about matters affecting the student learning experience, but considered that stronger links to decision-making bodies would allow the University to derive greater benefit from these discussions.

26 Within faculties and schools, the responsibility for the planning, development, coordination and quality assurance of the faculty/school's provision lies with the faculty boards which report to the Academic Board. Each faculty board is responsible for monitoring the work of the faculty's boards of study, establishing one for each of the faculty's taught programmes. Each plays a key role in determining the structure, organisation, entry qualifications, curriculum, teaching methods, examination schemes and methods of assessment of existing programmes and of proposed new programmes. The audit team saw evidence that boards of study addressed and took action on matters within their remit, and that faculty boards received and gave consideration to reports received from boards of study.

Quality enhancement framework

27 In seeking to achieve a more streamlined approach to quality assurance and management, the University in 2005 implemented a new Quality Enhancement Framework. Its elements included both the establishment of the Strategic Academic Planning Group and of the Quality Enhancement Unit, and the modification or restructuring of quality assurance procedures used at university level and within faculties. Although the University has not yet carried out a formal review and evaluation of its new processes, based on the operation of the new framework to date, the audit team formed the view that the new framework has the potential to make an effective contribution to securing standards.

28 The Quality Enhancement Unit is a section of the University's Registry which maintains the Quality Assurance's Committee's requirements for procedures, documentation and reporting. An adviser appointed from the staff of the Quality Enhancement Unit works with each faculty on matters relating to course development, approval and review. From the audit trails followed, the audit team found that this is an effective means of securing adherence to procedures and the timely preparation of programme specifications and other forms of documentation.

29 The University's processes for managing the quality and standards of collaborative provision follow as closely as possible those for on-campus provision. The University's collaborative provision will be the subject of a separate audit activity.

30 The University possess a full and comprehensive framework for the management and quality assurance of its research degrees, including procedures for the selection, admission, supervision and assessment of research students.

31 The audit team was told that the new framework does not apply to research degree provision in collaborative partners and that the University commonly introduces change by undertaking partial implementation on a pilot basis.

32 The University has substantially revised its framework for quality assurance since the previous audit. The new framework, the work of the Quality Enhancement Unit in implementing it, and the work of the Quality Assurance Committee, the Teaching and Learning Committee and the Strategic Academic Planning Group in identifying and addressing institutional issues make an effective contribution to securing academic standards and learning opportunities.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Programme approval, monitoring and review

33 The process for approval of new or substantially revised programmes involves two main stages, the first of which is approval 'in principle'. Proposals for new programmes are considered by boards of study and are then approved in principle by the University's Strategic Academic Planning Group, which focuses on strategic and resourcing issues relating to new provision.

34 Following approval in principle a Course Development Group is established to prepare the necessary documentation. This includes a business plan, a complete programme specification, a set of module descriptors and a document specifying the resources that will be available for programme delivery. A member of staff from the Quality Enhancement Unit is assigned to work with the Course Development Group during this process in order to ensure that the final proposal is likely to satisfy University requirements.

35 Built in to the process (for example, in the templates for the documentation and the approvals required at each stage) there are a series of checks to ensure that new programmes align with the University's credit frameworks and regulations and that they take due account of the Academic Infrastructure developed by QAA (for example, subject benchmark statements and *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ)). Where appropriate, the process ensures that programmes also meet the requirements of external accrediting agencies or professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs).

36 There is a requirement that course teams obtain the input of at least one external adviser. Where a programme is to be accredited by an external body, comments from the accrediting organisation may be deemed sufficient. For all other courses, the requirement is for input from an academic subject specialist at another higher education institution, although this may be supplemented by comment from potential employers. The University does not allow the use of external examiners in this context, recognising that their function is to uphold the standards of assessment rather than participate in the development of provision.

37 The University has sought to ensure that programme design reflects contemporary applications and has developed a series of modules that are explicitly linked to skills that underpin career development. This is embodied in the Add+Vantage scheme whereby students are required to make a number of module choices related to enhancing their employability skills.

38 Final approval of programmes is carried out by a Review and Approval Panel (RAP) acting on behalf of the Quality Assurance Committee, since that Committee is responsible for the approval and review of University courses and validated courses on behalf of the Academic Board. In the case of collaborative provision, a Partnership Approval and Review Panel approves and reviews partnership links and a Course Approval and Review Panel approves and reviews the courses delivered collaboratively. All of these panels include a representative of the Quality Assurance Committee and a member of staff from the Quality Enhancement Unit in order to ensure that they operate in accordance with University requirements.

39 The audit team reviewed samples of the documentation and committee minutes relating to programme approval and these demonstrated that the process was taking place as described by the University. The Briefing Paper identified the approval process as an example of the benefits that had been achieved by 'streamlining' quality management arrangements and this was confirmed by staff who met with the team.

40 The University's procedure for the monitoring of programmes involves an 'upward cascade' of reporting. An annual report is prepared by each programme team and is approved by the relevant board of study. A composite report, based on the boards of study reports, is prepared for each faculty board in order to identify cross-faculty issues. The faculty reports are considered by the Quality Assurance Committee at a day-long meeting, where cross-University

issues and identified good practice are discussed. Since the academic year 2007-08 the focus of this procedure has been changed, to encourage reflection and a greater emphasis on enhancement.

41 The monitoring reports are required to consider a number of issues and sources of information. These include data on student recruitment and admissions; data on student progression and achievement, both in general and broken down by gender and ethnicity; student employment (first destination) data; and issues raised by external examiners, students, employers and PSRBs. There is a requirement to comment on individual modules where the pass rates are below the norm set by each faculty and to identify aspects of good practice that are being or could be disseminated across the faculty or University. Faculties are asked also to reflect on trends and issues in teaching and learning and the student experience, and deans are required to certify that the standard of provision and the quality of learning opportunities are being maintained.

42 An important feature of the reports at both boards of study and faculty level is the inclusion of action plans, demonstrating how issues previously identified are being followed up and proposing actions arising from the current reporting cycle. There is also an emphasis on institutional priorities, with boards of study and faculties being asked to reflect explicitly on how they are helping to achieve objectives in the University's Corporate Plan.

43 The audit team read a sample of the documentation involved in the monitoring process which showed that the process was taking place as described by the University. The team was told that the appointment of course administrators had eased the burden of assembling and collating the information base required, and that the emphasis on action planning and identification of good practice was felt to be helpful by the staff most directly involved.

44 All courses are reviewed at least once every six years. The University exercises some flexibility in the conduct of the review process in the interests of efficiency, for example by integrating its reviews with external reviews of provision by a PSRB. Like the process of programme approval described above, the procedure for periodic review involves preliminary consideration by the Strategic Academic Planning Group, to confirm that the programme continues to be viable before it undergoes revision. Final approval is also given by a Review and Approval Panel (or a Course Approval and Review Panel in the case of collaborative provision).

45 The review process involves preparation by the course team of a critical review of the programme. The review document is expected to be evaluative and to take account of emerging trends in the programme since the last review, for example, by considering the comments of external examiners and feedback from students during the review period. There is a requirement for external input into the review process. This is expected to include comment from an independent academic expert but may also involve the views for example of employers, and PSRBs. Further development of the course may be undertaken by, for example, the revision or introduction of new modules. The review process also requires the programme specification to be revised and updated and for the course to be considered against appropriate elements of the Academic Infrastructure developed by QAA (subject benchmark statements and the FHEQ, in particular).

46 The audit team was able to read a complete set of documentation for two recent periodic reviews, which confirmed that the process was being carried out as described by the University. The team formed the view that the processes of programme approval, monitoring and review were fit for purpose and were being conducted in accordance with the University's requirements. The team concluded that they were contributing effectively to the assurance of academic standards at the University.

External examiners

47 External examiners are appointed on behalf of the Academic Board by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Student Experience). Nominations are made by faculties, taking account of detailed criteria specified in the University's regulations. Appointments are normally for a period of four years, but may exceptionally be extended to five. There is provision for appointments to be terminated in the event that external examiners do not fulfil their duties satisfactorily, or that a conflict of interest develops.

