

University of Sussex

Annex to the report

May 2008

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Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Sussex (the University) from 12-16 May 2008 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

Outcomes of the institutional audit

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

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

The audit included all of the University's provision leading to or contributing to its awards.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policy states that the University has a 'management framework for the development and support of...enhancement, for fostering a climate of review and reflection, and for leading and setting targets for enhancement'. At the time of the audit, the University was working on developing a systematic and embedded approach to quality enhancement and modifying its quality assurance procedures to assist it in achieving this aim. From its reading of the documentation and discussion with staff and students, the audit team concluded that the University endeavoured to improve the learning opportunities provided for students through a range of mechanisms to support developments in teaching and learning, innovations and change. The team found limited evaluation of the impact or effectiveness of the University's overall approach to enhancement for students and their learning but, in the view of the team, the development and implementation of the student evaluation and continuous improvement strategy has the potential to make a significant contribution in this area.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

Scrutiny of relevant documentation, including handbooks and committee minutes, confirmed that the University's structures and processes for the management of its research degree provision were sound and operating as intended. The University's approach meets the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice,)* Section 1: *Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA, in respect of the academic standards of the awards. In the view of the audit team, the establishment of the Doctoral School will provide the University with a vehicle for systematic enhancement of the quality of postgraduate research programmes across the institution.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the role of the student advisers in providing a coordinated local approach to student support and guidance (paragraphs 94 to 96)

- the University's response to the identification, through its standard processes, of inequities in relation to the conditions of service for hourly-paid staff, which has led to a consistent, effectual and vigilant approach to the employment and support of associate tutors (paragraphs 118 to 120)
- the approach to the management of collaborative provision, which is characterized by well thought out and supportive processes for quality assurance and enhancement (paragraph 147).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendation for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- to review the approach at institutional level to the use of the qualitative and quantitative management information collected from both internal and external sources with a view to establishing a holistic and methodical approach to the provision of student learning opportunities (paragraphs 55, 63, 64, 76, 123).

Recommendation for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- to take stock of departmental practices in the support and preparation of postgraduate research students for assessment to encourage consistency of approach across the institution (paragraph 163).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 The University of Sussex was founded in 1961. At 1 December 2007, the University had 10,591 registered students on award-bearing programmes. Of these, 8,026 (76 per cent) were undergraduates and 2,565 (24 per cent) were postgraduates. In the latter category, 912 (36 per cent) were undertaking research degree programmes. At the time of the audit, the majority of undergraduate students were registered on full-time programmes of study. There are 610 teaching staff, 291 research staff, 113 technical staff and 989 staff in professional services. The University offers a wide range of award-bearing programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, including around 225 first degree programmes and approximately 150 taught postgraduate programmes.

2 The University is jointly responsible for a number of awards in partnership with the University of Brighton. The most significant of these, in terms of student numbers, is the Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery delivered by Brighton and Sussex Medical School, to which the first intake of students was admitted in September 2003.

3 The University also has a range of collaborative relationships with other higher education providers in its local region. The University validates programmes designed and delivered by six institutions, and franchises the delivery of two foundation-year programmes to local further education providers. At the time of the audit, there were no validation or franchise relationships with overseas institutions, although there was a collaborative research degree scheme with an overseas partner. The University has exchange arrangements with a number of overseas institutions, providing study-abroad opportunities for its students, largely within the European Union and North America. In the future, the University plans to develop arrangements for joint or dual awards with international partners.

4 At the time of the audit, the University's mission, which was under review, was 'to contribute to the commonwealth of ideas and the development of society by:

- pioneering research across disciplines, which inspires innovative thinking and our own teaching

- attracting students with enquiring minds and offering a flexible curriculum that prepares for them to be citizens of the world
- creative collaboration with business and communities, which supports social change in development.'

The information base for the audit

5 The University provided the audit team with a briefing paper and supporting documentation, including that related to the sampling trails selected by the team. The index to the University's Briefing Paper was referenced to sources of evidence, to illustrate the institution's approach to managing the security of the academic standards of its awards and the quality of its educational provision. The team had hard-copy of all documents referenced in the Briefing Paper; in addition, the team had access to the institution's intranet.

