

Keele University

May 2008

Annex to the report

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Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) carried out an institutional audit of Keele University (the University) from 12 to 16 May 2008. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's management of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. To arrive at its conclusions, the team spoke to members of staff and students and also read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the University manages the academic aspects of its provision.

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

Outcomes of the institutional audit

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

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University's commitment to quality enhancement is evident in a number of activities. In the view of the audit team, these activities would benefit from greater coordination. The team also identified the need for more effective dissemination of good practice.

Postgraduate research students

The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for securing and enhancing the quality and standards of its research degree programmes are sound, while noting that further action in a small number of areas has the potential to further secure the quality and standards of this provision.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following features of good practice:

- internal quality audit as a robust and effective process of periodic review (paragraphs 42, 81)
- the University's commitment to gathering and responding to student feedback, and in particular its willingness to invest in a bespoke survey which complements the National Student Survey and provides more sophisticated data on student satisfaction, particularly in respect of its distinctive dual honours programmes (paragraph 88)
- the work of the Centre for International Exchange and Languages in managing students' opportunities for study abroad (paragraph 108)

- the use of 'E-vision' as an effective tool for supporting the revised personal tutoring system (paragraph 135).

Recommendations for action

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

It would be desirable for the University to:

- extend personal tutoring to all postgraduate taught students (paragraph 136)
- review its procedures for the induction, training and support of staff and students who join the University at times other than the start of the academic year (paragraph 142)
- review its approach to enhancement and, in doing so, pay particular attention to the development of systematic processes designed to capture, and effectively disseminate, good practice (paragraph 153)
- strengthen institutional oversight of collaborative provision to ensure consistency in the management of both existing arrangements and developing links (paragraph 162)
- give priority to the development of a workload allocation model and thus ensure that staff time for supervision of postgraduate research students is appropriately calibrated (paragraph 184).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The University and its mission

1 Keele University (the University) was the first completely new higher education institution established after the Second World War, gaining degree awarding powers in 1949, as the University College of North Staffordshire, and University status in 1962, as the University of Keele. The University was founded to promote interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary scholarship and it continues to emphasise the development of a broad educational programme; around 80 per cent of its undergraduate students study two subjects to honours level.

2 Most of the University's provision is located on a 617-acre campus in Staffordshire close to Newcastle-under-Lyme. It also has a hospital campus at the University Hospital of North Staffordshire in Stoke-on-Trent.

3 Teaching takes place across a broad range of disciplines, which are organised into 13 schools, grouped into three faculties: The Faculty of Health, the Faculty of Natural Sciences and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. All research and related activity, including the supervision of research students, is organised and managed by seven Research Institutes.

4 In 2007-08, the University had a total of 10,110 students enrolled on higher education programmes (7,412 full-time equivalent), shown by programme level and mode of study below.

Level	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Undergraduate	6,038	277	6,315
Taught postgraduate	660	919	1,579
Research postgraduate	199	233	432
Other	0	1,784	1,784
Total	6,897	3,213	10,110

5 According to the University's strategic plan 2005-10, its distinctive mission is to be recognised as, 'the UK's leading example of an open, integrated intellectual community'.

The information base for the audit

6 The audit team had access to the reports of the following QAA reviews: the Institutional audit of the University of Keele, May 2004; the Overseas Quality Audit Report for the University of Keele and Informatics Institute of Technology, Sri Lanka, May 2004; the Major review of healthcare programmes report of the University of Keele and Shropshire and Staffordshire Strategic Health Authority, April 2005; and the Review of postgraduate research degree programmes for Keele University, July 2006.

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

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

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

Developments since the last audit

10 Developments since the last QAA audit in May 2004 have been driven in the main by the 'Keele2006' change management programme, which has led to a substantial reorganisation of the University's academic and administrative structures. In consequence, the University has moved to a new academic structure comprising three Faculties, 13 Schools and seven Research Institutes; and established five new directorates to manage the administration. The new directorates are: Academic Services; Human Resources and Student Support; Finance and Information Technology; Planning and Secretariat; and Commercial and Facilities Management. Most of the administrative teams with formal responsibilities for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are based within the Academic Services Directorate. They include the Quality Assurance Office, the Learning Development Unit, Academic Registry and the Graduate School Office.

11 QAA's last audit resulted in a judgement of broad confidence in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The report noted five features of good practice and made three recommendations where action was considered advisable, and a further seven where action was considered desirable. The advisable recommendations related to: using the opportunity provided by Keele2006 to reflect on the effectiveness of the University's structures for the supervision of quality and standards; strengthening the institutional oversight of all existing collaborative provision; and reviewing the annual monitoring review process to strengthen institutional administration. The desirable recommendations related to: the development of criteria for the appointment of external members in course approval and monitoring processes; consideration of a policy codifying the involvement of external examiners in the modification of programmes and modules; continuation of support for staff working at module level in the development of module outlines expressing intended learning outcomes; reviewing student representation and induction arrangements for part-time students; consideration of the development of internal benchmarks to measure student progress at both module and programme level; provision of a consolidated, authoritative and accessible single reference point for both University-wide and course-specific regulations; and a review of the range of support services available for international students.

12 In considering the University's response to the recommendations of the 2004 audit report, the audit team noted that the University had made progress on several fronts. In particular,

it had taken the opportunity presented by Keele2006 to strengthen institutional oversight of quality and standards, in large part through the creation of Faculty learning and teaching committees; revised its procedures for annual monitoring; implemented new programme approval procedures providing for the involvement of external advisers; created the new posts of faculty directors of learning and teaching to provide support, inter alia, for the development of module outlines; revised its arrangements for the representation of students; embarked on a major review of the external examining system; and begun combining University regulations, course regulations and other key policies in a single set of web pages. These developments are discussed within the relevant sections of this annex below.

13 In response to the second desirable recommendation on the management of collaborative provision, the University carried out a detailed review of its collaborative partnership in South-East Asia in 2006-07, informed by a report from its internal auditors. This led the University to maintain the link subject to a number of conditions, which included strengthened oversight at faculty and university levels, and a new contract with the partner was signed on this basis. Notwithstanding these new arrangements for the University's overseas partnership, the audit team noted some minor variance in the University's performance against its stated procedures for managing the standards and quality of collaborative links within the UK. This is discussed in Section 5 of this annex.

14 The audit team concluded that the University had responded appropriately to the recommendations of the 2004 audit, while noting that further action had the potential to further secure the quality and standards of its collaborative provision.

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

15 In its overall framework for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, the University draws a fundamental distinction between the functions of 'quality management and enhancement' and 'quality audit'.

16 According to the Briefing Paper, the purposes of quality management and enhancement are to ensure that the learning experience provided to students is of the highest quality; the means by which good-quality learning and teaching are achieved are widely shared and applied; the teaching provided is appropriate to the level of the qualification; the outcome of students' learning is rigorously and objectively assessed; and the standards students attain are appropriate to the qualification awarded. The philosophy that the University has adopted for allocating responsibilities for quality management and enhancement is that they should rest as closely as possible with the staff who teach the students. Thus primary responsibility rests within the Schools, with programme boards (or their equivalent) taking operational action within a framework monitored by school learning and teaching committees. In order that the University may exercise oversight, school learning and teaching committees report to faculty learning and teaching committees, which in turn report to the University Learning and Teaching Committee. Finally, this Committee reports to the Senate, the University's most senior academic committee.

17 The purpose of quality audit is to test whether quality management and enhancement is being undertaken thoroughly and consistently. This includes testing compliance with internal procedures and with relevant external requirements and guidelines. According to the Briefing Paper, quality audit should be independent of the individuals and committees responsible for quality management and enhancement, to ensure appropriate checks and balances. This philosophy is reflected in the existence of an academic audit committee, which independently advises Senate on the outcome of the University's quality assurance processes, and the Assurance and Academic Audit Office, which is based in a separate directorate from the teams involved in quality management and enhancement. The audit team saw the minutes of several academic audit committee meetings, which demonstrated that it performed this function effectively, for example in its recommendation that examination boards should routinely record progress in

responding to issues raised in external examiner reports, and in its management of potential risks to standards in overseas collaborative links.

18 The Briefing Paper described the Senate as the guardian of academic standards and quality. Although Senate discharges this responsibility primarily by receiving reports through the committee structure described above, the University stressed that Senate is actively and directly engaged in the scrutiny of academic standards and quality itself. The audit team's consideration of Senate minutes confirmed that this was indeed the case. It noted, for example, the involvement of Senate in the introduction of a new degree algorithm in 2007.

19 Senate devolves operational responsibility for safeguarding the standards of academic awards to the University Learning and Teaching Committee. More specifically, this Committee, which is chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning, is responsible for delegated actions and recommendations to Senate on matters of quality management and enhancement, acting on instructions from Senate, on business proposed by its membership, and on the basis of reports and recommendations from faculty learning and teaching committees. In addition, the University Learning and Teaching Committee has a subcommittee on foundation year and complementary studies programmes which takes lead responsibility in those areas, and has established three Working Groups on Standards, Widening Participation and Student Development to undertake detailed work on its behalf and make recommendations as appropriate. The University Learning and Teaching Committee is also concerned with the promotion, implementation, monitoring and review of the University's Teaching and Learning Strategy, 2007-10, which was developed as a specific learning and teaching complement to Keele2006.

20 The University's new faculties play a crucial role in quality assurance processes. Each is managed by an executive dean, who controls faculty budgets and is responsible for supporting and fostering the development of research and of teaching and learning within the faculty. Deans sit ex officio on the University Learning and Teaching Committee and are members of the University's senior management team, known as the Vice-Chancellor's Committee. As described above, each faculty has a learning and teaching committee, which is chaired by the faculty's Director of Learning and Teaching. The faculty Learning and Teaching Committees link the schools with the University by receiving business from schools' learning and teaching committees and reporting to the University Learning and Teaching Committee, thus addressing a key concern in the findings and recommendations of the 2004 QAA audit report.

21 The principal University reference point in the framework for managing academic standards and quality is the Academic Quality and Standards Manual. The manual was in process of revision at the time of the Audit, in accordance with the changes approved under Keele2006.

22 The University Regulations include general regulations for University examinations and assessment. Day-to-day administration of the regulations is the responsibility of the Planning and Secretariat Directorate.

23 A distinctive feature of the management of standards and quality at postgraduate research level is the work of research institutes, which oversee supervision arrangements for postgraduate research students. More detail on the framework for postgraduate research students is provided in Section 6 of this annex.