48 The University provides its external examiners with a comprehensive and detailed handbook that explains the University's arrangements for quality assurance, the structure of its awards, and the role and duties of external examiners. The handbook makes clear that the purview of external examiners is not confined to consideration of assessment results: they are encouraged also to comment on the content, balance and structure of modules and programmes, and on the conduct of assessment processes.

49 The University offers a briefing session each year that is aimed at newly-appointed external examiners but is open to all external examiners and the briefing materials are made available on a section of the University website for external examiners. The website also contains copies of, for example, the handbook and assessment regulations. There is a checklist of matters that are to be covered during the briefing and induction of external examiners by faculties. The University has noted that despite these precautions, a small minority of external examiners are submitting reports with a minimum of commentary, and has identified that these are mainly examiners who were unable to attend the annual briefing. Given this evidence of the effectiveness of the briefing, the audit team encourages the University to take steps to maximise the attendance and participation of external examiners at future briefing sessions.

50 The 2004 Institutional audit recommended the University to review its arrangements for securing input from external examiners to decisions relating to the standards achieved by students over an entire course. In its Briefing Paper for the current audit, the University explained that it had reviewed its assessment regulations with regard to this issue and its guidance to external examiners, and had also restructured its curriculum. It commented that these measures had led to an increase in comments made by external examiners on whole courses. The report form used by external examiners requires them to comment explicitly on the standards of whole courses where they have responsibility for doing so.

51 External examiners' reports are submitted to the Registrar and Secretary and are then copied to the Chair of the Quality Assurance Committee and to the appropriate faculty. In each faculty they are considered by boards of study, who report on any issues raised and actions taken, and reply in writing to the external examiners. Boards of study include student representatives, who are thus informed about matters raised by external examiners. Faculty Registrars prepare an annual summary of issues raised within their faculties and these too are included in the annual monitoring process. The Registrar and Secretary prepares a summary for the Quality Assurance Committee of matters that have relevance across the University.

52 The audit team was able see a sample of external examiners' reports and the associated documentation involved in this process, which confirmed that external examiner reports were being considered and processed as described by the University.

53 The audit team concluded that the process of external examination was thorough and robust, and that it was making a valuable contribution to the assurance of academic standards at the University.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

54 As noted earlier (paragraphs 35 and 45) the University takes account of national subject benchmark statements and the FHEQ during the processes of programme development, approval and periodic review. Through the University's curriculum frameworks and regulations, all of the programmes and awards link to the FHEQ, and the University has adopted the Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer level descriptors for its internal use.

55 The University takes account of the *Code of practice*, published by the QAA, by producing an annual report on its position with respect to each precept of the *Code*, taking particular note of changes as sections of the *Code* are revised. The report serves not only as a briefing for the Quality Assurance Committee about developing national expectations but also as a summary of matters within the University that may need attention. Each section of the *Code* is assigned to a member of staff in the Quality Enhancement Unit, who is responsible for monitoring and advising on its implementation and for being aware of (and, where possible, contributing to) its continuing development.

56 The University uses a detailed template for programme specifications, which are key documents in the processes of programme approval and periodic review. The template includes a detailed curriculum map, in which the contribution of each module to the learning outcomes of the programme, and the development of a range of generic skills and capabilities prescribed by the University, is clearly specified.

57 Information about the modules available to students is held in a module information directory which is accessible online. Again, the directory entries conform to a standard template, with a summary of the educational aims, module availability, and pre and co-requisites for each module. The programme specifications are also available online, both to staff and students.

58 The University has many interactions with PSRBs, both through formal reviews and (re)accreditation of its programmes and through ongoing consultation and collaboration. The primary responsibility for managing these interactions rests with course teams, but they are overseen by boards of study. Through the annual monitoring process, boards of study are made aware of any issues arising in relation to the expectations of PSRBs, and agreed actions are tracked through to completion.

59 The 2004 Institutional audit recommended the University to enhance its central overview of PSRB reports. The University's Briefing Paper explained that, as an initial response, it had assigned responsibility for this task to its Employment and Enterprise Enhancement Steering Group, with a remit to report back to the Quality Assurance Group. However, this process had not worked as well as intended, due to the infrequency of meetings of the Steering Group. At the time of the audit the University was expecting that its normal process of annual monitoring would achieve this overview by including a requirement that PSRB issues should be considered explicitly by boards of study and faculties. In addition, it had established a small subgroup of the Quality Assurance Group to maintain specific oversight of PSRB reports. The team was unable to assess the effectiveness of this approach as the Standing Advisory Group had not met by the time of the audit visit.

60 There are two main ways in which the University makes use of external advisers and experts to assist in assuring the standards of its awards. The first is through the system of external examiners. The other main area of involvement is in the development of new provision (leading to programme approval) and programme review. Here, the University's requirements with regard to the status and independence of external experts are more inclusive (for example, external advice may be sought from employers or PSRBs) and the focus of the input is not primarily on the assurance of standards. For example, external advisers comment on the currency and adequacy of the curriculum and the appropriateness of the teaching, learning and assessment strategies employed.

61 During a meeting with staff the audit team was told that the University had taken account of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* when they were adopted nationally. It had also taken account of the Bologna Process in the design of its curriculum framework, and it issues a standard Diploma Supplement to all undergraduate and postgraduate students at the time of their graduation.

62 The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for taking account of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points were comprehensive and effective in making a contribution to the management of academic standards.

Assessment policies and regulations

63 The University's approach to the assessment of students is set out in its Assessment Strategy, which explains the educational and organisational principles that inform the practice of assessment. This strategy is supplemented by clear and comprehensive regulations for assessment in taught programmes (a distinct set of regulations relate to research degrees, and are dealt with in a later section of this report (paragraph 185)). General assessment regulations prescribe arrangements for the conduct of assessments and the processing of marks; separate regulations for undergraduate and postgraduate provision cover matters such as credit accumulation and progression. In addition, some programmes have specific regulations of their own, but these are subordinate to the general University requirements.

64 Within this regulatory framework, the process of assessment is overseen by subject assessment boards and programme assessment boards, both of which include external examiners. The task of subject assessment boards is to determine the results of assessment, module by module, within a given subject area. The role of programme assessment boards is to decide on the progression of students through a course and to approve the eventual award. Subject assessment boards carry the primary responsibility for academic standards and have a duty to consider whether assessments have been set and marked at the appropriate standard, adjusting marks for all students in a particular module up or down, where necessary. The University conducts annual briefings for staff involved in subject and programme assessment boards to promote consistency of practice and to ensure that those concerned are aware of any changes to regulations or procedure. In addition, it produces a booklet summarising its assessment policies, procedures and guidelines for the information of staff.

65 As part of the implementation of its new curriculum framework, and in response to concerns voiced by external examiners, staff and students, the University is seeking to reduce the assessment load on its students. It has produced guidelines which explain the principles that should determine the volume of assessment and each faculty has agreed an assessment tariff for the programmes within its purview. In the Briefing Paper the University claimed 'some success' in reducing the assessment load. The audit team was told by staff that the exercise had also helped them to reflect on the value of particular assessment tasks and to achieve greater consistency between programmes. The team encourages the University to continue with the implementation of this approach to managing student assessment load and to monitor its adoption and effectiveness.

66 The University is also seeking to combat a rise in the number of cases of plagiarism reported over the last four years. Besides issuing detailed advice and guidance it has adopted a modified version of the Harvard reference style as the model for most subjects and has linked its module web pages to an online tool for plagiarism detection. Students continue to be informed of the University's policy and are guided in the principles of good practice by means of standard 'inserts' in course handbooks and through the work of the Centre for Academic Writing.

67 The audit team formed the view that the University's assessment policies and regulations were comprehensive and coherent, and were contributing effectively to the assurance of standards at the University.

Management information - statistics

68 The University makes use of statistical information to inform the management of academic standards in a number of ways. One is through the production of data relating to the assessment of students: the student records database, UNIVERSE. This holds all the information about student academic attainment, and progression data and award classifications are generated for assessment boards in line with the relevant regulations. Another is through the provision of statistics to inform the annual monitoring of provision. As noted earlier, these include admission, progression and award statistics produced to a standard format.