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

7 In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the previous institutional audit (May 2004)
- reports of reviews by QAA at the subject level since the previous institutional audit
- reports produced by other relevant bodies (for example, Ofsted and professional, statutory or regulatory bodies)
- the institution's internal documents
- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.

Developments since the last audit

8 The previous audit of the University in May 2004 resulted in a judgement of broad confidence in the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards, and of the quality of its programmes. A number of features representing good practice were identified, as were certain recommendations for action.

9 The University provided the audit team with a detailed summary of actions that had been taken in response to the report from the previous audit, outlining a number of changes to policy and practice. Among other things, there have been changes to procedures for approval and re-recognition in collaborative arrangements and internal programme approval processes have been made more secure. The present audit team found that the University had responded appropriately to the findings of the previous audit.

10 There have been significant changes at senior management level since the previous audit. A new Vice-Chancellor was appointed in September 2007, preceded one year earlier by the appointment of two pro vice-chancellors, one with an education and one with a research portfolio, and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, with responsibility for planning and resources. New appointments have also been made to senior administrative posts within the University executive.

11 A revised committee structure has been implemented to clarify lines of responsibility, thereby making decision-making more efficient. In particular, there has been a rationalization of the number of committees and a strategic linking of resource decision-making and academic strategy by the creation of a joint strategy and resources committee of the Senate and Council.

12 The University has introduced a new planning process and resource allocation model for schools, has developed a research strategy and a teaching and learning strategy, and, at the time of the audit, was involved in the final stages of consultation in the development of an overarching

institutional Strategic Plan. During the audit, the audit team learned that detailed discussions were underway following a review of the effectiveness of the academic organisation of the University and its existing school-based structure, with the aim, amongst others, of improving the efficiency of communication at managerial level and reducing bureaucratic overheads.

13 The Briefing Paper pointed to a number of substantial developments in the University estate, both new-build and refurbishment, particularly relating to teaching and study space. Brighton and Sussex Medical School, a partnership with the University of Brighton, has reached steady-state in terms of student intake and joint research degrees have been introduced; further detail of this development may be found at paragraphs 144 to 146.

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

14 The academic structure of the University comprises six schools of studies: Humanities; Life Sciences; Social Sciences and Cultural Studies; Science and Technology; the Sussex Institute, and Brighton and Sussex Medical School. The schools comprise the main academic units of the University, with the addition of SPRU (Science and Technology Policy Research). There are 25 departments distributed across the schools of studies.

15 In the Briefing Paper, the University stated that its policies and procedures for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities were determined through its deliberative structures. University departments are responsible for their implementation and it is the responsibility of schools to monitor and ensure that their constituent departments do this effectively. Schools then report on outcomes of completed processes and on issues that require University-level attention to the appropriate University-level committee. A structure of officerships at University, school and departmental levels, provides leadership and support for the development and implementation of these policies and processes.

16 The Vice-Chancellor is supported by two pro-vice-chancellors, for education and for research, and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. The Pro Vice-Chancellor for Education's portfolio comprises academic leadership for all matters related to teaching and learning, including collaborative partnerships, quality assurance and enhancement, and the overall student experience in relation to all taught programmes. The Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research has responsibility for academic leadership relating to the academic standards of research degrees. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor has executive responsibility for business planning and resource allocation across the University and for oversight of the quality assurance of academic staff.

17 The deans of schools of studies, line-managed by the pro-vice-chancellors, are responsible for providing leadership and strategic vision, and for the financial and academic management of their schools. Three directors in each school, for taught programmes, doctoral studies, and student support, report to the dean. Heads of department are responsible, primarily, for ensuring the strategic direction and development of their subject area.

18 The deliberative infrastructure for teaching and learning was revised with effect from the academic year 2007-08 'to drive change and enhancement' and to provide a suitable basis for delivery of the University's Teaching and Learning Strategy. The University Teaching and Learning Committee has oversight of the academic portfolio under delegated authority from Senate and has explicit responsibility for the establishment and maintenance of academic standards, and for the assurance, development and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities. The Student Regulations and Progress Committee, a subcommittee of the University Teaching and Learning Committee, is responsible for the operation of processes for the consideration of mitigating evidence and for policy and procedures for assessment and student progress. The Collaborative Provision Committee exercises oversight of collaborative provision, with decisions on recognition of collaborative partners being reserved for the University Teaching and Learning Committee and Senate.