24 The Vice-Chancellor's Committee is the senior management team of the University. Its membership comprises the Vice-Chancellor and Deputy, the pro vice-chancellors, faculty deans, Secretary and Registrar and the directors of the five new directorates. This Committee generates subgroups, whose membership is largely internal to the wider Committee. Its Academic Development Group considers issues of an academic nature brought to it by the deans, considers all proposals for new academic courses and has strategic oversight of all issues relating to the recruitment and retention of students.

25 The audit team investigated the wider strategic and deliberative role of this Committee and its subgroups. It was grateful to the Vice-Chancellor for making available to it minutes of its deliberations, which are normally for private use. From its scrutiny of documents and in meetings, the team formed the view that, although the Vice-Chancellor's Committee initiated discussion of strategic changes and also provided leadership on operational matters, its work needed to be seen as an important element within the University's deliberative structures.

26 As senior managers agreed, given the range of its work in academic development and in strategy and in supervision of a range of activities concerned with standards and quality, the Vice-Chancellor's Committee in effect forms part of the University's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. The University may wish to consider both clarifying, and for the benefit of the wider University community explaining, the nature of the deliberative role which the Vice-Chancellor's Committee plays within its overall structures.

Effectiveness of the framework

27 At the time of the audit, several components of the University's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities were still bedding down and it was not possible for the audit team to gauge their effectiveness over a complete cycle of work. This view was reflected in the Briefing Paper, which conceded that, to some extent '...we are still finding our way through the new committee structures...'. However, it was evident to the team that the new structure had been carefully planned, responded to the recommendations of the previous audit, and was likely to develop into a robust and effective system. Meetings with staff confirmed that the changes were being properly implemented at school and programme levels.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

This section describes how the University's procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of award standards support the management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

Programme approval

28 Proposals for new programmes are raised by the dean of the relevant faculty within the Vice-Chancellor's Committee. If the Committee supports the proposal, then it will ask the dean to take the development of the programme forward within the faculty. The proposal then follows a five-stage process.

29 The first stage involves the detailed development of the proposal by a programme group, in consultation with colleagues from the University administration, to determine both that there is a market demand for the programme and that it can be adequately resourced. The Programme Group is required at this stage to solicit the views of a range of internal stakeholders, including the University Librarian and the Finance Department.

30 The second stage of the process comprises consideration of the proposal by Academic Development Group, which is a subcommittee of the Vice-Chancellor's Committee. The Group will either grant or withhold outline planning consent for the third stage of the process, which involves the development of the detailed academic content of the programme and discussion of the proposal by the relevant faculty learning and teaching committee. External consultation is sought by relevant staff in Academic Services and, once approved by the faculty Learning and Teaching Committee, the full proposal, including a final business case will be put before a scrutiny panel appointed by the University Learning and Teaching Committee, comprising University representatives from faculties and schools not directly involved with the proposal,

senior members of the University administration and an external academic adviser. The external adviser's comments may be made by correspondence.

31 At the fourth stage, the scrutiny panel will undertake a formal validation event, which includes consideration of the evidence of demand, the proposed academic content of the programme and the staffing and other resource requirements. The scrutiny panel passes its report to the University Learning and Teaching Committee, which has power to give final approval on behalf of Senate.

32 The fifth and final stage takes place within the relevant faculty, which will make the necessary arrangements to establish the new programme and build into its planning process a review of the programme after two years. The Dean, or his or her nominee, is responsible for ensuring that relevant information appears in any prospectus or marketing material.

33 The audit team regarded the University's programme approval process as robust and effective, with appropriate external input (thus responding to a recommendation of the previous audit report). Salient features of the process include the attention given to the alignment of the proposed programme with the University's broader offering, and to the correspondence of the proposed academic structure, content and resources with the intended learning outcomes. The scrutiny panel has the power to make recommendations to the University Learning and Teaching Committee in respect of the proposal, and the faculty may be obliged to act upon any recommendations as a condition of final approval. The University Learning and Teaching Committee may add further conditions as a result of its own discussions of the panel's report.

Annual and triennial programme review

34 The University requires programme committees to review annually all the programmes for which they are responsible. The review must include the consideration of module reports for all modules that form part of the programme; the outcome of student evaluation of any of the modules forming part of the programme which have been evaluated in the year under review; various quantitative data; external examiner reports; and reports of any relevant Internal quality audits or external reviews. Programme committees must present an annual report to the School's Learning and Teaching Committee, which summarises the results of the review and reports any actions taken in response to the review's conclusions.

35 The University exercises oversight of this process through an Annual Monitoring questionnaire, which each school is required to submit to the relevant faculty learning and teaching committee annually by the end of September. The questionnaire makes clear that module evaluations should feed into the process at least once in three years and that staff-student liaison committees should have the opportunity to discuss such evaluations. The University expects faculty learning and teaching committees to report examples of good practice arising from annual monitoring to the University Learning and Teaching Committee.

36 Every three years, the annual programme review must be extended to include consideration of whether the programme needs substantial revision. In addition to the evidence on which annual programme review is based, the triennial review must also consider the reports of the previous two annual reviews (in order to identify any trends); programme specifications, module aims and learning outcomes; the requirements of, and participation by, validating and accrediting bodies; and whether student achievement in the programmes continues to meet the requirements of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) for the level at which it is set. Programme committees are expected to present a report to the School's Learning and Teaching Committee on the triennial programme review. This report summarises the results of the review, identifies any action in response to the review's conclusions and recommends any action required, including substantial revision of the programme. If the recommendation is for substantial revision, the programme committee must solicit the views of all stakeholders including, as appropriate, students, potential employers and external bodies.

37 The University has identified several weaknesses in its systems for annual and triennial review described above. These include a lack of thorough trend analysis and identification of performance strengths and weaknesses; variability in the standard of reports and in the analysis of data between programmes; and a lack of proper scrutiny of the process and its outcomes at faculty level. In parallel, an analysis of the University's market position and student recruitment trends identified the need for its undergraduate programmes to be reviewed and refreshed annually not only from the perspective of quality assurance but also in the light of student demand, competitor behaviour and market trends.

38 In response, the University has adopted a new annual monitoring system, the Curriculum Annual Review Development, from the middle of 2008. The new process is designed to provide a much broader suite of information than the existing Annual Programme Review, responding to the University's concerns about student demand and market trends, as well as address the shortcomings of the current system. As a result of a strengthened annual review, it is proposed that triennial review should be discontinued.

39 The University developed the Curriculum Annual Review Development through its deliberative structures and gave the wider University community the opportunity to comment through faculty learning and teaching committees. Based on its scrutiny of evidence related to the development of the new system, the audit team concluded that this development should achieve the degree of consistency that the University requires in its annual reports and that, provided appropriate management data are available, it should also provide an informed picture both of market demand, and of student progression and achievement. The team also noted the planned greater involvement of faculty learning and teaching committees in the monitoring process and the planned timetable of implementation which should allow the University to remedy any issues brought to light by the process in a timely way. However, while the new process appeared to be capable of identifying potential problems, its role in capturing features of good practice was not clear.

Periodic review

40 The University's periodic review process is called Internal Quality Audit. The normal unit of audit is the school and the focus of the audit is on the processes used by the school for the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of education and the standards of achievement, the school's response to the Academic Infrastructure and its compliance with the University's policies and regulations.

41 The Internal Quality Audit is conducted by an audit team which comprises a chair (a senior member of teaching staff of the University with wide experience of teaching and the management of teaching), two auditors who are both teaching staff of the University with experience of the management of teaching, an external adviser of national standing in one or more of the disciplines covered by the audit, and an audit secretary from the Quality Assurance Office. The process is predicated on a self-evaluation portfolio prepared by the school, which includes a SWOT analysis and reports from other quality assurance processes. On the day of the audit, the audit team has a series of meetings with selected staff and students from the school. The team then prepares a report and submits it to the Quality Assurance Office which forwards it to the Head of School and the Dean of the Faculty. The school has four weeks to develop an action plan in response to the report that it is expected to submit to the Quality Assurance Office, the relevant faculty learning and teaching committee and the University Learning and Teaching Committee. Normally the full audit reports are published on the University intranet. A year after the audit, the Head of School will submit a brief report from the school on the progress made in implementing the recommendations of the audit to the Dean of the Faculty and to the Quality Assurance Office for consideration by the University Learning and Teaching Committee.

42 The audit team saw evidence of the Internal Quality Audit as part of the sampling trails. This evidence demonstrated that the process is extremely rigorous. In particular, the involvement

of external advisers helps the University's own internal auditors to measure at least part of the academic curricula against national criteria and scrutiny of a sequence of external examiner reports mitigates the risk of any emerging problems going unnoticed. The body of evidence which the process demands is extensive, but most of it, for example external examiner reports, annual reports and student handbooks, appears to be readily available, and taken in conjunction with meetings between auditors and members of the student body enables the team to develop a thorough understanding of a school's management of its responsibilities with respect to quality management and enhancement. Furthermore members of academic staff involved in the Internal Quality Audit whom the team met regarded the experience, including the comprehensive training given, as contributing much towards their professional development. The team, therefore, identified the Internal Quality Audit as a feature of good practice.

43 Normally, each school has an internal quality audit every five years. However, in recent years, the University has found it impossible to sustain this schedule, despite having trained a substantial number of new internal auditors during 2006-07. In response, it is considering ways of enhancing its approach to periodic review, including the possibility of replacing the Internal Quality Audit with an annual process of audit to review and report on various themes such as assessment or employability, agreed by the University Learning and Teaching Committee, across all schools and programmes. While mindful of the challenges faced by the University in running the Internal Quality Audit on a five-yearly cycle, and the difficulties in auditing large and complex schools running many programmes, the team encourages the University to consider very carefully the benefits of the current process before substantially changing or replacing it.

44 A number of programmes, including all those in the Faculty of Health, are also subject to validation and accreditation by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. The reports of these processes, along with schools' responses to them, are considered by faculty learning and teaching committees and reported to the University Learning and Teaching Committee. The timetable for the Internal Quality Audit may be adjusted to take account of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies' requirements.

External examiners

45 The University appoints external examiners for all courses leading to an award. They are nominated by schools, agreed by the Dean of Faculty, and appointed by Senate, although in practice approval is delegated to the Director of Quality Assurance. In order to ensure external examiners' independence, the University's 'Guidance to Academic Schools on the Appointment of External Examiners for Taught Courses', sets out a number of criteria for the appointment of external examiners, including that appointments are normally for a maximum of three years, and that an external examiner should not have served as an external examiner at the University in the previous six years or have served more than one previous term. However, these rules may be relaxed, with the agreement of the Director of Academic Services and subject to the ratification of Senate, in exceptional circumstances such as when an external examiner unexpectedly becomes unavailable and a replacement is needed urgently, or in subject areas where there are very limited numbers of potential external examiners.