69 The University also uses statistical information to assist in the management of its provision more generally. The Strategic Academic Planning Group holds two 'horizon scanning' meetings each year at which a wide range of statistical information is used to inform consideration of the University's course portfolio, and the Academic Executive and the Vice-Chancellor's Group monitor summary data on applications, admissions and withdrawals, and the composition of the student body.

70 The audit team concluded that the standardised provision of statistical information, and its use by assessment boards and boards of study in particular, was making a valuable contribution to the assurance of academic standards at the University.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Academic Infrastructure and external reference points

71 The University has a system for keeping abreast of developments in the *Code of practice* and for considering the implications for its own practice (paragraph 55).

72 The University takes account of other external requirements by a variety of means. Accreditation visits by PSRBs, for example, together with central institutional oversight of those activities (paragraph 58), provide a means for the University to be aware of the expectations of those bodies. The Disability Office likewise provides a mechanism for the University to be aware of legislative requirements and good practice with respect to the teaching, support and assessment of students with disabilities, and this was reflected in the documentation made available to the audit team.

73 The audit team concluded that the University was, in general, making effective use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points in its management of learning opportunities for students.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

74 The University's procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review have been described in Section 2. They aim to contribute not only to the assurance of standards but also to the management of learning opportunities and the enhancement of programme quality. For example, as noted earlier (paragraph 36), the input of external advisers to the processes of programme development and review is directed particularly to the design and coherence of the curriculum, the relevance of the syllabus, and the appropriateness of teaching methods and assessment tasks. In programme monitoring and review, there is also a requirement to take explicit account of student feedback (paragraphs 77 to 83). Through the programme specifications and the reporting templates, the processes also focus attention on planned learning outcomes and on students' acquisition of specified skills and capabilities, and the University's handbook for staff on Quality Assurance and Enhancement gives due emphasis to the underlying principles of programme design.

75 Although in general these processes appeared to be working effectively, the audit team formed the view that there was a deficiency in the University's arrangements for protecting the interests of students in the event of programme closure or withdrawal, as recommended by the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review, Precept 9*. The team was told that when withdrawal of a programme was approved by the Strategic Academic Planning Group, the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Student Experience) would seek assurances from the faculty concerned, to confirm that the provision of learning opportunities would continue for students already registered or accepted for the course: because of the University's modular curriculum structure, modules usually continued because they contributed to other courses as well. However, continuation of the modules did not appear to be recorded as a condition for approval of programme withdrawal, and the audit team was told that some courses were more self-contained and that most of their constituent modules were not shared with other programmes. The team concluded that there was a risk that the interests of students might not be protected adequately, and therefore considers it advisable for the University to establish a formal procedure for the discontinuation of courses in order to safeguard the quality of learning opportunities.

76 With that exception, the audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for programme approval, monitoring and review were making an effective contribution to the management of learning opportunities.

Management information - feedback from students

77 The University's approach to collecting and using student feedback to assist with the management of learning opportunities has two strands. One is through the work of student representatives, primarily at module and course level, since student representation at faculty and university level has a broader focus. The other is through student surveys and questionnaires, including data from the National Student Survey.

78 The University regards course consultative committees as the main fora in which student representatives assist with the management of programme quality. These committees have a formal constitution and are required to meet at least once each term. Their terms of reference make clear that their purpose is not merely to facilitate communication and the exchange of views (which might be inferred from the word 'consultative') but also to solve problems reported by students and to further develop the course. Students who met with the audit team confirmed their awareness of these arrangements and gave examples of issues that had been resolved by this means.

79 The student members of course consultative committees are elected by their peers and receive support and training from the Students' Union, (paragraph 93). Meetings of the Committees are minuted and are reported back to the student body via course notice-boards and websites; a copy is also sent to the Students' Union. Matters raised by students, and any actions taken as a result, are considered by boards of study as part of the process of annual monitoring, and are thus fed upwards (if appropriate) to faculties and the University.

80 The University makes use of data from three types of student survey. One is a survey that seeks anonymous feedback on every module and course each year. Previously paper-based, this is now (since 2006-07) conducted electronically. Since the transition to an electronic format the University has seen a considerable reduction in the number of responses received, and is currently making efforts to improve the accessibility and ease-of-use of the online form. The audit team were advised after the audit visit that the University intends to revert to a paper-based exercise. A second source of data is a biennial student satisfaction survey, which uses an established methodology to gather data on students' experience of the University's provision and its facilities. The data are broken down by programme, as well as by factors such as gender and mode of study, and the University uses them as a significant performance indicator in its management and enhancement of programme quality. The third source is the National Student Survey, which is used to reinforce the data from the University's student satisfaction survey.

81 These data inform the views and decisions of the University in several contexts. One is the process of annual monitoring, where module and programme survey data and student satisfaction data are considered with a view to current provision. A second is periodic programme review, where a more longitudinal view is taken and trends affecting the viability and development of the programme are identified. Thirdly, the data are considered at institutional level by the Strategic Academic Planning Group, which has a view to the composition of the University's portfolio, the development of learning support resources, and the overall satisfaction of the student body.

82 The University also seeks students' views on areas of service development and the audit team noted examples of discussions such as that of the development of library and IT services and also the new arrangements for the undergraduate and taught postgraduate curricula. The team learned that students are normally consulted on major changes to their learning environment although there was some indication from students that there was variability in the effectiveness of this communication. This was also confirmed in the findings of the student satisfaction survey.

83 The audit team concluded that the University makes good use of student feedback and that this contributes effectively to its management of learning opportunities.

Role of students in quality assurance

84 The University places great importance on student representation. In 2005-06 the system of student representation was reviewed and the Students' Union benchmarked the system against 10 other universities. The Academic Board approved the recommendations of the review of student representation. A role specification for course representatives and a framework for the contribution of the Students' Union were developed and published. The framework established the student representation system as the joint responsibility of the University and Coventry University Students' Union. This emphasised that student representatives are 'the independent voice of students on matters concerning their learning experience'. Students confirmed to the audit team that there is a well-established and clear structure underpinning the student representation system.

85 Following the 2005-06 review, student representation at faculty and course level was also reinforced and the number of representatives on faculty boards was increased from three to six, including the faculty chair (paragraph 95). A number of representative mechanisms were reinforced and the University ensured representation on key decision making bodies including the Academic Board, faculty/school committees, the Quality Assurance Committee and participation in panels and consultative groups.

86 In building on what was felt to be an effective system of representation, the University appointed the first Student Representative Coordinator in 2006-07. This role is intended to strengthen student participation and enhance the quality of contributions made by students in committees and other key meetings. Students gave very positive feedback to the audit team on the contribution and support from the Student Representative Coordinator and gave a number of examples of the impact made by this role. The Student Representative Coordinator is in attendance at the Quality Assurance Committee of the University and plays a significant part in ensuring that views of students are fed into relevant discussions and decisions.

87 The University and the Students' Union recognise the continuing challenge of securing effective student representation for all courses. The University recruits between 480 and 530 representatives each year but there are often vacancies. Students noted the considerable effort in some faculties to raise awareness of the representation system and gave examples such as in Art and Design where representative's photographs are posted on notice-boards and information is widely available.

88 Following the review of student representation, the University instigated additional monitoring and evaluation of the system through the annual reporting process. Faculty boards are required to include in their annual report a commentary on the strength of their student representative. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Student Experience) also meets periodically with the Student Representative Coordinator and the sabbatical officers of the Students' Union. These are practical and operational meetings at which issues are discussed and practical measures outlined to improve representation and enhance the student voice. Additionally the University has established an annual meeting involving the University Registrar, faculty registrars and officers and staff of the Students' Union to discuss the student representation system and make operational improvements.

89 Despite the extensive representative mechanisms and support from the Students' Union there continue to be challenges in ensuring that students use the opportunities made available to them. The University recognises the need to enhance student participation in the work of committees and representative groups. The audit team learned that there is a shortfall in the number of students representatives appointed and that some students are not sure of their representation or the name of their current representative. This view was confirmed by students who met the audit team.