19 The Doctoral School Committee, part of the Research Committee sub-structure, has oversight of research degree provision. The Doctoral School Committee also reports to the University Teaching and Learning Committee on the standards and delivery of research degree programmes, the student experience and on issues indicated in the Teaching and Learning Strategy. The University's Research Governance Committee, which is responsible for the supervision of policies and procedures addressing issues of research integrity, probity, ethical standards, quality assurance and risk assessment for both students and staff, is also a subcommittee of the Research Committee.

20 A student experience forum was created with effect from the academic year 2007-08 as an arena to exchange views, discuss practice and make recommendations. The Forum is not part of the University's formal decision-making structures, but it brings together academic staff, students and professional services to consult, monitor and share good practice on issues relating to student well-being and the wider student experience.

21 School teaching and learning committees undertake the detailed final approval of new academic programmes and approval of changes to the existing curricula. They ensure the implementation, by departments, of annual course and programme monitoring, and confirm that appropriate follow-up action is implemented, and evaluate the effectiveness of the monitoring process. The committees consider internal periodic review reports, and any external reports, including those from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, and again approve action plans and monitor their implementation. The committees are also required to: ensure the consistency of academic standards between departments; consider the reports of external examiners for taught programmes and approve action plans proposed by the relevant examination boards. They also approve, under delegated authority from Senate, the membership of examination boards within the school, and the ratification of pass lists from all taught programmes within the school. Examination boards report to the school teaching and learning committees. Subject-level examination boards operate at undergraduate level and a separate set of subject-level examination boards operates at taught postgraduate level.

22 There are also school research degrees committees, school research governance committees and school student support and development committees. School research degree committees are responsible for determining and monitoring arrangements for selection, induction and supervision of research degree students and the appointment of supervisors in accordance with University policies. School research governance committees draw up procedures and policies for research governance within schools. School support and development committees are responsible for developing school-wide retention and widening participation strategies consistent with corporate goals, and for coordinating, monitoring and developing student support provision within the school and sharing departmental good practice.

Programme approval

23 The process for the approval of new programmes is described in the University's Curriculum Development and Approval Handbook, which is supplemented by guidance on good practice, produced by the Teaching and Learning Development Unit in the form of a course and programme design document. The programme approval process is a two-stage process, with the first involving the consideration of outline approval by the Strategy and Resources Committee Sub-Group, which reviews the business case for the proposed programme. Responsibility for formal approval is delegated to schools through a validation event, with a panel comprising senior staff from the institution, a member of the University Learning and Teaching Committee, an external academic specialist and, optionally, an external stakeholder representing the needs of potential employers. The process is supported by professional services staff from the Academic Office and the Teaching and Learning Development Unit. The outcomes of approvals given at school level are reported to the University Teaching and Learning Committee. All approval panels include a member of the University Teaching and Learning Committee, to ensure that University

requirements are met. Scrutiny of the documentation provided and discussion with staff confirmed that processes for the approval of new programmes were operating consistently and in line with the stated requirements.

24 The process of approval requires the completion of programme approval templates, which include programme specifications, and an account of how the proposed programme achieves congruence with relevant external reference points such as the Academic Infrastructure and, where appropriate, any external compliance requirements. The University's Framework for Taught Awards, which sets out the detailed credit arrangements and progression rules for all undergraduate programmes and the Academic Framework of the University of Sussex, are also used to inform the programme approval process.

Annual monitoring

25 The University's Handbook on Annual Monitoring sets out the expected inputs into the process. Standard templates are used by departments to report to schools and for schools to report to the University on the outcomes of the exercise. Programme-level data, in support of the annual monitoring process supplied by the Student Systems Office, indicate patterns of progression and where specific indicators are out of line with institutional norms. The monitoring of the outputs from processes operated at school level is undertaken by the University Teaching and Learning Committee.