46 Following a recent wide-ranging review of issues relating to external examiners prepared by the Director of Quality Assurance and considered by the University Learning and Teaching Committee's Standards Working Group, this Committee is awaiting proposals for change in a number of areas of practice and regulation. These proposals include: clarification of the criteria for the commitments of examiners outside Keele; provision of a handbook for external examiners; the right to withdraw appointment; a compulsory half-day induction at school level for new external examiners; provision to staff-student liaison committees of action plans and aspects of good practice arising from external examiner reports, as well as the reports themselves; a more responsive system for informing external examiners about actions resulting from their reports; and the introduction of a Keele Code of Practice on external examining. Other issues which will be considered include a review of the external examiner report form and a review of the role of

external examiners for collaborative provision. The duties of external examiners are described in the regulations, but the review noted that there are variations in how external examiners are used between schools especially with regard to viva voce examinations and moderation. A questionnaire has recently been sent to schools to determine the range of practice with a view to establishing consistent practice.

47 External examiners submit a report after each examination period on a standard template. The Vice-Chancellor receives and reads all the reports, and comments on any issues she regards as significant. The audit team saw two examples of reports upon which the Vice-Chancellor had made comment, the subsequent consideration of those comments by the school, and the school responses which were also seen by the Vice-Chancellor.

48 Under arrangements that operated up to 2006-07, external examiner reports were sent from the Vice-Chancellor to the central Quality Assurance Office, which identified matters of general and particular interest, and then distributed the reports to the heads of the appropriate schools. Schools produced a response to the issues which was agreed by the relevant programme committee and school learning and teaching committee. The audit team saw examples of this process, and of the consideration of the reports, and schools' responses, by the University Learning and Teaching Committee.

49 Following the introduction of the new committee structure, the University has revised the process described above. The revised process enhances the responsibilities of the central Quality Assurance Office in highlighting reports which suggest potential problems; and introduces a new role for the Faculty learning and teaching committees in scrutinising schools' responses to the issues raised by external examiners. The University recommends that these committees dedicate most, if not all, of their February meetings to this function. The audit team saw the minutes of all three faculty learning and teaching committees for February 2007, which confirmed that they were performing this function effectively.

50 The Quality Assurance Office also now produces an overview report of external examiners on the University Learning and Teaching Committee's behalf, which identifies both issues and commendations from each external examiner's report, together with schools' responses. The audit team's analysis of the Committee minutes demonstrated that it considered summaries of external examiners' comments, and the schools' responses, rigorously. The annual University Learning and Teaching Committee report to Senate includes a report on actions relating to significant issues raised by external examiners.

51 The Academic Audit Committee recently identified variability among schools in terms of the thoroughness with which actions resulting from comments by external examiners are routinely reported and scrutinised. However, the audit team confirmed that faculty learning and teaching committees' enhanced oversight of schools' responses to external examiner reports now mitigates the risk of significant issues going unnoticed.

52 The University has introduced a process whereby the Director of Academic Services reports annually to external examiners in order to keep them up-to-date with developments that impact on their activities. The audit team was able to examine the 2007-08 report and to confirm that the new process was likely to achieve its objectives.

53 The audit team saw documentary evidence that some staff-student liaison committees had considered external examiner reports. However, none of the students whom the team met at the audit visit had seen any reports, nor were they aware of where they might find them, although student representatives are party to the discussion about external examiner reports at faculty learning and teaching committees. The audit team concluded, therefore, that the University might consider doing more to promote the sharing of external examiner reports with students.

54 All forms of collaborative provision are subject to the same or similar external examiner arrangements and the arrangements are specified in all contracts. This is discussed in more detail in section five of this annex.

55 In addition to the external examiners appointed for each course, the University has created the role of Chief External Examiner in recognition of the need for equity in determining results across a range of dual honours degrees. The role of the Chief External Examiner is, therefore, to ensure consistency in the application of the University's procedures and regulations for awards and progression, and that the regulations and procedures are appropriate and comparable to other UK higher education institutions. The audit team heard that the Chief External Examiner attends all Boards for second and third year undergraduate study and prepares an annual report based on that experience, which is considered by the University Learning and Teaching Committee and the faculty learning and teaching committees. The audit team saw an example of the effectiveness of this role in the recent change to the undergraduate degree classification algorithm, which was recommended in the Chief External Examiner's annual report.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points - standards

56 The University publishes guidance on the FHEQ and key-level descriptors as part of its support for programme and module development. It requires all new module proposals to refer to the Academic Infrastructure.

57 The aims and intended learning outcomes of every module should be placed within a single defined level, using the descriptors from the FHEQ. The University's guidance also requires intended learning outcomes to express what, as a minimum, students should be expected to have learned on satisfactory completion of a given module.

58 The University's Quality Assurance Office receives information on subject benchmark statements, and revisions to those statements, as they appear. These are then discussed at school level. Schools should use existing benchmark statements in the course of programme development and should take any revisions to such statements into account as an element of their monitoring processes.

59 All taught programmes should have a formal programme specification and the University is in the process of making all of its specifications available on the web. The audit team found considerable variation in the programme specifications which were already available at the time of the audit, both in respect of the format and the extent to which they made explicit reference to benchmark statements and intended learning outcomes. The team learned, however, that the University was intending to enhance its use of programme specifications both by developing enhanced module specifications and by specifying its approach to the use and design of programme specifications in the redraft of the Academic Quality and Standards Manual.

60 Based on its analysis of the evidence which the University presented as part of the sampling trails, the audit team confirmed that schools' use of the Academic Infrastructure to inform the management of academic standards was generally appropriate. The same evidence also allowed the team to confirm that the Internal Quality Audit process allowed the University to scrutinise schools' use of the Academic Infrastructure effectively. The team noted two examples where Internal Quality Audit panels had raised concerns about the use of external reference points, the first concerning the failure of a school handbook to make direct reference to either benchmarking criteria or learning outcomes, and the second regarding the need to diversify assessment in order to reflect subject benchmarks and the FHEQ in respect of the development of oral communication and group working skills. However, in both cases the effective working of the audit process had led the schools to take remedial action.

61 The programme approval process requires external involvement. Faculty deans, who take lead responsibility for championing a proposed new programme, may seek external advice at the outline stage. Once initial stages have been completed, the Academic Services Directorate will seek relevant external consultation on the programme.

62 The Internal Quality Audit requires the appointment of a panel of three internal auditors and at least one external adviser. The evidence studied by the audit team confirmed that external involvement was an integral part both of programme approval and quality audit.

63 The University has a number of programmes accredited by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. Validation events for these programmes include members of the relevant regulatory bodies and are, wherever possible, harmonised with internal quality assurance activities. School learning and teaching committees, faculty learning and teaching committees and the University Learning and Teaching Committee consider, and comment upon, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies' reports as appropriate. The Academic Audit Committee is responsible for scrutinising the effectiveness of school and faculty responses to these reports.

Assessment policies and regulations

64 The University's regulatory framework for assessment at all levels is established in University and course regulations. The Senate is responsible for the approval of all innovation and change in regulation at institutional level. Course regulations are subject to approval by faculty learning and teaching committees and report to the University Learning and Teaching Committee.

65 Assessment regulations are provided on the University's website with related guidance. Schools publish course regulations, for example attendance requirements, and the audit team saw examples of student handbooks containing this information. The University has adopted a single source of reference for the definitive record of its regulations and planning for the publication of course regulations in a single place on the University website is underway.

66 The University's pedagogical approach to student assessment is described in its Learning and Teaching Strategy, Goal 6: developing best practice in assessment. The University Learning and Teaching Committee has recently approved an assessment strategy based on this goal, which concentrates on areas currently requiring enhancement, such as the systematic use of formative assessment, the explication and development of marking criteria, the increased provision of assessment feedback, the need to ensure that assessment aims and outcomes reflect the aims for transferable skills embedded in modules, and the assessment of employability skills. It was evident to the audit team that these areas had emerged primarily from internal review processes; the Internal Quality Audit reports that the team saw contained examples of assessment issues related to these areas. The University Learning and Teaching Committee's Working Group on Standards has also informed the development of the strategy, for example, recently noting that there is currently no systematic approach to mark moderation in modules, and that a process should be developed. Information and guidance for staff on assessment is provided in annexes to the strategy. The University has published the finalised strategy on the internet. Faculty learning and teaching committees have received the new strategy, although at the time of the audit the intended recommendations to faculties for implementation had not been fully distributed.

67 Prior to the development of the University assessment strategy, schools established their own statements on assessment practice, and the audit team saw examples of these statements within the learning and teaching strategies or plans of individual schools. The team agreed that schools will now need to review their assessment practice in the light of the University's new assessment strategy.

68 The audit team noted that some students regard feedback on assessment as unsatisfactory and tardy. The University has recognised this as a matter for attention; one of the annexes to the new assessment strategy is a Code of Practice for giving feedback to students.

69 Good practice in assessment is identified through the internal quality audit process, and the audit team saw evidence in the sampling trails of good practice being reported, including the early use of formative assessment and the effective use of student self-assessment and self-evaluation. However, the team found that the University lacked a systematic approach to the dissemination of this good practice. This is discussed further in Section 4.

70 The audit team noted that the University is constantly reviewing its assessment regulations. For example, the University's regulations require that all in-course assessment that contributes 25 per cent or more to the assessment of any module that counts towards the end

award must be marked anonymously, although exemption may be granted. With the developing use of the virtual learning environment and online submission of coursework, the continuing practice of anonymous marking for coursework has recently been discussed by the University Learning and Teaching Committee, and referred to its Standards subgroup. Another example is the monitoring and review of plagiarism. An extensive framework of regulation, support and guidance in the area of academic misconduct, especially plagiarism, has been developed in recent years. A review of plagiarism and collusion was undertaken in 2004-05, which resulted in new regulations and the creation of a network of academic conduct officers, who administer the devolved aspects of policy and practice linked to the regulations. The use of these regulations is monitored through an annual report to the University Learning and Teaching Committee, which relies strongly on feedback from academic conduct officers. The reports note good practice and recommend amendments to the regulations.