90 The impact of this inconsistent representation is that the arrangements for dissemination of key information through representatives are variable. Students who met the audit team gave examples such as the consultation processes on major change. In this example it was evident that the University had made considerable effort to share information with representatives but the information did not seem to filter out effectively leaving many students believing that there was no consultation. It is clear that further improvement in the dissemination of information through the representative system would enhance the utility of the representative role and improve communication with all students. Hence the team recommends that the University and the Students' Union explore further ways of enhancing the systematic dissemination of information.

91 The University considers that one of the most effective mechanisms for student feedback on the quality of the learning environment is the course consultative committee (paragraph 78). These committees meet at least three times per year and operate within centrally determined guidelines.

92 The representation mechanisms for students undertaking programmes by distance learning are not identified specifically. While these students have regular meetings online with course teaching staff there is not a formal representation system to feed into course consultative committees. Students who met the audit team were happy with this arrangement and felt that they could raise issues as needed. The University, however, might wish to consider whether a more formal representation arrangement might ensure that the needs of distance-learning students could be fed more systematically into its quality assurance system.

93 Student representatives receive an induction and training programme to equip them for their role. Training is given by the Student Representative Coordinator and includes training on academic matters and information on pastoral, finance and housing matters. The Students' Union reports that approximately half of the course representatives attend this in-depth training. This induction is viewed positively and the Students' Union believes that this has helped to improve communications with students and ensures that representatives have appropriate briefing. The audit team concluded that University should work with the Students' Union to consider further ways of ensuring that all student representatives participate in this training.

94 The University seeks to communicate changes with students through course handbooks, briefings and other notices for students. Vice-Chancellor 'Road Shows' and senior management briefing sessions are held periodically. While student opinion varied on the effectiveness of communication, there were many examples of well managed briefings and a commitment to share information with students. Programme specifications are available to students and are

supported by the course module directory and handbooks. Students have access to clearly defined learning objectives and the criteria for marking their assignments. While some students indicated that they were unsure of the learning outcomes of their course, the student satisfaction survey indicated that students are generally satisfied with their knowledge of what is expected of them. That view was confirmed by students who met the audit team.

95 Students act in the role of faculty chairs and coordinate feedback from student representatives to feed into faculty committees. Student faculty chairs also gather information and represent the faculty students on working groups and committees. The faculty chairs have a key role in ensuring that representatives' views are fed into the discussions by the Students' Union and they prepare reports on common or recurring issues for the Students' Union. Faculty chairs and other student representatives participate in a range of action groups that are established to review or implement systems change. One example is that of the Leadership Action Team reviewing student retention patterns. The Students' Union was in membership of this team and played a role in creating new initiatives to establish actions to improve student progression and retention. This work was seen by the audit team to be collaborative and analytical, and the outcomes resulted in an action plan being put in place across the University. This cross University participation and the outcomes are seen as an example of good practice.

96 Students' Union officers represent students in the processes associated with disciplinary procedures and complaints and grievances. This contributes to the Students' Union understanding of difficulties in the student learning environment as well as offering support and assistance to students who are subject to a formal hearing. This role is taken seriously and the Student Representative Coordinator provides specific training and support for students who act in support of others.

97 The University places great importance on the contribution of student representation to quality assurance. The University has put in place a well designed framework for ensuring that there is a student contribution to quality management. The system is generally effective but the students' experience of their representative system is highly variable, partly due to variability in communicating key messages from committees and consultations to the wider student body. The University recognises the need to strengthen the participation of student representatives and intends to continue to support the role of Student Representative Coordinator. The audit team equally recognises the importance the University places on representation and recommends that there should be further work undertaken, jointly by the University and the Students' Union, to ensure the effective dissemination of key information from student representatives to their fellow students.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

98 The University has identified the development of applied research as one of its core objectives and this is a central theme of the University research strategy. Part of this strategy is designed to ensure a link between research and scholarship in ways that have application in the learning environment. The portfolio of research is overseen by applied research centres and groups. Research activity is expected to influence curriculum content and extend the learning opportunities for students through access to specialist equipment and external organisations and the audit team saw evidence of this in programme designs.

99 The development of pedagogy and programme design is seen as a key function of pedagogical research. The University Teaching and Learning Strategy explicitly addresses the need for teaching to be underpinned by research findings and locates the authority to teach within the development of a culture of pedagogical research supported by developing links between teaching and research.

100 A number of institution-wide initiatives have been developed to ensure the application of research to support learning. These include inter alia the Centre for Excellence in Product and Automotive Design which is a base for a community of design educators linked to the University.

This network has explored innovation in teaching style and undertaken research projects to enhance understanding of the Design curriculum. Other examples include the establishment of the Serious Games Institute; The Futures Institute; The Institute for Creative Enterprise and the Health Design Technologies Institute. These research centres are expected to make an active contribution to the enhancement of learning opportunities for students.

101 The University has three Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and in 2005 established a new initiative to provide a wide ranging network of pedagogical research. This is the Inquiring Pedagogical Research Network which has held research based conferences and other developmental events for academic staff.

102 The University seeks to ensure that courses take account of a diverse population of students. Undergraduate and postgraduate modular frameworks enable courses to be designed with some flexibility. The development of the curriculum is supported by the teaching development fellows scheme, (paragraph 143), which supports innovation and assists in the application of pedagogical research. Teaching development fellows produce newsletters and papers sharing a wide range of contemporary debate arising from pedagogical research. These resources are widely available through the staff intranet. Teaching fellows also make a major contribution to the development of pedagogy and give strong support to the University's applied research agenda. The audit team saw a number of examples of the role of teaching development fellows in linking research, scholarship and teaching practice in ways that make an impact on the learning experience.

103 A new framework has been designed for postgraduate research degrees, including for the first time a programme specification for postgraduate research students. This has been in place since August 2008 and gives a comprehensive and clear account of the requirements of a research degree programme and includes explanations of milestones and the processes by which research degrees are approved and monitored. The arrangements for progress review are specified and a template provides a checklist for activity and progress. A fuller analysis of the framework is included in Section 6.

Staffing policies

104 The University expects that all staff have appropriate subject expertise for their role and less experienced staff should be offered mentorship and formal training in teaching. The University also encourages membership of professional organisations.

105 Each member of staff has an annual development and performance review (DPR) and the University expects that this includes objectives related to research and scholarship for academic staff to give authority to their teaching role. Templates and guidance for the DPR processes are available to all staff on the University intranet. The University has a pay and reward scheme that maps performance against personal objectives and identifies development needs as well as supporting the decisions for merit awards (paragraph 163).

106 Staff recruitment, performance management, remuneration and promotion are also linked into the objective of recruiting and retaining high quality research-active staff. The University's Applied Research Strategy explains that the majority of staff will be research active. The strategy outlines arrangements for the support and development of existing staff. The University expects all academic staff to undertake scholarship in their field of expertise and to take responsibility for maintaining their professional teaching knowledge. The audit team heard from staff of the wide range of opportunities to develop research and scholarship in support of their teaching and assessment roles.

107 The University has put in place a clear framework derived from its research strategy to strengthen the links between research and teaching. The mechanisms are being put in place to ensure this is informing practice across the University. The audit team came to the view that the development of links between research and teaching, while emergent in some subject areas, is generally effective.

Other modes of study

108 The University has a number of courses delivered by flexible learning and this area of provision is expanding in response to a growing demand from business and industry. The Standing Advisory Group on Collaborative Provision maintains institutional oversight for developments in flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning). There is an intention to undertake significant development in distance-learning provision for international students, especially in the area of Health Care and Advanced Practice. Central support is available to assist in the development of these delivery methods and examples of support were given such as the experience of staff developing distance-learning courses in the health field that have been supported by the University's Centre for Interprofessional Education and Learning.

109 The University has an e-Learning Unit that offers information and staff training in the use of online teaching methods based within the Centre for the Study of Higher Education. This ensures that staff developing course materials draw on appropriate knowledge and research to inform course development. Academic staff commented positively on the support provided by the Centre.

110 The arrangements for the security of assessment materials for students studying through distance learning are the same as for those students studying on campus. Security of assessment information is maintained through the use of a password protected access to the virtual learning environment presented in CU-Online.