Periodic review

26 The University undertakes the periodic review of taught programmes on a quinquennial cycle, as set out in its Procedure for the Conduct of Periodic Subject Reviews 2007-08 document. Since 2001, the process has been managed and supported by the Academic Office, in order to secure consistency in approach. The review is based on a reflective self-evaluation document prepared by the relevant department, and involves a review panel with a similar composition to that used for initial programme approval, involving both external and internal reviewers. Completion of the periodic review results in confirmation that academic standards are appropriate and a series of recommendations and commendations which relate to the teaching provision and the student experience. The review report specifies follow-up through an action plan that must be approved by the relevant school, and is received at the University level. The University Teaching and Learning Committee receives a summary of the report and details of the key issues to be tackled by the department and the school through the action plan. A sub-group of the University Teaching and Learning Committee reads the summary and action plan to identify issues for report. Schools monitor the implementation of the action plan and outcomes are reported annually to the University Teaching and Learning Committee.

27 The audit team considers that the University's arrangements provide a generally effective framework for the management of the academic standards of awards and of the quality of learning opportunities. The University will wish to ensure that it maintains rigorous procedures for discharging institutional-level responsibility for the management and surveillance of academic quality and standards throughout the University's current restructuring and into the future.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

28 In the Briefing Paper, the University identified the principal means by which academic standards were defined and maintained as the operation of its policies for curricular design, and programme approval, monitoring and review. The relevant policies are set out in the Academic Framework of the University of Sussex and associated documents and handbooks.

29 Confirmation of the academic standards that the students achieve takes place on an annual basis through the operation of examination boards, which confirm both the academic

standards of the components (courses) of programmes of studies and progression decisions and recommendations for exit awards. Oversight of the assessment process occurs through annual monitoring reports and periodic review, and the operation of the Student Regulations and Progress Committee. The Briefing Paper noted that the focus of periodic review was 'developmental and strategically focussed', but additional outcomes of the review are the confirmation of academic standards and of continuing alignment with the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure.

30 Routine monitoring of programmes occurs through annual monitoring. Department-level reports are aggregated and form one of the inputs to the production of the school annual monitoring reports, which are submitted to the University Teaching and Learning Committee. At the time of the audit, the Committee was refining its approach to effective consideration of the outcomes of schools' annual monitoring. Programme-level reports consider student achievement, progression, retention, a detailed analysis of the reports of external examiners, with an action plan in response to comments made. Review of the data provided for a sample of programmes demonstrated to the audit team that detailed and sophisticated management data were made available to departments to support the annual monitoring process. The template-based annual monitoring reports had a tendency to be descriptive rather than evaluative in content, with much of the detail being lost as the reports passed to higher levels in the committee structure.

External examiners

31 External examiners are used in the confirmation of academic standards through their moderation of the assessment of courses by internal examiners and confirmation of the application of the regulatory framework governing progression and award decisions. External examiners are appointed to all taught programmes and to the assessment panels for research degrees and professional doctorates. The audit team confirmed that the appointment criteria for external examiners were rigorous. Appointment follows a set procedure, with formal approval being given by the Chair of the University Teaching and Learning Committee on behalf of Senate. The responsibilities and duties of external examiners are described in a set of handbooks that cover undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, examination and assessment procedures and the processes for induction and reporting.

32 The University operates a two-phase examination board system, comprising a first-stage meeting of the board, where marks for individual courses (the components of programmes) are assured and confirmed, and a second stage comprising a separate meeting of the board where progression is recommended for those candidates who have satisfied the rules, where awards are confirmed and where resits and repeats are determined. The first-stage meeting, of the board is the point at which the academic standards attained by the students are confirmed. External examiners are invited, but not required, to attend the first-stage meeting, but are consulted about any issues arising. The regulatory framework and the management statistics made available to the examination boards enable unusual marking patterns to be detected early and remedial action to be taken as necessary to protect the interests of students. External examiners are required to attend the second-stage meeting where progression and award decisions are made. External examiners meet discipline staff prior to the meeting of the board to discuss assessment practice and outcomes, and, while they are not required to attend the first-stage meeting, they must provide a written report in lieu of attendance. Examination boards also include internal members, being a subset of the academic staff involved in the delivery of the programme, formally appointed for a fixed term.