71 The University makes considerable use of proprietary software as a means of deterring plagiarism. The use of this system increased significantly between 2005-06 and 2006-07 and the University expects it to double again during 2007-08. At the time of the audit, a follow-up review of plagiarism detection was about to be launched. The Learning Development Unit supports the academic conduct officers through regular meetings and by providing information in the virtual learning environment.

72 Where students have been absent from examinations, or require extensions to coursework submission dates, their extenuating circumstances are considered by a subcommittee of the University Learning and Teaching Committee, which makes decisions based upon evidence submitted by schools on behalf of the students. The audit team saw examples of the outcomes of the deliberations of this subcommittee, which reports annually to the Senate.

73 A student may appeal against the decision of a board of examiners and there is a well-documented procedure for the submission of an appeal. An appeal is submitted on the student's behalf by the designated member of staff in the school, and considered by the University Examination Appeals Committee. However, the University Learning and Teaching Committee has very recently noted that the appeals process is applied differently between schools, and has made recommendations to Senate for changes to the appeals process in order to achieve greater consistency in its application. The changes will be reviewed after a year.

Management information - statistics

74 The University introduced a student course information management system in 2006-07, which includes data on student progression, achievement and retention. The University Learning and Teaching Committee received the first trial dataset from the student course information management system, based on students' performance in the 2005-06 academic year, in May 2007, and the second in May 2008, based on results from 2006-07.

75 The data suggest that the University faces challenges in the retention of undergraduate students, particularly at the end of the first year. The University has responded through developments in personal tutoring and the creation of new web pages dedicated to providing students with further information and support, known as Welcome Webs, which it hopes will help to improve progression. The data also reveals significant variation between schools in retention rates. The University Learning and Teaching Committee has resolved to tackle this issue by sending the data to course directors and faculty learning and teaching committees with guidance on how they might respond.

76 The introduction of the student course information management system is an ongoing process and the University recognises that the new system requires further development and support, including support for staff who are responsible for working with the system, to fulfil its potential. In addition, the University has yet to establish responsibilities and standard procedures for the production and consideration of the data, although it hopes to do so in the current

academic year. The audit team saw further evidence of the need to improve the use of management information in the most recent Internal Quality Audit report for the School of Humanities, which identified the need to '...obtain and use more effectively appropriate management information, in particular relating to student progression and achievement'. Moreover, the team noted that some schools continue to use alternative information management systems. The team therefore encourages the University to expedite the ongoing development of its management information system, so that it makes use of more accurate and consistent data to inform quality assurance.

77 The development of the student course information management system is being taken forward by the University Learning and Teaching Committee's Standards Working Group. The Group is seeking to establish the data sets that will be most useful to schools, as well as those at institutional level or national level. Another requirement is the data set required for the new CARD process. The links between data and other processes are also being recognised: for example, the Director of Academic Services has noted that the data requirements of systems such as the virtual learning environment and the timetabling software require module data to be finalised by faculty learning and teaching committees by April prior to the start of the academic year. A student course information management system and e-Vision steering group has also been established with a remit to discuss and agree on the business priorities for the roll-out of this information management system and e-Vision to staff and students. Although there is a clear intent by the University to develop reliable and accurate management information, and there is demonstrable progress towards this end, the audit team concluded that the respective roles of the various groups involved were unclear and might, therefore, lead to confusion. The University may wish to consider clarifying these roles for the benefit of staff and students.

78 Other relevant management information that the University gathers systematically include data on plagiarism, which is reported annually to the University Learning and Teaching Committee, and data on staff supervision of postgraduate research students, which were reported for the first time to the Graduate School Board in May 2008. The University's Code of Practice on Collaborative Provision specifies the management information that partners must include in their annual reporting.

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

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points - quality of learning opportunities

80 The University has created a detailed document which describes how it has designed its processes to reflect each section of the *Code of practice*. In some areas, including placement learning, postgraduate research degrees and collaborative provision, the University has developed its own codes to manage those particular areas of its provision. The audit team found that each of these codes responded to the *Code* appropriately. They are each discussed in more detail elsewhere in this Annex.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

81 The University's procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of programmes, and how these procedures support the management of learning opportunities, are covered in Section 2 of this Annex above. The audit team regarded these procedures as robust and effective and identified the internal quality audit as a feature of good practice, partly in view of its value in the management of students' learning opportunities.

Management information - feedback from students

82 The Senate approved a new student feedback policy in June 2007, following a review by a student feedback working group. The new policy aims to provide '...routes for student voices to be effectively integrated into University decision making, planning and priorities'. It operates at module, service provision, and institutional level.

83 The revised Academic Quality and Standards Manual requires all modules to be evaluated each time they run in order to inform course developments and monitor effectiveness. The University does not prescribe the form or content of module evaluation questionnaires. However, the manual offers guidance on the formulation of module questionnaires, including a list of areas on which feedback should be sought as a minimum. The audit team saw several examples of the most recent module evaluations, which showed that schools are working within the guidance set out in the manual.

84 The outcomes of the module questionnaires are considered by the relevant course committee at least once a year, and the course committee reports any recommendations for action to the school's learning and teaching and staff-student liaison committees. The audit team saw an example of a course committee's consideration of the questionnaire outcomes under these new arrangements, but the reporting process had not been completed by the time of the audit.

85 At a service level, the University runs special student surveys to obtain feedback on particular services. A recent example is the student satisfaction survey of the virtual learning environment, considered by the University Learning and Teaching Committee in autumn 2007, which has led the University to approve the introduction of minimum standards for the use of the virtual learning environment by teaching staff across the institution (see paragraph 100).

86 At an institutional level, the University draws on data from the National Student Survey and a bespoke survey which the University commissioned from another university in the UK in response to concerns that the format of the National Student Survey, seeking from students a single response to each question concerning aspects of their academic experience, cannot fully capture the experience of students studying dual honours programmes. The latter is known as the Keele (CRE) survey.

87 Schools are responsible for considering the outcomes of the National Student Survey and reporting any actions which they take in response to the data to faculty learning and teaching committees, which report on this to the University Learning and Teaching Committee. The University expects that schools will take action in respect of any question for which the National Student Survey score is less than 4.

88 The Keele survey was launched for final-year undergraduate students in 2006-07. The University Learning and Teaching Committee considered a comparison of the National Student Survey 2006 and the Keele survey 2007 in April 2007. The comparison revealed very similar trends between the surveys, but the Commission for Racial Equality survey provided more detail in many areas. The University addressed the Keele survey to second-year undergraduates during 2007-08. In the view of the audit team, the University's commitment to gathering and responding to student feedback, and in particular its willingness to invest in a bespoke survey which complements the National Student Survey and provides more sophisticated data on student satisfaction, particularly in respect of its distinctive dual honours programmes, constitutes a feature of good practice.

89 In July 2007, the University commissioned a review of student complaints procedures from its internal auditors. As a result, the Assurance and Academic Audit Manager made a number of proposals to manage risk and strengthen control in relation to the University student complaints procedure in a paper to the Academic Audit Committee in January 2008. The proposals promote better tracking and recording of complaints, and the inclusion of major issues from staff-student liaison committees and action taken within the school annual report template. The Audit Office

will not respond to complaints but will manage and monitor the process to ensure compliance with the procedure and ensure provision of a clear audit trail to evidence and track timely and appropriate action.

Role of students in quality assurance

90 The University's revised Academic Quality and Standards Manual states that the University '...seeks to encourage the role of students as partners in the process of enhancement of quality and maintenance of standards by seeking their views on how best to achieve the University's mission and strategic goals'. The manual describes in detail the ways in which students are involved in each of the University's quality assurance and enhancement processes.

91 At institutional level, students are represented by sabbatical officers on the Senate and Council, and on the major Senate committees, including the University Learning and Teaching Committee. Student sabbatical officers are also represented on this Committee's working groups and on ad hoc project groups as appropriate.

92 In addition, the University has a students' liaison committee, which meets at least three times a year. The committee is chaired by a pro vice-chancellor and its membership includes the deans of faculty, the service directors, and the student sabbatical officers. As one of the University's executive liaison committees, the role of the Students' Liaison Committee is to focus on an area of activity, in this case student liaison, across the spectrum of the University as a whole, including academic and non-academic matters. The committee has the right to put forward recommendations and proposals to any appropriate University committee for consideration, or to take forward any actions which fall within its remit. During 2006-07, the committee discussed issues including student behaviour on-campus, timetabling of teaching sessions during dedicated recreational periods, and refurbishment plans for the Students' Union buildings. The committee reports annually to the Senate.

93 Each school has a staff-student liaison committee and each of the programmes within the School is represented on the liaison committee by a student academic representative. There is a University Code of Practice for the constitution and conduct of these committees, which was developed by the University's 'student link' in the Quality Assurance Office in partnership with the Students' Union and the Postgraduate Association. The key responsibilities of the committees are to: discuss matters raised by students and matters on which the school wishes to seek students' views; consider the outcomes of student evaluation questionnaires and the school's response; advise the school on proposals for new programmes and changes to existing programmes; and to report the views of students to the school learning and teaching committee. The liaison committees may be chaired by a student academic representative and the audit team saw one example of this.

94 The audit team saw a set of minutes for a complete cycle of one staff-student liaison committee, which demonstrated that student academic representatives were able to raise issues and that the school responded appropriately. This evidence also showed that the committee had considered module evaluation feedback, but not external examiner reports. Other evidence from the Internal Quality Audit process suggested that some students regard the liaison committees as unimportant and ineffective, and that some committees meet infrequently. The University may therefore wish to consider how it might achieve a more consistent level of operation and performance among all its staff-student liaison committees, perhaps through the dissemination of good practice.

95 Students are also represented on faculty learning and teaching committees by student academic representatives who are active at programme level. The Briefing Paper stated that the Students' Union trains these representatives for these roles. However, the students whom the audit team met, including some student academic representatives, were not aware of any opportunities for training. This may be an area which requires further attention.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

96 The University's strategic commitment to linking research and teaching is described by its Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2007-10. This commitment is manifest in a number of actions, including a review of all school strategies and programmes to identify additional opportunities for research-informed teaching, an annual joint review by the University Learning and Teaching Committee and research committees of their respective strategies to assess their impact on research-informed teaching, and the identification of research-informed teaching as one of the quality assurance criteria for taught programmes. In addition, the University has used monies from its Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund allocation to develop research-informed teaching during 2007-08 and 2008-09, principally through academic staff development activities.