111 The University has developed a range of effective programmes to be delivered online and through distance learning. The approval and support mechanisms that have been used for the approval and management of existing distance-learning courses are appropriate and reflect engagement with of the *Code of practice, Section 2*, published by QAA. The additional arrangements currently adopted for the development, approval, support and examining of this mode of delivery could usefully be formalised, thus strengthening the consistency of delivery.

Placement students

112 The University Corporate Plan includes an objective to increase student work placements, work experience and employer engagement. In 2004 the University approved a Code of Practice for Placement Learning. The University also established a Work Placement Unit in 2007 to offer additional support in finding placements. The key function of this Unit is to assist in finding placements by providing information on placement availability and finding new placement opportunities. The responsibility for giving support for students during work placements rests with faculties and schools.

113 The audit team learned from students that some subject areas had generous access to placement opportunities whereas others were in areas where there was little or no access in their field. In particular, there was significant criticism of the mechanisms for finding placements in some subject areas. Students also reported to the team that there was highly variable experience of placement support highlighting that some students have no visits during their placement with no support on their return to their studies, while others had experienced regular, highly effective support. They believed immediate action was needed to address the placement issues raised.

114 The audit team heard a range of views from course leaders about the management of student placements and the issues raised by students. Course leaders recognised the issues raised by students and suggested that the problems are partly related to the limited availability of placements in some subject areas that make it very difficult to manage student expectations and ensure consistency in placement support.

115 The audit team also learned that the University intends that within five years every first-year undergraduate student will have the opportunity to undertake a form of placement experience at some time during his/her programme. Thus, the University expects that in the

region of 5,000 students will have placements each year. The University is intending to widen the concept of placements to include on-campus work experience and other approaches to work-based learning.

116 The audit team came to the view that the current arrangements for managing work placements in some areas have significant limitations in meeting the expectations of students at the present time. This could jeopardise the University's plans for significant expansion and the team recommends the University take action to ensure that staff and students are aware of the current definitions of 'work placement' and that there are sufficiently robust mechanisms in place for management of student placements. In particular the team advises the University to review the mechanisms by which it is assured that the University's Code of Practice for work placements is working consistently across the institution.

Resources for learning

117 The University Management Team has reviewed its approach to the allocation and management of learning resources and sought to ensure that resource income 'follows the student' in that it is devolved where possible to faculties and schools to support the delivery of courses. The learning resource strategy is derived from the teaching and learning strategy and investment has been made to ensure that resource investment underpins teaching and learning and quality enhancement. Benchmarks are used to identify areas of per capita spend in key areas including in the library and IT services.

118 The central mechanism for monitoring the effectiveness of learning resource management is through student feedback as well as the normal mechanisms of audit and governance. Student feedback in the student satisfaction survey shows high satisfaction and increasing confidence in the facilities and learning environment over the past three years. Some students commented that they were attracted to the University 'because of the kit'. Students reported in the satisfaction survey that they were also very satisfied with the computing software and facilities available to them.

119 The University has introduced a review system for support services. The student-facing services (library, computing, Student Services, Registry, and International Office) all have mechanisms to meet with students and seek feedback through, for example, surveys on their services. The Student Charter identifies what students can expect from these services. Additionally the University undertakes an annual business review and planning cycle with all professional services.

120 Students reported to the audit team their general satisfaction with the way in which the library and IT services have responded to improve facilities and services. For example, in response to student requests a 24-hour facility has been piloted and weekend access has been extended. Students indicated to the audit team that their views are taken into account in relation to decision making in library services and this has resulted in an improved service with which students are satisfied. For example the team learned of action to introduce quiet zones in the library.

121 Additional support and resource for e-learning is in place and felt by the students to be effective.

122 The audit team came to the conclusion that the University has an effective resource allocation model and that students have available appropriate resources to support their programmes of study. As new courses are developed resources are available to support expansion and change in the University portfolio.

Admissions policy

123 The University does not have a discrete admissions policy but embeds its approach to admissions within the regulations and frameworks for courses and programmes. The management and oversight of recruitment and admissions is located in three separate departments of the University; the Recruitment and Admissions Office, the International Office and the Graduate and Continuing Professional Development Centre.

124 The admissions process and associated administration and communication are managed centrally through the Recruitment and Admissions Office. The Office is responsible for admissions to taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses for Home and EU applicants. This Office is developing the University admissions systems based on the principles of Fair Access. The University has also streamlined the processes that support a change in course choice and a new process has been introduced under the Course Transfer Scheme.

125 There is commitment to make courses available to under-represented groups. The audit team learned that there is not a discrete strategy for widening participation but that the approach to development of the learning environment takes into account the diverse learning needs of the student population. Students who met the team gave good examples of the opportunities created by the University and the team recognised the University's commitment to create progression and access routes that are making a difference for underrepresented groups.

126 The University Recruitment and Admissions Office has designed a Customer Relationship Management System and reports and tracks mechanisms for efficient and effective admissions processes. The University makes explicit the entry requirements for admission of students to courses and the regulations include a statement on the permitted use of credit for access or advanced standing. Course leaders are required to take into account the personal, professional and educational experiences to assure themselves of the applicant's ability to meet the requirements of the course.

127 The University Management Team and Academic Board have available to them reports compiled from the recruitment and admissions data as part of the standard reporting set provided from the student record manager. This enables regular review of admissions and recruitment practice.

128 The International Office has responsibility for the recruitment and admission of overseas students. The Office helps to ease the access for international students and offers ongoing support. One example given to the audit team was that of actions taken to address concerns from external examiners about the English capabilities of overseas students. This has been addressed at policy level by reinforcing the understanding of the requirements and also by providing pre-sessional courses including a Business Foundation Course and also generic pre-sessional English courses.

129 The audit team came to the view that the University has invested considerable effort in enhancing the admissions process since the previous audit. While there is some variability the team shared the view that the admissions process is effective. The tracking system which is an integral part of the Customer Relationship Management System provides an effective mechanism for monitoring the admissions process and students confirmed that they felt informed and supported throughout their application process for a University place.

Student support

130 The University has developed a Student Charter that acts as a statement of the services, learning support and points of reference and redress for students. The Charter gives a clear account of the support that students can expect to receive and their associated responsibilities. The Charter includes information on the University's position in relation to recruitment and admissions, published information, teaching and learning, learning resources, student services,

financial support, and accommodation, the role of the Students' Union and a wide range of pastoral and social facilities. Students who met the audit team believe that this document is very helpful in clarifying their entitlements and the support arrangements that they can expect. The student written submission suggested a number of areas in which the University had not delivered consistently on the commitments specified in the Student Charter: the clarity of assessment criteria; the provision of timely and constructive feedback; the allocation of tutors; the accessibility of online learning support; and the communication of actions taken in response to issues raised at course consultative committees. The team also found some evidence of inconsistent and variable practice between faculties in those areas, but also noted the efforts being made by the University to deliver the commitments specified in the Charter (paragraph 94). The team encourages the University to continue to work towards a consistent, uniform delivery of the commitments for all students. A student entitlement statement has also been prepared for the support of research degree students (paragraph 180).

131 In response to recommendations from the previous QAA Institutional audit in 2004, the University reviewed its personal academic support for students and established a personal tutor system in 2006-07. University standards for student personal tutoring were approved and faculties/schools were expected to meet the minimum standards by 2008-09 academic year. Students reported to the audit team that in the past the personal tutor system was variable but the new arrangements meant that they had been allocated personal tutors this year and that the new system is starting to be implemented.

132 The University has enhanced the induction experience of students and a team within student services takes responsibility for overseeing the University wide induction processes. Students who met the audit team reported that they had all undertaken an induction programme and they had found this to be a relevant and helpful process. Overseas students are supported in arriving early so that they can fully participate in the induction and Fresher's activities. The team heard from students of the positive support and appropriate induction for overseas students.