33 External examiners' reports follow a standard University-wide template, with prompts on a number of matters including academic standards, sector-wide comparability, alignment with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and the expectations of subject benchmark statements, and achievement and quality. External examiners' reports are circulated widely and departments are required to prepare action plans where necessary, to address any issues raised. The University indicated that external examiners' reports

were made available to students through their representation on the school learning and teaching committees; students who met the team had little knowledge of this provision, which was introduced in the academic year 2007-08. The processes for external examiners on collaborative arrangements closely follow the practice for those involved with on-campus programmes.

34 An institutional overview of external examiner reports was maintained in the past by the Taught Programmes Subcommittee of the Academic Policy and Standards Committee, in the form of a written summary of issues of institutional concern that had been raised in the reports. The Briefing Paper noted that the function of these two committees had been taken over by the University Teaching and Learning Committee and its subcommittees; at the time of the audit, the arrangement had not been in operation for long enough for an assessment to be made of their effectiveness in discharging this function.

35 From the documentation made available to it and consideration of the relevant committee minutes, the audit team formed the view that the framework for external examining and the operation of the examination boards were effective in maintaining academic standards. The appointment process for both external and internal members of the examination boards is rigorous, and the handbooks and associated procedural and policy documents are clear and unambiguous, and promote consistency and equity of treatment across different subject areas. The audit team found that the University made strong and scrupulous use of external examiners in summative assessment, supporting a judgement of confidence in the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

36 All of the University's programmes are defined by programme specifications compiled to a standardised template, to provide the definitive curricular statement. The University views these specifications as 'technical documents' that define academic standards and ensure alignment with the FHEQ and any relevant subject benchmark statements, rather than as accessible descriptors aimed at students. Proposals for curricular development must take into account the requirements of any relevant professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, and the guidance offered by the *Code of practice*, published by QAA. Records for the University Teaching and Learning Committee also indicate that it has been kept informed and has made the necessary responses to other external influences of relevance, for example, the Burgess Group final report and the potential impact that the report's recommendations might have on the Academic Framework of the University.

37 Programme (curriculum) approval and periodic programme review are the points at which alignment with relevant reference points is confirmed, as is compliance with the requirements of any relevant accrediting body. The audit team saw evidence of the effectiveness of these processes in the example of a programme whose approval had been made contingent on the programme team taking due account of the FHEQ in the proposal documentation. When the FHEQ was introduced in 2001 the University was offering a small number of 'conversion Masters' degrees that were intended for students who wished to pursue advanced study in a subject area for which they lacked a first degree; these degrees were not aligned with the level descriptors in the FHEQ. Documentation provided by the University confirmed that these programmes either no longer bore the master's title, or had been subject to a formal re-approval event following curricular restructuring to bring the constituent courses to the requisite level.

38 The University does not publish the *Code of practice* to staff, preferring to interpret it centrally and then to build the relevant guidance into its own published procedures. The precepts of the *Code* are embodied in the University regulations and ordinances, amplified through the handbooks and procedural documents relevant to the conduct of assessments, the appointment and duties of examiners, and the Academic Framework of the University. There was clear documentary evidence that revisions to the *Code* were considered centrally by a mapping exercise against existing practice, resulting in recommendations for action to take account of the revised guidance.

39 The requirements of accrediting bodies are an additional benchmark for academic standards and form an integral part of the approval and review processes. There was evidence of central oversight of the information that was being given by departments to students about the role of these bodies, and the requirements that graduates would have to meet. Interactions with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies are largely devolved to departments.

40 Documentation and discussion with staff and students demonstrated to the audit team that there was a high level of awareness in the University of the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points, which were intrinsic to the processes for the setting and maintenance of academic standards. There was also effective central oversight of the implications of changes and revisions to the Academic Infrastructure for the University's policies and procedures.