97 In order to determine the impact of the University's commitment to linking research and teaching, the audit team scrutinised a range of module and programme documentation as well as material used in academic staff development, and discussed the issue with staff and students. Evidence of the academic content of programmes demonstrated that teaching was informed by the research interests and activities of teaching staff. However, the team's analysis of the recent Learning and Teaching Workshop Series sessions arranged by the Learning Development Unit, the Teaching Innovation Projects funded to support the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy and the University's Teaching Innovation Day, did not reveal any particular focus on research-led teaching.

Other modes of study

98 The University has recently created a virtual learning environment to replace a web server dedicated to hosting learning resources. Every module now has dedicated space on the virtual learning environment for the use of staff and students. The Learning Development Unit provides training for staff in the use of the virtual learning environment.

99 The student written submission confirmed the usefulness of the virtual learning environment in supporting students in their learning, but expressed some dissatisfaction with the level of use by teaching staff. Students whom the audit team met confirmed that use of the virtual learning environment was variable: they said that some teaching staff employed the virtual learning environment in ways that were imaginative and interesting, but others seldom used it.

100 The University is aware of this issue. It undertook a survey of the student experience of the virtual learning environment in 2007, which concluded that this tool should be used more consistently across modules and that students should be better informed how the tool was being used to support their learning, in order to manage their expectations. The University Learning and Teaching Committee received the findings of the survey in September 2007 and agreed to keep the matter under review. Faculty learning and teaching committees also received the report and the audit team noted evidence of engagement with the relevant issues: the Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee for Humanities and Social Sciences agreed to establish a minimum standard for usage across the Faculty and asked schools' directors of learning and teaching to provide outlines of usage for their respective schools. At the audit visit, the audit team learned that the University had recently approved a similar approach across all faculties.

101 The University operates an extensive Study Abroad student exchange programme whereby up to 150 students per year spend a semester at a number of partner universities in Europe, Australia, Japan, Hong Kong, South Africa and North America. Partners are normally identified through individual staff contacts, but formal exchange agreements outlining the respective responsibilities of both parties are agreed for all links prior to the exchange of students. Formal or regular visits to partners or potential partners do not appear to take place in all instances, but unsatisfactory links may be terminated, for example as a result of evaluation of the student experience based on the feedback students are expected to provide at the end of their exchange.

102 The Study Abroad programme is managed by the University's Centre for International Exchange and Languages working within the University's Code of Practice on Placement

Learning. This document is consistent with the relevant section of the *Code of practice* and it includes a useful checklist to ensure that, in arranging and managing all types of placement, schools have fully considered quality assurance issues.

103 The Centre for International Exchange and Languages operates a comprehensive selection and preparation programme for students wishing to take part in the exchange, and normally, as a condition of acceptance, students are expected to complete a module on Intercultural Communication for Study Abroad as an integral part of the first-year Complementary Studies programme. The audit team regarded this programme as well planned with clear learning objectives focusing on issues of intercultural awareness as well as more practical matters such as gathering information about chosen destinations.

104 In addition, the Centre for International Exchange and Languages operates a series of student meetings enabling students planning to undertake study abroad to meet students who have experienced the programme. Students are also required, as an integral part of Intercultural Communication for Study Abroad module, to use a web-based resource, 'Tick Off to Take Off' which guides them through the necessary checks, for example regarding communication with the partner University, their local authority, and passport and visa agencies, that must be completed before departure.

105 Students are directed by the Centre for International Exchange and Languages to designated tutors in an appropriate school in order to decide upon their programme of study in the partner University. Students complete a Learning Agreement before leaving the UK. Normally they are expected to pursue studies broadly in line with what they might have studied at Keele, although there is some opportunity to pursue additional academic interests.

106 The Centre for International Exchange and Languages refers students with disabilities or special needs to the Centre for Learning and Student Support, which ensures that such students are not disadvantaged during their period abroad.

107 Returning students are responsible for bringing back evidence of their learning, which normally include transcripts as well as a portfolio of work. The Centre for International Exchange and Languages is responsible for sending this material to the appropriate school, which makes an assessment of the equivalence of the marks awarded by the partner. External examiners are able, if they wish, to examine the material provided. The marks gained abroad are clearly indicated on the mark sheets seen by boards of examiners. In rare cases where performance while abroad is unsatisfactory, the audit team learned that re-assessment is normally conducted at the University in order that a student's normal progression is not interrupted.

108 The audit team noted the professionalism and effectiveness with which the Centre for International Exchange and Languages manages the Study Abroad programme. Preparation of students for study abroad is thorough and the module on Intercultural Communication for Study Abroad is a particularly valuable initiative. Information both on the web and in hard copy, covering both academic and more general requirements, is readily available, and the use of student-to-student advice is commendable. The programme as a whole, and the work of the Centre in particular, are manifestly appreciated by students. The team, therefore, identified the work of the Centre for International Exchange and Languages in managing students' opportunities for study abroad as a feature of good practice.

Resources for learning

109 Responsibility for the maintenance and development of learning resources is shared between two directorates: Academic Services for the University Library; and Finance and Information Technology for IT Services, which has responsibility, among other things, for the virtual learning environment.

110 The Library has recently undergone a major refurbishment, which has created flexible learning and research space, study rooms and bookable carrels for research students, and wireless access to the internet.

111 The University has invested significantly in recent years in online materials and has created a new post to coordinate the delivery of digitised materials. It has also created a new Health Library in the Clinical Education Centre at the hospital site, which contains a variety of study environments and an information technology suite. It is accredited by the NHS as a Helicon Level 3 library, demonstrating '...significant evidence of excellence and innovation'.

112 The student written submission confirmed that all these developments were welcomed by students, and students who met the audit team further confirmed both that the increased availability of digitised materials and the new health library supported their learning effectively.

113 However, the matter of library opening hours on-campus remains an issue for some students. The student written submission suggested that opening hours should be extended during examination periods, and students whom the audit team met suggested that opening hours were too limited and not sufficiently flexible, for example, to take account of the needs of part-time postgraduate students during vacation periods. Students reported that they understood the matter of opening hours had been raised with the institution, but that no changes had ensued.

114 Students also highlighted what they saw as the need both for a greater availability of multiple copies of core texts and for a better communication between members of the teaching staff and library staff, so as to assure that the stock reflected more closely the reading lists prepared by module teams.

115 The audit team explored the availability of core texts in meetings with relevant staff at the audit visit and through the documentation provided. Based on its scrutiny of University Learning and Teaching Committee meetings, the team learned that the University had become aware of the issue of book provision, in part as a result of the findings of the National Student Survey, and, during discussion of those findings, that the University Learning and Teaching Committee had been specifically informed that additional funding would be necessary to increase book stock. The Briefing Paper itself confirmed that current spending on books was still below the sector average per full-time equivalent student.

116 The audit team noted the University's aspiration, expressed in the Briefing Paper, to move closer towards the sector average for spending on books. The team was assured during the visit that investment in written texts had increased at a rate above inflation over the last three years and, moreover, that an agreed list of priorities for future investment in library services had been identified.

117 The audit team also explored the communication between teaching and library staff. It learned that there were good links between faculty learning and teaching committees and the library, facilitated by faculty liaison librarians, who also attended school learning and teaching committee meetings. The team was further informed that faculty liaison librarians are proactive in obtaining multiple copies of core texts and in monitoring the availability of new editions, and that there are a number of mechanisms, such as the staff-student liaison committee structure and module evaluation questionnaires, through which any difficulties with book provision should become apparent.

118 However, the audit team noted that it had been suggested elsewhere that the work of library staff in respect of managing the book supply was hindered by a lack of clarity in some reading lists submitted to the library, and the team remained unclear as to the exact nature of communication between module teams and the library. The team noted in a recent discussion at the University Learning and Teaching Committee on the new electronic module proposal form the suggestion that, 'there is a need for a mechanism to ensure that reading lists are sent

to the library'. The team would, therefore, encourage the University to give further consideration to this matter with a view to ensuring some level of systematic, routine communication between module teams and the library, whether through the new module proposal form or another method.

119 Information Technology Services provide support for the virtual learning environment and for PC open-access areas in the library and across the campus. Information technology services also support the HallsNet campus network service available in every student bedroom on-campus and the wireless network, which is available in a variety of social spaces on the campus, giving access to internet resources. An information technology service desk, located in the library building, is available for students and staff on weekdays. Students appeared satisfied with the information technology provision, although there was some suggestion that there should be greater provision for general information technology training.

120 Library provision and information technology services have been part of the University's surveys of the student experience and the library also obtains feedback from its users on a continuous basis by means of online comments and a suggestion board. Students whom the audit team met commended the responsiveness of library staff in regard to specific problems raised through these avenues.

Admissions policy

121 The University operates an overarching policy for the admission of undergraduate and postgraduate taught students, overseen by the Academic Registry, which aims to ensure that applicants are well suited to benefit from the academic programmes on offer.

122 In the Faculties of Natural Sciences and Humanities and Social Sciences, the Academic Registry consults schools on their entry standards, and then applies these criteria to individual applications. School-based admissions tutors may advise on specific cases. In the Faculty of Health and other professional provision, schools are responsible for admissions decisions and selection occurs through interviews with applicants. Interviewers are trained to apply the admissions policy and rejections are independently scrutinised to check that interviews have been conducted fairly.

123 Applications to postgraduate taught programmes are administered by the Academic Registry, with admissions decisions being made by individual schools. Applications from overseas students may be dealt with by senior staff, including during overseas visits, according to the guidance provided by schools.

124 The University publishes details of its undergraduate admissions processes in its prospectus and on the University website. The website includes dedicated pages for school teachers and higher education advisers. Additional supporting or explanatory information is provided by the Academic Registry. Information for postgraduate taught courses is also provided in a prospectus and on the web. Information regarding arrangements for students with a disability is provided through the Centre for Learning and Student Support and the University's policies on gender and disability are available on the web.

125 The University experienced a small decrease in undergraduate recruitment during 2006-07. In response, the Vice-Chancellor's Committee created a new subgroup (the Student Numbers subgroup) to monitor recruitment and admissions more closely and consider a range of measures to address the decrease, including the development of new programmes. Admissions targets for programmes are set by an iterative process involving the schools, the finance team and senior management.

126 The University is currently reviewing its internationalisation strategy with a view to increasing the numbers of overseas students, alongside growth in several taught postgraduate programmes, work-related learning and short courses.