133 The University recognises the need for additional academic support, given the diverse range of students' prior learning experience. The Centre for Academic Writing was established in 2004 to provide enhanced individual support and guidance. The Centre also provides advice for staff in improving the academic writing skills of students. Students reported to the audit team that this service is invaluable and makes a significant difference to their skill development. This service is in such demand that there are considerable waiting times. It was clear to the audit team that students see this as one of their most useful support mechanisms. The University recognised the value of this type of support for learning and identified the need for specialised support in other areas of core skills development. The strategic oversight, of and commitment to, enhance the learning environment with this focused support, together with the evidence of positive outcomes for student learning were recognised by the team as an example of good practice.

134 The University has secured Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning funding to establish a University wide student support service for mathematics and statistics. This service provides mathematics support to all students as well as a statistics advisory service which is of particular value for postgraduate students undertaking major projects. Students reported very positively on the widely available student support service for mathematics and statistics and indicated that the support is so highly valued that there is also a significant demand for the service resulting in waiting times at key periods.

135 Pastoral care is provided through the Student Centre which is the locus of a range of welfare and support services including counselling, financial advice, careers advice and guidance and specific support to students with disabilities. The Student Centre also provides links and access to other services including medical care, faith and social support.

136 The audit team came to the view that the support mechanisms for students are seen as a significant and important function in the University and there has been systematic review and investment to ensure that these services operate effectively. The University is aware of the diverse needs of its student body and has developed services to reflect the changing nature and diverse learning needs of students.

137 The overview of the quality of the learning experience through flexible and distance learning is located with the course and faculty committees in the same way as courses studied on-campus. Additional support is also available through the e-learning unit and its team of CU-Online experts. Oversight of support is maintained through the Standing Advisory Group of Collaborative Provision and Flexible and Distributed Learning. This Group scrutinises performance in some detail and makes recommendations for action to reinforce the support provided.

138 The audit team came to the conclusion that the arrangements for student support are generally effective. While there is considerable evidence of good practice and support in academic guidance and supervision, the University recognises that attention needs to be given to the implementation of the personal tutor system for all students. The team also recommends as advisable that the University review the effectiveness of student placement management and recommends that action is advisable to safeguard both the current and future learning support for students on placement (paragraph 116).

Staff support (including staff development)

139 The University has invested significantly in staff development that supports the corporate plan. The University has put in place policies and procedures for the recruitment, support, development and promotion of staff. These are available to all staff on the staff intranet. Performance standards for all levels of staff are specified including cross-University staff performance themes. There has been considerable investment in the provision of support for staff, most notably in the developments of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education and of the teaching development fellowship scheme. The audit team recognised the significant contributions of Centre for the Study of Higher Education and the teaching development fellowship scheme to the development of the quality of the learning environment in the University.

140 Attention has also been given to the selection and appointment frameworks for all grades of staff to underpin the development of the learning experience for students. The selection processes include a protocol that outlines the University requirements and ensures that the priorities are secured for appointing staff with the appropriate skills. A training programme for those involved in staff selection is also in place. All staff have an annual development and performance review that identifies areas for further development and informs the staff development plans for the University.

141 The University has identified the need to enhance the research and scholarly activity of staff to underpin teaching and the applied research strategy. A framework of support and development for those staff that do not hold a research degree is in place. The audit team met staff members who were being well supported in completing their doctoral studies.

142 The human resource procedures appear to be comprehensive and there is recognition of the contribution from all categories of staff through the frameworks for appointment, performance review, pay and reward. The University review process is intended for all staff and although visiting lecturers are not currently included in the full procedure, the University has decided that this should be extended to all those who contribute to teaching and learning.

143 The responsibility for overseeing the management of academic staff support is located within the Centre for the Study of Higher Education. This service offers a wide range of workshops, training sessions and seminars. There is up-to-date information available for staff on the staff intranet and the Centre provides individual advice and support. A major initiative to

enhance teaching and learning was initiated with the establishment of a teaching development fellowship scheme. This supports staff development through pedagogical research and dissemination of good practice. The teaching development fellows work within faculties and produce newsletters and arrange local staff development activities. The support offered to staff by the Centre and in particular by the teaching development fellows is valued highly by staff. The audit team felt that the relationship between the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, teaching development fellows and 'front line' academic staff is playing an important role in developing the learning environment and considers it a feature of good practice.

144 All new members of staff are expected to attend an induction programme and mentoring arrangements are in place for new staff. The support and induction for new staff is available to those on fractional contracts as well as full and part-time members of staff.

145 A peer observation of teaching system is in place and all academic staff are expected to participate. Guidelines and preparation for the role of peer observer, along with papers on the role on peer observation, have been made available on the staff intranet. The University recognises the value of peer observation and has identified that this needs further attention to continue to enhance the effectiveness of feedback. The audit team would agree with the University's view and encourage the continued development of the peer observation processes.

146 The audit team learned of the strategy to support senior staff in learning from the experience of others through a series of visits to other organisations. A framework for leadership development is also in place. The Leadership Action Team was given the task of reviewing the issues arising from the data on student retention, progression and attrition. The outcomes were that the University learned a great deal about matters concerning student retention and put in place a wide-ranging action plan. Additionally the members of the team received leadership development while enhancing the learning experience for students and other staff. The team concluded that this approach to leadership development as exemplified by the work of the Leadership Action Team on student retention is a particular feature of good practice in the University.

147 As indicated above there is a range of staff development activity in place to enhance staff research and scholarship. Training is provided for research supervisors and mentoring for new supervisors. Additionally there is a range of support services through the Centre for the Study of Higher Education for staff supervising research students. The audit team learned that research students with teaching responsibilities are not required to attend a course to support the acquisition of teaching skills although courses are available for them. The University is moving to make this a requirement.

148 A series of workshops, seminar and lecture events is promulgated on the staff intranet to support the research community and research supervisors are encouraged to participate in these events. A training directory is also available to all staff and this includes a wide range of activities and relevant staff support mechanisms to underpin the core and key competencies outlined in the University's Framework for Performance.

149 Institutional oversight of staff development is maintained through staff satisfaction surveys and data from the student satisfaction survey. The Academic Executive considers the results of staff surveys that help to inform its investment decisions. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Student Experience) maintains operational oversight through the work of the Quality Assurance Committee which includes staff support as part of quality management. The work of faculties in supporting staff development is overseen by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Student Experience) and the deans. Where good practice is identified, such as that in the Student Experience and Enhancement Unit in the Faculty of Computing and Engineering, there is evidence that the development is monitored to identify how it could be disseminated to other faculties.

150 The audit team came to the view that staff support is effective with some significant features of good practice in the enhancement of quality through staff development and the dissemination of good practice. Some innovations have the potential to significantly enhance the quality of the student learning experience. The staff performance and review frameworks are clear and relate closely to the University's expectations for the quality of the student learning experience.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

151 The University regards the enhancement of the quality of the student experience as being core to its academic developments. It has chosen to embed the process of enhancement within institutional structures by basing it on the University's Corporate Plan, and specifically on the '2010 Agenda' which sets out measurable objectives for achievement in the years leading up to 2010 and which provides the framework for the University's approach to quality enhancement.

152 The Briefing Paper asserts that the University 'strives to involve staff at all levels in the process of developing and agreeing what is needed for high quality delivery' and refers to an 'openly collegial way of working'. The audit team formed a view of an institution in which the agenda for enhancement is developed at corporate level, with a strong emphasis on meeting key corporate objectives, and that staff are informed of its development and have opportunities to contribute to it.

153 A key driver for institutional enhancement is the University's perceptions of its students' views and their level of satisfaction with the learning experience offered. Evidence from the student satisfaction survey is central to plans for the enhancement of the student experience and as an indicator of the degree of cultural change taking place across the institution.

Student retention

154 As an example of the University's approach to enhancement, the audit team considered the development and implementation of its plans to improve retention and progression rates for undergraduate students. The University has acknowledged its concerns in this regard and is taking steps to address them by enhancing a variety of forms of support available to students particularly in the early part of the programme.

155 A strategic initiative was launched to develop further understanding of student retention and put in place relevant action plans. This was orchestrated through the establishment of a Leadership Action Team that was given full authority to investigate retention matters and establish policies and action plans (paragraph 146). The Centre for the Study of Higher Education also undertook a detailed analysis of the data to highlight any themes that emerge from retention monitoring. Attendance monitoring has been put in place during the first term and a wide range of measures implemented to identify students at risk from attrition or non progression. A guidance document has been issued 'Enhancing student achievement and retention' that identifies good practice to be followed in relation to improving student retention. This 'Blue Book' gives staff practical advice on mechanisms to enhance retention and includes information on student proctoring (peer support), assessment, student diaries, attendance and mentorship and counselling.