Assessment policies and regulations

41 The approach to assessment is clearly defined in the examination and assessment handbooks for both undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. There are parallel documents for the operation of assessment boards, and a separate set of documents pertaining to research degrees. The common framework for undergraduate programmes defines the credit volume and level of the awards, and lays out the algorithm by which the honours degree will be classified. Despite the clarity of the common-credit framework for undergraduate programmes, there seemed little awareness on the part of the students who met the audit team about what was required for them to succeed, nor the criteria attached to individual assessments.

42 There are clear processes whereby mitigating evidence can be taken into account, which happens at school level in the school mitigating evidence committees prior to the meetings of the examination boards. There is a well-established mechanism for alerting examination boards to groups of marks that fall outside the broad range that would be expected for the cohort. Centrally generated data flag up those courses that exceed a pre-set statistical criterion and that therefore require particular attention on the part of the examiners. The procedures and permissible actions that might be taken are clearly defined in the Handbook for Examiners and examination boards. In occasional cases, the complete set of grades is adjusted to bring it into line with that for other courses on the programme. Both the external examiners' reports and the annual monitoring reports for the programme require specific comment on such cases with an account of the actions taken.

43 In the Briefing Paper, and in audit team meetings with senior staff, the University acknowledged that progress on a common-credit framework for its taught postgraduate provision that would match the undergraduate framework had not progressed as rapidly as it would have liked. Nonetheless the audit team considered that the overall regulatory approach, the assessment strategy more generally, and the clarity of the supporting documentation, provided an effective and secure approach to the assessment of students and the maintenance of academic standards.

Management information - statistics

44 The University uses an extensive set of centrally produced statistics relating to student performance, retention and progression. It was clear to the audit team that subsets of these data were a key information source in the annual monitoring process and provided a detailed and rich source of information about recruitment, withdrawals, transfers, progression and exit awards. The data also enable a snapshot to be formed of cohort performance. While the statistical information provided is comprehensive and detailed, as noted above (see paragraph 30) the requirements of the annual monitoring process do not invite a detailed analysis of the information available to the department.

45 The minutes and papers for the Student Regulations and Progress Committee, a sub-group of the University Teaching and Learning Committee, show that the Committee makes extensive use of management information as part of its remit to oversee student progression. There are detailed summary reports and contextual analysis prepared by the Registry on both undergraduate and postgraduate progression, with firm recommendations to schools to use the data in order to disseminate good practice and improve outcomes.

46 The audit found that the University had in place sound procedures for the establishment, appraisal and monitoring of academic standards. The elements of the Academic Infrastructure are used systematically in the setting of academic standards. Approaches to assessment and external examining are sound. The audit team concluded that confidence could reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

47 The University's management of learning opportunities is related to the University Strategic Plan and the associated Teaching and Learning Strategy. The relationship relies on the implementation of policies and procedures, designed to maintain the quality of provision, by departments, with schools being required to monitor and ensure consistency. Schools then report on completion of the procedures to the University and bring matters requiring University-level attention forward. Through review of the departmental, school and institution-level documentation available to it, the audit team was able to appraise these levels of delegation in action.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

48 The operation of the relevant academic committees, being at the time of the audit, the University Teaching and Learning Committee, the Doctoral School Committee, the Collaborative Provision Committee, and the Student Regulations and Progress Committee, demonstrates that the University benchmarked its processes for the management of learning opportunities against the *Code of practice*, when each section was first published, and modified its practice as the *Code* was updated. There is ample evidence of this engagement in relation to all sections of the *Code*, with specific reviews of the actions taken to maintain alignment being a feature of committee considerations.

49 A review by the audit team of the relevant documentation established that, under the aegis of the University Teaching and Learning Committee, proposals arising from revisions of the *Code of practice* had also been considered by other relevant committees. The University's appraisal of the *Code* and its application extends to a systematic approach to ensuring that the University responds to national consultations on revision to elements of the *Code*. The concern with maintaining alignment of procedures with the *Code* is also fully demonstrated in the way that the principles and details of the relevant sections have been incorporated into the design and delivery of the procedures relating to the University's collaborative provision.