127 Widening participation is a priority in the University's current Strategic Plan and is a stated goal of its Learning and Teaching Strategy. The primary focus of the University's activities in this area is the region surrounding it, which is characterised by very low levels of participation in higher education among young people. In order to raise aspirations and participation rates, the University is engaged in a number of outreach activities in local schools and colleges (such as the KeeleLink Scheme), and it has developed a series of resources to promote and provide further information about higher education to under-represented groups and other stakeholders (such as parents and schools). Some of these resources have received national recognition, such as the Upload CD aimed at applicants from further education colleges, which received the Fresh Digital Award in November 2007 under the category of Freshest Public Sector Service.

128 The University also pays close attention to the needs of students from under-represented groups as they arrive at the University. This is manifest in the second goal of its Learning and Teaching Strategy, which is concerned with supporting students during the transition to higher education in the context of a more diverse student body. In furtherance of this goal, the University has developed new Welcome Webs for the 2008-09 cohort, which the students whom the audit team met welcomed.

129 The University has developed targets for the recruitment of students from under-represented groups and monitors performance by reference to sector benchmarks using statistical data prepared on an annual basis by the Planning and Secretariat Directorate. The data are monitored by the Widening Participation Working Group and the widening participation team, and the University Learning and Teaching Committee prepares an annual report on widening participation for Senate.

Student support

130 The University has developed a new strategy for undergraduate student support in the period 2008-11, which is due to be approved by Senate and Council by the end of the 2007-08 academic year. The new strategy includes eight development goals, including the implementation of personal tutoring for undergraduates and enhanced support for international students and students who live away from campus, some of which the University has already begun work on. The audit team noted that the University's work in this area was clearly informed by evaluations of the University's existing support services.

131 The second goal of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy is to support students' transition to higher education. Within this context, it has been developing its approach to student induction, putting a particular emphasis on the needs of students from under-represented groups through the introduction of Welcome Webs for the 2008-09 cohort and a dedicated page on a social networking website.

132 Induction to the University varies according to programme, level of study and student domicile. The University provides a week-long series of induction events for undergraduates and an induction day for postgraduates. The induction of overseas students is mainly organised by the Academic Registry and the International Student Support Officer, with the support of the Students' Union and the Postgraduate Association. The audit team's discussions with students suggested some variability in students' experience of these processes. Whereas some were satisfied, others suggested that the University should provide more opportunities for undergraduate students to engage with their schools during induction, and enhance its support for the induction of overseas students, particularly given the University's aspiration to raise overseas student numbers. In addition, the students highlighted a lack of induction support for students admitted to the University part-way through the academic year. This contributed to the team's recommendation on the induction of staff and students, which is set out under 'Staff support' below.

133 The University's primary vehicle for the academic support of undergraduate students is the revised personal tutor system, which was introduced for all first-year undergraduate students in

2007-08. The system will be rolled out to all undergraduate students incrementally in the next few years.

134 Personal tutors' responsibilities are set out in the University's 'Guidelines and Code of Practice for Personal Tutoring', which is contained within the revised Academic Quality and Standards Manual. The Code provides for the appointment of senior tutors to act as an additional source of advice and guidance both for students and a group of personal tutors as the system is rolled out. The success of the senior tutor role will be evaluated in due course. The allocation of personal tutors to students is organised by schools and faculties. Allocations may not necessarily reflect students' primary programme of study, which some of the students whom the audit team met regarded as problematic. All academic staff have been allocated personal tutees except those on study leave. Early-career staff and some specific postholders have a reduced load.

135 To support the implementation of the revised personal tutor system, the University has adopted a new electronic record-keeping system known as 'E-vision'. 'E-vision' enables personal tutors to record their discussions with students and any subsequent actions. It also allows senior tutors and heads of schools to monitor the progress of groups of students and personal tutors for whom they have responsibility. The audit team learned that the new system had already produced a number of benefits: students and staff reported that meetings are now based on more accurate and up-to-date information, helping tutors to identify any potential problems much more quickly than they had been able hitherto; and the system also provides an improved overview of the student's experiences which assists tutors in giving pastoral advice or providing references. The team, therefore, identified the use of 'E-vision' as a feature of good practice.

136 At the time of the audit, the revised personal tutoring system did not extend to postgraduate taught students, with the exception of some schools such as the School of Law. However, the University had recognised that support for some postgraduates, in particular overseas students and others with no prior experience of the University's interdisciplinary academic structures, was inadequate and had begun a review led by the Pro Vice-Chancellor for staff and students. The students whom the audit team met suggested that the University should consider extending the personal tutoring system to postgraduate taught students. Within this context, and in light of the emerging benefits of the revised undergraduate system and the use of 'E-vision', the team concluded that it would be desirable for the University to extend personal tutoring to all postgraduate taught students.

137 The University provides pastoral support for students through a number of services, many of which are coordinated by the Centre for Learning and Student Support. Resident tutors in the halls of residence often provide the first port of call for students experiencing difficulties. Serious cases may be referred on to residential managers. Prior to the structural changes precipitated by Keele2006, training for resident tutors was provided by staff from the Centre for Learning and Student Support. Under the new structure responsibility for training now rests with the Commercial and Facilities Management Directorate. The audit team encourages the University to monitor the impact of these changes with a view to ensuring that the level of support provided by the resident tutors and residential managers is maintained.

138 The University has recognised the need to provide an equivalent level of pastoral support for students who do not live in halls of residence. It provides bespoke sessions for these students and information on accessing University support services. Furthermore, it plans to develop a virtual hall for students who live off-campus, based on the model of electronic social networking.

139 The University has recently established a student development working group of the University Learning and Teaching Committee with a remit to consider aspects of the student experience, both within and outside of the curricula, which contribute to the students' overall development, such as employability, personal development planning, the Complementary Studies Programme, and volunteering. The University is putting a particular emphasis on graduate employability: it has developed an Employability Charter, aims to embed employability skills in

new modules from 2008 onwards and to provide enhanced opportunities for placement and work experience, and ultimately to create a Keele Skills Certificate of Employability. The students whom the audit team met welcomed these developments and some spoke very positively about the University's existing work in this area, in particular with regard to the careers advice available in the Faculty of Health. However, other students suggested that the University should consult more with them about their needs in this area.

140 The University has introduced personal development planning during 2007-08 through the use of E-portfolios, which are available through the virtual learning environment. Students may access support for the development of their portfolios from personal tutors, staff from the Centre for Learning and Student Support and staff from Information Services. There is also a dedicated section of the Centre's website providing information on the use of personal development planning programmes. Where disciplines already have a professional portfolio they will continue to operate their existing system. The University recognises that it has much to do to embed personal development planning in the student experience and it is planning to evaluate progress during 2009. It was evident to the audit team that the University recognises the importance of providing training and support for staff working with students on their personal development planning programmes and intends to put in place a programme of staff development. It was, however, too soon for the team to evaluate the effectiveness of the associated systems.

Staff support (including staff development)

141 'Supporting staff in their professional activities' is the eighth goal of the University's learning and teaching strategy. In pursuance of this goal, the University has adopted a staff development policy, which is articulated in a framework document 'Arrangements for Staff Development Provision'. Staff development policies are embedded in schools through schools' learning and teaching strategies and the audit team was able to see examples of these strategies for the period 2007-10.

142 New members of academic staff are expected to follow the Teaching and Learning in Higher Education Programme, which attracts master's-level credits and is consonant with the UK National Standards for Teaching (and which may be extended into a full master's award); and the Keele Knowledge Programme, provided by the Centre for Professional Staff Development, which provides detailed information about the University. New academic staff are also allocated to a mentor who is not their line manager. However, in discussions with staff the audit team noted some confusion about who is responsible for organising and supervising the induction of new staff. Arrangements for the induction of academic staff who join the University part-way through the academic year appeared to be particularly ambiguous. The team, therefore, concluded that it is desirable for the University to review its procedures for the induction, training and support of staff and students who join the University at times other than the start of the academic year.

143 The development needs of individual staff are identified primarily through annual appraisals and peer reviews of teaching. Heads of schools review all appraisals so that they can identify overarching themes. All staff are expected to engage in on-going development activities for a minimum of three days a year. The various training providers, which include the Learning Development Unit and the Centre for Professional Staff Development, advertise training opportunities on the University intranet. Where necessary, for example as part of the introduction of an innovation, the University provides dedicated training. The Centre for Professional Staff Development also offers the AWAKE programme (A Programme for Women at Keele) to support the career development of women. During the audit it was clear that members of staff, to whom the audit team spoke, were aware of the full range of development opportunities available and had attended sessions.

144 The University provides promotion routes through to professorial level for staff on the basis of research; or a mixed portfolio of research, teaching and academic leadership; or nationally acknowledged academic achievement in a professional discipline. Staff whom the team met indicated that in some schools the process was well supported with workshops being provided to assist staff preparing for promotion. The Human Resources website is a useful resource although the audit team found some information difficult to locate. For example, the information on promotion criteria for professorial posts had been removed from the website following the completion of the current round of promotions. It may be more helpful to staff if the criteria and process for promotion remained available throughout the year and only the detailed dates and procedure for the current year are removed.

145 The audit team concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Institutional framework for managing quality enhancement

146 Quality enhancement is an integral part of the University's approach to quality management and enhancement, described in Section 1 of this Annex, and the University therefore aims to use many of the processes and procedures which provide assurance about the standards and quality of its provision, such as programme approval, periodic review and external examining, as vehicles for the enhancement of student learning as well.

147 The strategic framework for the University's work in this area is provided by the ninth goal of its Learning and Teaching Strategy, 'Supporting innovation in learning and teaching', which aims to improve the student learning experience by the promotion and embedding of innovative practice and the expansion of the range of resources and incentives supporting staff and students in creating a high quality learning and teaching environment. The primary responsibility for pursuing these objectives rests with teaching staff, reflecting the University's broader philosophy for the allocation of responsibilities for quality management and enhancement. The University provides support for this activity through the work of the Office for Learning and Teaching, which acts as a coordinating structure for individuals and groups engaged in the development of learning and teaching, and the Learning Development Unit (a sub-unit of the Office for Learning and Teaching), which is charged with disseminating good practice and encouraging innovation. The latter is particularly important in this area. Created on a temporary basis in 2006, it is engaged in a range of activities including providing support for learning environments (including teaching spaces, the virtual learning environment and an electronic resources repository), organising and delivering staff development and funding action research into teaching. The audit team noted that the University had recently evaluated the Unit, leading to its permanent establishment.