156 The audit team learned that this University wide action plan, developed by the Leadership Action Team for Student Retention, was starting to make a difference and there was an early indication that retention was slowly improving. It was recognised that it was difficult to determine the specific factors for any improvement as the University had taken a 'broad sweep' approach and put in place multiple measures to address the concerns that were raised by scrutiny of the retention data. There was, however, evidence of systematic thinking; drawing on evidence from research that resulted in plans being developed by faculties and supported by teaching development fellows. The team recognised the benefit of the outcome of the approach

taken to address this problem and came to the view that the strategic function of the Leadership Action Team, both for team members and for the impact on the learning environment, was a feature of good practice in the University.

Learning and teaching strategy

157 The University's Learning and Teaching Strategy identifies three key areas for enhancement within the context of the 2010 Agenda, specifically: enhancing the student learning experience; enhancing the University's 'authority to teach', and enhancing its organisation for teaching. In each of these areas the University has adopted a set of specific objectives for achievement by 2010-11.

158 The audit team found little evidence that the objectives of the Learning and Teaching Strategy were a key driver in determining the manner in which academic staff approached their roles nor that the Teaching and Learning Committee had undertaken oversight of the implementation of the Strategy in faculties' learning and teaching strategies.

Thematic audits

159 Since 2006-07 the University has conducted thematic audits, with a view to evaluating the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures and to identifying and spreading good practice within the institution. A total of 11 such thematic audits were conducted in the years 2006-07 and 2007-08. The audit team noted that the Quality Assurance Committee, at its meeting of May 2008, had received a summary report of thematic audits carried out in the course of 2006-07 and 2008-09. The reports of these thematic audits include recommendations for change, based on the evidence of the audit process. The team formed the view that the thematic audits form useful contributors to the dissemination of good practice, and would encourage the Quality Assurance Committee to ensure timely consideration of audit reports and timely monitoring of the fulfilment of recommendations which it has adopted.

160 The annual summary of the reports of external examiners, prepared by the Registrar and Secretary, provides a useful and detailed statement of themes arising in those reports, encompassing both on-campus and off-campus provision, and enables institutional oversight of good practice identified by external examiners and of areas of concern where remedial action might be called for.

Staff development

161 The Centre for the Study of Higher Education has the role of providing developmental events for teaching staff. It offers a wide-ranging programme of activities which are linked to institutional priorities and of which many are well-attended. The audit team formed the view that the Centre for the Study of Higher Education played an important role in helping to enable institutional enhancement, and would encourage it to fulfil its self-declared aim of measuring the effect of its interventions.

162 Teaching development fellows are regarded by the University as playing a key role in the implementation of its Learning and Teaching Strategy, in that they provide a 'bridge' between the Centre for the Study of Higher Education and staff in faculties. Although teaching development fellows have concentrated on their own faculties' responses to the University's learning and teaching strategy and rather less on activities at university level, they have supported a wide range of developmental activities across the University.

163 The University has a variety of means for supporting the development of teaching staff. Newly-appointed academic staff without significant academic experience are required to undertake the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Professional Practice. A Leadership Development Programme has been established in order to enhance academic leadership across the institution. The University has established a pay and reward scheme for staff

in professional services, and is undertaking discussions in respect of pay and reward arrangements for academic staff. Although the scheme is intended to offer opportunities for all staff to earn merit payments in addition to incremental progression it is not yet clear what criteria will be adopted for assessing merit in the provision and enhancement of learning opportunities.

164 Induction and mentoring are offered to all newly appointed staff, although the University accepts that there is variability in the uptake of these. The system for peer observation of teaching is intended to provide opportunities for sharing good practice. The audit team saw evidence of examples of good practice in the Faculty of Engineering and Computing which had been adopted by colleagues as a result of peer observation and also valuable guidance for staff of the Faculty of Business, Environment and Society in the Peer Observation Handbook written by a teaching development fellow. The team would encourage the University to build on existing good practice to develop a scheme which disseminates the good practices identified to all staff throughout the University.

165 The audit team formed the view that there are a number of instances of valuable enhancements which originated at institutional level and are being implemented across the institution, particularly the development of numerous local activities to improve retention and progression rates, and staff development activities run by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education. However the team would encourage the University to take steps to ensure oversight and monitoring at institutional level of the implementation and effectiveness of enhancement strategies, in order to allow it to form a view about the extent to which the aims of the corporate plan are being met, and to enable institutional learning to inform management of future enhancement plans.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

166 It was agreed prior to the visit that the University's collaborative provision should be the subject of a separate audit.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

167 The University acknowledges the role of postgraduate research students in creating a vibrant research environment and has taken action recently to enhance the framework for supporting such students. At the time of the last audit, the Academic Board of the University had delegated its responsibility for managing the quality and standards of postgraduate research degrees to the Research Degrees Committee. Operationally the responsibility for monitoring the maintenance of academic standards has been that of the Research Degrees Committee and the faculty research degree subcommittees. The 2006-07 Annual Report of the Research Degrees Committee shows that it has given careful attention to a range of issues in respect of research degrees and of support for students and supervisors.

168 Since the last audit, the University has conducted an internal review of its research degree provision, and this has resulted in a new framework for research and professional degrees, approved by Academic Board in June 2008. The year 2008-09 is regarded as being a transitional year from the old framework to the new, and to implement and monitor the new framework the University has established the Registry Research Unit, and a new committee structure comprising the Applied Research Committee and the Research Degrees Subcommittee. The terms of reference of the Applied Research Committee include responsibility for the management, award and quality assurance of postgraduate research and professional degrees, and the Committee has delegated this responsibility to its Research Degrees Subcommittee.

169 The University's aims in creating a new framework were to ensure that the expectations of the precepts of the *Code of practice* are fully met, to ensure that the framework would permit professional doctorates to be awarded, to resolve a number of operational inconsistencies between faculties, to create a system for central oversight of student progression using UNIVERSE, and to ensure that feedback on progress is offered to students at intervals of no more than 12 months.

170 The series of briefings for postgraduate research students on the new framework arrangements was viewed particularly positively by postgraduate students who confirmed that this was thorough and useful.

171 The University has established a comprehensive set of operating procedures for research and professional degrees which detail the committee structure and procedural aspects of the progress and assessment of students on research programmes. Research students expressed a strong level of awareness of the new framework after the consultation process in which some of them had been involved.

172 The University has a research strategy centred on applied research. The audit team heard that the research strategy supports research students by attaching them to applied research centres or applied research groups to facilitate engagement with external networks or partner organisations.

173 From 2008-09 the University has adopted programme specifications for programmes leading to the award of a research degree. The specifications provide a full and detailed description of the required outcomes of a research degree programme and of the programme of study which a student will be expected to follow in order to achieve them. It also specifies the modules which a student is required to complete alongside the research programme, including a module in research methods taken by every student.

174 The University has not yet approved any programme leading to the award of a professional doctorate, but has adopted a template for the structure and learning outcomes of such programmes. The University's statement of the Postgraduate Research Degree Student Entitlement provides a helpful guide for research students entering the programme.

175 The University has appropriate requirements, as expressed in its academic regulations, for admission as a postgraduate research student, including the requirement for academic qualifications as well as for competency in English language where appropriate. Discipline specific requirements may be added by the Faculty Research Degrees Committee. The selection and admission of students has been carried out within faculties and has been led by the faculty research office. The selection of candidates is normally carried out by academics who, for successful candidates, will form the basis of the supervisory team.

176 Prior to 1 August 2008, the Faculty Research Office monitored the availability of appropriate supervision arrangements. Faculty research offices were also responsible for arranging the induction and admissions support for research students. While some students reported variation in their experiences the move to a more centralised admissions system for research students was felt to have strengthened the process considerably.

177 Research students are also able to access specialist support and guidance through the Graduate Centre. The audit team was advised that research degree students have access to the central induction programmes although the experience is variable. There is a perception that the focus is inevitably towards undergraduate students and faculty induction programmes vary considerably with some examples of well organised and useful support while others are the subject of criticism. The University accepts that further development of induction arrangements is desirable and is taking steps to address this. For example, the new support framework for postgraduate students is designed to address these criticisms through the introduction of a new and comprehensive support programme for research students including a bespoke induction programme and research training.

178 The approval and appointment of a supervisory team, including the Director of Studies, has been the responsibility of the Research Degrees Committee but will from 2008-09 be the responsibility of the Research Degrees Subcommittee. The University recently reinforced the policy on an upper limit on the number of students that may be supervised by a member of staff.

179 The Centre for Study of Higher Education runs training workshops for supervisors. A total of six workshops are planned for 2008-09, each being delivered more than once at different points during the year. These cover a range of topics relevant to the supervisory life cycle, and their mode of delivery has been evolving over the past two years in response to perceived needs and to address a problem of poor attendance identified by the Centre for Study of Higher Education.

180 The University publishes a 'Guide for Research Students and their Supervisors' which details the support offered to research students and including a 'Statement of Entitlement'. This statement clarifies the nature of the supervision arrangements that students can expect and explains the support, resources and administration in place to ensure that students are able to undertake their studies effectively. Research students are supported through the Registry Research Unit and more directly by the Research Supervision Team.

181 The resource strategy that underpins the research objectives includes equipment infrastructure and enhanced library resources. While the research strategy does not explicitly address resources for research degree students the intention is to create an environment that is likely to enhance the resources available to research degree students. The audit team learned of a good range of resource available for research students, including specific resources such as a programme of seminars, symposia and workshops. The University has also developed an area of CU-Online to support debate and discussion across the postgraduate community.

182 The University carried out a survey of the experience of research students in 2007, which, with a response rate of 29.5 per cent, showed evidence that students were satisfied with the quality of supervision.

Progress, review and assessment arrangements

183 The University requires annual monitoring of the progress of each student, as well as monitoring of students enrolled for MPhil/PhD at the point of transfer to PhD.

184 Within its new framework for research degrees, the University has established a new system for monitoring the progress of students. Hitherto the system has required the student and the Director of Studies to complete annual monitoring forms which were considered by the school/faculty research degrees subcommittee. The new system requires each student annually to meet a progress review panel, functioning as an Assessment Board, which hears a presentation by the student of his/her work and which makes decisions about progression or otherwise. The audit team heard that the University regards this process as thorough, albeit time-consuming. The team also heard from research students that they had a positive view of the new progress review panel system, and that they valued the opportunity for annual feedback and discussion.

185 The University's arrangements for the assessment of research students are expressed in its Academic Regulations. Examinations are conducted by an examination panel whose recommendations lead to decisions regarding the conferment of an award being taken by the Chair of the Academic Board.

Development of research and other skills

186 The recently-introduced programme specifications for research degrees include explicit requirements for research students to carry out study of research methods as well as relevant subject-specific material. This study is in the form of credit-rated modules: the 10-credit module in 'Induction and Research Methods' is delivered at various times during the year; the student selects appropriate subject-specific modules by agreement with the Director of Studies.

187 The new framework will introduce a requirement for students to maintain a personal development planning logbook, in order to aid their development as reflective researchers. This will not be monitored other than informally by the Director of Studies.

188 Recognising that most research students are expected to carry out some form of teaching while studying at the University, the Research Degrees Subcommittee has determined that training should be provided to such students in order to ensure that standards are met. The audit team encourages the University to ensure all research students complete this training before teaching.

Feedback mechanisms

189 The University has completed its first student satisfaction survey for postgraduate students, including those undertaking research degrees. As a result of the survey findings, the University has strengthened its representation and feedback mechanisms for postgraduate students. The survey findings had also led to the preparation of comprehensive and detailed faculty-based action plans approved by each faculty research degrees subcommittee and noted by the Research Degrees Committee.

190 The views of research students are expressed also in the student satisfaction survey and have led to the preparation of comprehensive and detailed faculty-based action plans approved by each faculty research degrees subcommittee and noted by the Research Degrees Committee.

Representation

191 Research students have representatives elected to the Faculty Postgraduate Research Degree Students Consultative Committee of each faculty applied research committee that meets formally once a year. This is the main mechanism by which student issues are raised. The minutes of these meetings had required to be considered by faculty research degrees Subcommittee and forwarded to the University research section. The University recognises that there is some variance in this practice, which was confirmed by students. The University also hears the views of research students through elected membership of the University's Applied Research Committee. Training is available from the Students' Union for these representative roles. The University is continuing to reinforce the importance of the representative system to research degrees committees to enhance the representation of research students.

192 Students told the audit team that they regard consultation with members of their supervision team as being the primary means of raising issues regarding the quality of their learning experience, and gave the team positive examples of their supervision experience and explained how issues are addressed quickly and effectively.

193 Research students have access to the University's procedures for complaints and for reviews of the decisions of examining boards, as expressed in the Academic Regulations and as available on the University's intranet. Students are given information about the procedure for review at the time of their examination. The Research Degrees Committee has evaluated the outcomes of complaints and requests for reviews with a view to safeguarding standards and improving quality.

194 The new framework for research and professional degrees, when fully implemented, provides the potential for securing the standards of research degrees and the learning opportunities available to students. The framework has been carefully introduced with appropriate consultations and briefings. The University acknowledges the need to achieve uniformly high standards in the induction of research students, and is taking steps to achieve this. The audit team noted the University's acceptance of poor attendance on the part of supervisors at the training workshops run by the Centre for Study of Higher Education and suggest that the University take steps to reassure itself that all supervisors of research students have appropriate training.

Section 7: Published information

195 The Briefing Paper provides extensive details of published information but is less expansive about the measures used to assure its accuracy, completeness and reliability. General publicity material is the responsibility of Marketing and Communications, including the full-time undergraduate, part-time and postgraduate prospectuses.

196 Detailed project plans are prepared for the production of the undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses; these include reference to the checking of hard copy proofs by faculties, the Graduate Centre, Student Services and the International Office. Staff who met the team explained that all academic and service areas have marketing representatives and that it was the responsibility of the associate deans of faculty to check the accuracy of the academic content of the prospectuses.

197 The University's public website includes information such as programme specifications, assessment regulations and guidance for external examiners. The team was told that each faculty has a web editor and that the approval process for website content is managed by the Web Development Team in Marketing and Communications.

198 The University offers a number of pages of its public website in different languages to serve the needs of international applicants; this is complemented by the provision of a wap site and of country-specific, hard copy material. The International Office has responsibility for the accuracy of this material.

199 The Briefing Paper states that the University makes all of the information detailed in Annex F of *HEFCE 06/45* publicly available and the audit team saw evidence that this was the case. An Assistant Registrar based in the Management Information Unit is responsible for the compilation and accuracy of all University data which is uploaded on to the Unistats website.

200 Both the student satisfaction survey (2007) and the student written submission were generally positive about the accuracy of information provided to prospective students about the University and its courses.

201 The University requires module information to be produced in accordance with minimum guidelines which were originally approved by the Quality Assurance Committee in September 2004 and updated by the Quality Enhancement Unit in October 2007. Course handbooks for undergraduates and taught postgraduates are produced by faculties. Students who met the audit team noted the value of their course handbooks and confirmed that their modules guides either met or exceeded the minimum guidelines.

202 The University published a Student Charter for the first time in 2007-08. This outlines a set of common expectations of students as well as academic, support and recreational services. Student representatives made a contribution to the development of the Charter and focus groups were held to consult students on the new Charter. In terms of published information the Student Charter specifies the expectation that the University will 'maintain high standards of clarity and accuracy in its printed and on-line communications'. A copy is provided to all first-year students and other students are able to access the document via the Student Centre or in electronic form via the student portal. There appeared, however, to be a variable level of awareness among students of this key document and wider dissemination might prove helpful, although the audit team learned that the Charter is used by student representatives to identify issues relating to student expectations and entitlements.

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