148 The work of the central team in the Office for Learning and Teaching including the Learning Development Unit is augmented by other individuals and teams in the faculties, such as the Faculty and School Directors of Learning and Teaching. The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences has a learning development team comprising two learning and teaching development officers, who provide support for staff in the development of their teaching and pedagogic practice and two learning support officers charged with facilitating learning for students who are regarded as being at risk of not progressing or achieving their intended awards. This team, managed by the Associate Dean for Learning and Teaching, with an indirect reporting line to the Head of the Learning Development Unit, currently operates as a pilot project to see whether the model could be extended to the other faculties.

149 The University is working on introducing innovations on many fronts which it expects will enhance the student experience, including a new assessment strategy, a new method for annual review and a new international strategy. These projects are being pulled together by the Planning and Secretariat Directorate under the Academic and Curriculum Enhancement project. The University keeps staff and students informed of these initiatives through dedicated web pages.

Management Information - quality enhancement

150 The University generates information about the existence and impact of innovation in teaching and learning from many of its quality assurance processes and procedures. Notable examples include the external examiner system, wherein commendations and examples of good practice recorded by external examiners are reported to the University Learning and Teaching Committee; and the Internal Quality Audit, which directs audit teams to investigate and report on areas of good practice within schools. In addition, the University's scheme for the peer review of teaching may capture information about innovative teaching practice, which is reported to the head of the relevant school.

Good practice

151 According to the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy, in order to achieve its goal of innovation in teaching and learning, it needs to '...provide the means by which innovation is effectively disseminated across the University and embedded into learning and teaching practice.' The Learning Development Unit is charged with developing the University's web resources and supporting and promoting various opportunities, including events and resources, to achieve dissemination. In order to determine the effectiveness of this activity, the audit team scrutinised evidence relating to a number of processes, including the Internal Quality Audit and peer review of teaching. It found that, while all of these processes identified good practice effectively, this good practice was often either lost as these processes were reported upwards through the University, or published on the University website with apparently little effort made to highlight it. As a result, much of the good practice, which was so abundant at school level, had apparently not been disseminated to other areas.

Staff development and reward

152 The University offers teaching excellence awards. Students are able to nominate individual teaching staff or teams for these awards according to a process described on the Learning Development Unit website. Three awards were available in the 2007-08 academic year. The awards are presented at a degree awards ceremony along with £2,000 to the relevant school. The staff whom the audit team met were generally enthusiastic about these awards. However, they were not sure how an award could be used to benefit further the work of award holders, and the team could not identify mechanisms for harnessing the good practice developed by award holders for the benefit of the wider University community.

153 The University's commitment to quality enhancement and innovation is evident in a number of activities, many of which are now coming to fruition in terms of proposals to revise or renew a number of procedures and processes. In the view of the audit team, however, these activities and proposals appeared to constitute a series of separate innovation projects rather than a coordinated approach to quality enhancement. The team felt that the University's approach to the dissemination of good practice, in particular, would benefit from further attention. The team, therefore, concluded that it would be desirable for the University to review its approach to enhancement and, in doing so, pay particular attention to the development of systematic processes designed to capture, and effectively disseminate, good practice.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

154 At the time of the audit, the University's collaborative provision comprised five programmes provided in partnership with institutions in the UK and two programmes provided in partnership with an institution in South-east Asia. In addition, students studying the master's degree in European Scientific Research Training undertake a placement in an overseas research institute.

155 The University has maintained a strategic embargo on overseas collaboration since 2001. The one exception to this embargo is the link to the institution in South-east Asia, which was subject to a QAA audit in 2004 and an internal review in 2006-07. Following the internal review, the University renewed the link subject to a number of conditions, including strengthened oversight at faculty and university levels, and a new partnership contract was signed on that basis.

156 The University's collaborative provision operates according to the University's Code of Practice on Collaborative Provision, which has recently been amended to reflect revisions to both the relevant section of the Code of practice and the University's Academic Quality and Standards Manual. The University's Code is predicated on the principle that the assurance of the academic standards and quality of programmes offered in partnership should reflect the arrangements for home provision. Thus responsibility for monitoring collaborative provision lies with the relevant school.

157 Within schools, a link tutor is responsible both for day-to-day contacts with collaborative partners, and for ensuring general adherence to quality assurance procedures. The 2004 QAA Overseas Quality Audit identified a risk in relying on a single individual to perform this function. The University responded by appointing a deputy link tutor for this particular collaborative programme, and reassigned some duties. The audit team noted that in the recent review by the University of this link, the notion of a 'Programme Team' was raised. However, the resources required to support such activity continue to be subject to discussion between faculties and the University centre.

158 According to the University's Code, schools are expected to ensure that partners provide an annual report on the link to the Quality Assurance Office, normally in time for it to be considered by the first meeting of the University Learning and Teaching Committee each academic year. Schools are also responsible for commenting on the issues raised in the partner's report and a range of other matters including visits to the partner; matters raised in external examiner reports; the operation of student support and guidance procedures; the monitoring of student feedback; and data relating to progression statistics, mark distribution and where appropriate a comparison of performance between home students and their counterparts at the partner institution. Schools are expected to respond to any problems that these reports identify.

159 The audit team noted some variance in the University's performance against these procedures. In particular, it noted several cases where the reports had been delayed such that they were not considered by the University Learning and Teaching Committee until a year or more after the end of the academic year in question. The team also noted one case where this Committee highlighted a number of omissions in a report and called for clarification in some areas. Within this context, the team encourages the University to monitor schools' performance against the criteria set out in the University's Code for the annual reporting on collaborative links.

160 Arrangements for the external examining of collaborative provision are specified in the contract with partners and are the same or equivalent to those for home provision. Thus the University has a number of different mechanisms for identifying and responding to external examiners' concerns and the audit team saw evidence which confirmed that these were operating effectively.

161 The appointment of external examiners for collaborative provision also follows the procedures for home provision. However, the audit team identified one case where the University may have contravened its own requirements, both with regard to the impartiality of external

examiners and to their appropriate expertise. An individual was appointed as external examiner who had served as an external adviser on the development of the programme immediately prior to their appointment and who had recommended the validation of the new programme to the University. The individual concerned may also have lacked an appropriate degree of subject expertise. The potential risk to standards came to light only as the result of a report from a second external examiner, appointed after the programme had been running for a year and described as a 'subject specialist' in the annual report. While the team was reassured that the risk, once identified, had been swiftly dealt with, it concluded that the University might consider both strengthening its central supervision of quality assurance for collaborative links, to mitigate the risk of a similar event occurring again, and, more generally, reviewing the level of support offered to Schools developing and operating collaborative programmes.

162 The audit team concluded that, while the University's management of its collaborative provision was broadly sound, delays in annual monitoring processes and one example of a possible breach of the University's criteria for appointing external examiners highlighted a need for stronger oversight. The team, therefore, concluded that it would be desirable for the University to strengthen institutional oversight of collaborative provision to ensure consistency in the management of both existing arrangements and developing links. Within this context, the team welcomed the University's proposals for the appointment of an overseas collaborative provision officer in the Quality Assurance Office. The team encourages the University to consider extending this support to current and planned links within the UK.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

Institutional arrangements

163 The University's research degree programmes are governed by a hierarchy of three levels. At the highest level are the University Academic Regulations, followed by the Keele Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees and then individual research institute handbooks. The required contents of the research institute handbooks are prescribed in the Keele Code.

164 The Graduate School has overarching strategic responsibility for all research degree programmes and students, including quality assurance. The head of the School is the Dean, whose responsibilities include the strategic direction of postgraduate research programmes and the progress of students enrolled on them. The Dean also has oversight of quality assurance.

165 The Dean is supported by an office based within the Research and Enterprise Services section of the Academic Services Directorate. The Head of the Graduate School Office has operational responsibility for Graduate School services.

166 The Graduate School Board, which is a committee of Senate and is chaired by the Dean, has the responsibility of promoting and maintaining a high-quality postgraduate research culture. The Board's membership includes representatives from the Graduate School, each of the seven research institutes and postgraduate research students.

167 Working in partnership with the Academic Audit Committee, the University Learning and Teaching Committee and the Research Committee, the Graduate School Board is also responsible for setting, monitoring and enhancing standards of postgraduate research education.

168 Research institutes are responsible for research degree programmes and for monitoring and supporting students' progress. Each research institute has a postgraduate committee, chaired by a director of postgraduate research, through which it exercises responsibility for research degree programmes and students.

169 A research degrees committee reports to the Graduate School Board and, for the award of degrees, direct to Senate. It makes recommendations on the entry requirements of students admitted to postgraduate research degrees, and is operationally responsible for issues relating to the supervision, progress and examination of research students. Each school has a postgraduate committee and one member of each, on the nomination of the head of school, sits on the Research Degrees Committee, which is chaired by a member of the University's Learning and Teaching Committee.

Research environment

170 The University stated in its Briefing Paper that one of the main reasons for its recent extensive academic and administrative reorganisation was to develop an appropriate strategic environment for the conduct of all research, whether by academic staff or research students and, in particular to deal with problems arising from low critical mass in the academic departments that preceded the creation of research institutes.

171 The Keele Code of Practice includes a statement of 'normal expectations' concerning facilities which all research institutes should meet and clarifies that research students are entitled to appropriate supervision, office space, access to a computer and reasonable use of office facilities.

172 The audit team learned that a new research centre for the humanities and social sciences is nearing completion and will help to stimulate further developments, particularly in interdisciplinary research.

173 The Graduate School runs a graduate research symposium at which all research students and contract research staff are invited to present papers to an audience of fellow researchers.

174 The audit team concurred with the University's view that its recent administrative reorganisation has helped to focus more on the needs of postgraduate research students and, in general, augmented the University's research culture. It noted, however, a concern expressed within the University that postgraduate recruitment is insufficiently strong in some areas to sustain what it regards as a desirable critical mass.

Selection, admission and induction

175 All admissions to postgraduate research programmes are processed through the Graduate School, which checks them for eligibility and completeness and enters details on the student records system.

176 The normal minimum requirement for admission is a good honours degree in the relevant discipline, but some schools require a postgraduate qualification. Applications which appear to be eligible are sent to the Director of Postgraduate Research in the relevant research institute. The prospective lead supervisor and the Director should assess applications and make recommendations concerning admission. Formal offers of admission are made by the Graduate School.

177 The University stated in its Briefing Paper that it maintains institutional consistency in its admissions procedures but also acknowledged that more work needs to be done on admissions training. The development of this training was at the planning stage at the time of the audit.

178 Before arrival, all new research students receive a pack, which includes a student handbook and a research degrees enrolment handbook. Additionally, each research institute produces a handbook for research students, which provides information about the research environment of the institute; the role and responsibilities of any institute committees; expectations on both supervisors and students; and procedures for monitoring student progress. The audit team noted, however, that the content of some institutes' handbooks was not consistent with the University's Code. A new process, designed to address this problem, is being implemented during the current academic year.

179 All research students who begin their studies in September are invited to a four-day induction programme organised by the Graduate School. Students who arrive at times other than September can access induction presentations which appear on the Graduate School website. An induction event was arranged in 2006-07 for students who missed the September event. The University reported that, while it considered the exercise worthwhile, attendance was limited.

Supervision

180 The Research Institute to which a research student has been assigned is responsible for ensuring appropriate supervision arrangements, research training and facilities. Each student is assigned a lead supervisor and normally at least one other member of a supervisory team. The choice of lead supervisor, who has primary responsibility for the student, determines the research institute to which the student is assigned.

181 According to the University's Code, the supervisory team gives guidance about the nature of the research and the standard required, and should maintain contact through regular tutorial and seminar meetings. Students should be made aware of their responsibilities in maintaining regular contact with their supervisor, setting and keeping to agreed deadlines. Furthermore, regular meetings should be held to ensure that adequate training is being undertaken, and that work of an adequate standard is being produced. Key points arising from meetings are expected to be written down and students should receive written feedback, both on progress in general and also on draft chapters.

182 The University's Code states that all staff supervising research students must be approved by the Research Degrees Committee, either as associate or fully approved supervisors. Associate supervisors must be allocated an approved mentor.

183 The University has recently introduced a compulsory supervisor training scheme for associate supervisors but noted that its mentoring system for inexperienced research supervisors has not always worked efficiently. It has clarified the role and responsibilities of mentors of associate supervisors. A new system has also been agreed whereby each research institute has a limited number of approved mentors and associate supervisors are matched with the one they feel most comfortable with.

184 The QAA Review of research degree programmes of 2006 encouraged the University to give further consideration to setting upper limits on the number of students an individual member of staff may supervise in doctoral work at any one time. The University responded with a wider consideration of the workload on academic staff, leading to proposals for an overall workload model, to include specific weightings for postgraduate supervision and associated administrative tasks. The audit team noted, however, that the model remained under development. The risk that supervisors would have insufficient time to fulfil their responsibilities, therefore, remained. The team concluded that it is desirable for the University to give priority to the development of a workload allocation model, and thus ensure that staff time for supervision of postgraduate research students is appropriately calibrated.

Progress and review

185 According to the terms of the Keele Code, each research institute devises its own means for monitoring progress but these must comply with the requirement that a formal review should take place every six months. This review should incorporate a formal academic warning procedure where evidence is found of inadequate work.

186 Progress monitoring forms are in two parts, one completed by the lead supervisor and the other by the student. The University's Code states that forms should be sent separately to the research institute's postgraduate committee, which allocates one of five grades from 'Excellent' to 'Unsatisfactory'.

187 The University's Code stipulates that all research students admitted after September 2005 must maintain a learning plan. This includes a written agreement between the research institute and the student concerning supervision arrangements and entitlements, and a statement of learning objectives and the resources and strategies needed to achieve these. A formal written record is also kept of the research plan, research training, supervision meetings and stages undertaken in order to complete a research thesis.

188 The University acknowledged that learning plans remain at the early stages of implementation and an internal review has identified inconsistencies and a lack of rigour in terms of record-keeping. The revised Code of Practice identifies minimum requirements in record-keeping. Since the revised Code is new, it was not possible for the audit team to evaluate the extent to which it was helping to strengthen the efficacy of learning plans.

Development of research and other skills

189 The University regards the development of learning plans as integral to the full development of appropriate research skills. The plans should identify learning needs. Discussions between students and the supervisory team determine how these needs can be met.

190 Formal research training is a compulsory part of a research degree programme. Research students are required to accumulate a fixed number of research-training credits that they obtain from progress in approved modules. At doctoral level, students need at least 60 credits, of which at least 20 should be from generic training modules and at least 20 subject-specific.

191 The Dean has recently noted that, although research students have a wide choice of modules in their training programme, the University's overall research-training strategy needs to be refined. In meetings with the audit team, staff acknowledged that the catalogue of available modules often confuses students and the overall structure of research training needs to be tightened, particularly by isolating generic training at an early stage.

192 The audit team heard from staff that, although the wider choice of modules was welcomed, research students felt that some of the training provided was not demonstrably relevant to their needs. The team therefore encourages the Graduate School Board to give priority to implementing a revised strategy for the development of research and other skills.

193 The audit team also heard from staff that some research institutes arranged full viva voce 'dress rehearsals', with feedback, or shorter vivas that addressed particular issues. The University may wish to consider making these rehearsals available to all research students, and publicising them in research institute handbooks.

Feedback mechanisms

194 Research student representatives meet with senior management on a regular basis within a postgraduate students' executive liaison committee. In addition, a research students' executive liaison committee, chaired by the Dean of the Graduate School, meets several times a year to discuss issues of particular relevance to research students.

195 The Dean of Graduate School meets the President of the Keele Postgraduate Association regularly, and usually monthly during term. The audit team's scrutiny of the relevant documentation led it to conclude that the Research Students' Executive Liaison Committee was working with only limited effectiveness. Minutes revealed frequent absences by postgraduate representatives from several research institutes, while the standing agenda item 'Reports from Students' often elicited no reports. A former chair of the Postgraduate Association noted in his annual report that he was working towards increasing postgraduate representation on this and the faculty learning and teaching committees.

196 The QAA Review of research degree programmes of 2006 urged the University to ensure that it obtains and acts upon feedback from staff and examiners. In response, the University participated in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2007. The results, discussed at Graduate Studies Board, indicated that students felt that they had good guidance and sufficient opportunities to provide feedback. However, they were less satisfied compared to national Postgraduate Research Experience Survey data about the University's response to feedback, students' opportunities for social contact with other research students and their understanding of the requirements of examination by thesis. The audit team, therefore, endorses the conclusion of the QAA Review of research degree programmes report that the University should continue to focus attention on means of obtaining, and acting upon, feedback from its research students.

Assessment

197 The University publishes clear criteria for the assessment of research degrees. Descriptors incorporate descriptions of learning outcomes for level D of the National Qualifications Framework. The criteria for the award of a doctorate require students to have demonstrated the creation and interpretation of new knowledge through original research, a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge at the forefront of an academic discipline, the ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge and a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry.

198 The University also publishes guidance on the recommendations available to its internal and external examiners after examining a research thesis. The audit team considered this guidance to be clear and helpful.

199 The Research Degrees Committee receives the reports of at least two examiners (one of whom must be external to the University). This Committee also notes any issues raised by the examiners concerning the quality of supervision or facilities available to the student.

200 In a meeting with staff, the audit team learned that the currently discretionary use of an independent chair for the viva voce examination is likely to be made compulsory. Given that the relevant section of the *Code of practice* recognises the use of independent chairs as good practice, the audit team would encourage the University to move in this direction, and to give information about the composition of viva voce panels in research institute handbooks.

Representations, complaints and appeals

201 The University has an established complaints procedure for research students, which is supported by brief guidance notes. In addition, the University requires all postgraduate committees to have clearly articulated informal procedures for handling problems and complaints on an informal basis. Such informal mechanisms may involve a senior member of the research institute or the Dean of the Graduate School. After informal procedures have been exhausted the student may make a formal written complaint. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (students and staff) is the University's senior officer appointed to deal with complaints. The audit team considered these procedures to be clear and appropriate. In a meeting with staff, it learned that most representations were satisfactorily addressed by informal means. The number of formal appeals in the last three years had been very small.

202 The University took part in QAA's Review of postgraduate research degree programmes in 2006. The review concluded that the University's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree programme provision was appropriate and satisfactory. The audit team concurred with this view, while noting that further action in a small number of areas, in particular workload allocation, had the potential to further secure the quality and standards of research degree provision.

Section 7: Published information

203 The Academic Registry is responsible for the accuracy and completeness of materials relating to student recruitment to taught programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level, liaising with staff in schools and faculties as appropriate. Responsibility for recruitment materials for postgraduate research students and professional education courses lies with the Graduate School and the Centre for Continuing Professional Education respectively. In each case there are procedures for checking the materials by those directly involved. Prospectuses are signed off for accuracy by the deans and the Academic Registrar. Heads of schools, directors of research institutes, and administrative directors are each responsible for materials produced in their areas.

204 The Academic Registry is also responsible for producing a module catalogue, which lists the modules available on all courses in a given academic year. The audit team checked a number of entries in the catalogue and confirmed that the specific course information was accurate, although the introduction was out of date.

205 The University appointed a head of marketing in 2006-07, who has responsibility for the overall strategy, corporate publications, and the website. The University also employs a teaching quality information manager who is responsible for the information on the Unistats website. There are hyperlinks from the Quality Assurance Office website to the Unistats site, which are accompanied by links to the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey results and the National Student Survey website.

206 The University uses a number of feedback mechanisms on its internal and external publications to promote accuracy and completeness. External publications are market-tested by professional audit and report. Student feedback is solicited in a number of ways including through the First Impressions Group, staff-student liaison committees, and the Students' Union. The students whom the audit team met regarded the information they received from the University as useful and accurate. They were particularly positive about the development of the Welcome Webs to support new students. However, some suggested that the University had exaggerated the variety of accommodation available and its proximity to other cities in the region. This may suggest a need for the University to reassess the balance between the need for positive marketing and managing student expectations.

207 The content of the University website is the responsibility of the Marketing section of the Commercial and Facilities Directorate. A review of the website is underway and a content management system will be introduced during 2007-08. The maintenance and security of the website are the responsibility of Keele IT Services, who monitor the accuracy of information through liaison with schools and directorates.

208 The University requires schools to produce a student handbook for all of the principal courses they run and the Quality Assurance Office provides a list of the items which should be included. Compliance with this list is checked during the annual monitoring process and the evidence of the Internal Quality Audits demonstrated to the audit team that this was happening effectively. The students whom the team met generally found the handbooks helpful, informative and accurate but noted some variability in quality which, where it existed, was apparent particularly in the Dual Honours programmes.

209 The audit team regarded the accessibility of programme specifications as generally unsatisfactory. Although the team was assured that all the programme specifications had been produced and were available through the virtual learning environment, the links on the web pages did not always work properly. The University recognises this problem and it is intending to address the accessibility of programme specifications to students as part of developing its new degree structure.

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