50 The engagement of the University with the influence of the Academic Infrastructure is fully supported by its administrative processes. Initial consideration and suggestions for change are the work of the Academic Office; it is clear from the minutes of the predecessor Taught Programmes Committee and the University Teaching and Learning Committee that the Academic Office is active in ensuring that appropriate matters pertaining to the external environment are brought to the attention of those committees. The minutes illustrate the continuity of consideration given to specific items of academic-related policy by the committees, which is further supported by the action points included in all the minutes seen. The action points indicate an active involvement of specified officers, including the Chair, Secretary, Academic Registrar, Head of the Academic Office, Director of Academic Support, and the Assistant Registrar (Undergraduate examinations and student progress) in the progression of items and decisions related to them. Scrutiny of documentation confirmed that identification of responsibility for action became more systematic

during 2007. As the Committee changed its designation and remit from a taught programmes committee to a University teaching and learning committee, the instances of the Chair's action in relation to specific programme-level matters also declined significantly, demonstrating the reconstituted committee's focus on matters with institutional import.

51 The continuity of consideration illustrated above is supported by the minutes of University committees being in a standard house-style that provides a clear and sufficiently detailed account of matters, to ensure a clear historical record. The minutes record key aspects of debate and decisions in clear language and delineate between matters for note, for approval and for recommendation to parent bodies.

52 The University has a range of provision for which it seeks professional, statutory or regulatory bodies' recognition. Preparation for external reviews at the subject level is largely undertaken at school level and accreditation documentation is not seen or approved by the University prior to its submission to an accrediting body. The consideration of reports from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies is a duty of the University Teaching and Learning Committee as part of its oversight and development of the quality assurance of the University's provision. Minutes and papers of school committees demonstrate local action in response to professional, statutory and regulatory bodies' reports. The level of detail in the information considered at University level was sufficient for the University Teaching and Learning Committee to confirm that schools had considered the reports and identified the necessary actions. Documentation for accredited programmes viewed by the audit team indicated that there was not always a systematic method through which institutional-level recommendations or requirements contained in the reports were considered and responses produced: this was in contrast with the verifiable route for consideration of the reports arising from General Medical Council through the Joint Approval and Review Board (paragraphs 144 to 146).

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

53 The processes for the approval, monitoring and review of programmes are set out at paragraphs 23 to 26 above.

54 A key aim of the academic planning process, derived from the Teaching and Learning Strategy, is to reduce and refine the overall portfolio of academic programmes, in order to gain greater efficiency and more focused resourcing for those that remain. Documentation viewed by the audit team confirmed the effectiveness of the Strategy and Resources Committee Sub-Group in appraising the business case for proposed new programmes. The documentary advice provided by the Academic Office to all participants in the approval process is clear and helpful, with explicit guidance on matters to be considered in the approval process and the specification of apposite and demanding criteria. The team examined documentation for a recent example of an internal programme validation, including the draft validation report, the agenda for the validation event and the validation documents. The panel composition was in line with the University's requirements, and included an external academic assessor. The half-day validation event included a session with the programme proposers. The report indicated the range of internal and external reference points available and their use during the event. The submitted documentation included an overview of the proposal, and a postgraduate programme template setting out educational aims, programme learning outcomes, the teaching, learning and assessment strategies, the programme structure and the academic rationale for the proposal. The external assessor provided initial comments before the event, which were forwarded to the University's Strategy and Resources Sub-Group for consideration at outline approval stage. The documentation also included a University course template, which, for each course, included a course outline, teaching methods, learning outcomes, assessments and reading/resource list.

55 The documentation confirmed that the University's requirements for programme approval were operating as intended and took due account of the relevant guidance in the *Code of practice*. The documentation provided, including that for the signing off of proposals, indicated

appropriate levels of scrutiny at school level with ample evidence of external reference points being used effectively. The documentation did not demonstrate whether overall resource requirements were considered in the approval in a systematic way to support the learning opportunities to be provided to students.

56 In the academic year 2004-05, the University conducted a review of annual monitoring, which streamlined some elements of the process. The Briefing Paper pointed to the scope for the process to be dovetailed with the annual planning process, to avoid duplication and to encourage academic staff to use annual monitoring to inform academic planning, a view that the audit team would endorse. The Handbook on Annual Monitoring is distributed to heads of department and 'all those involved in the annual monitoring process'. Departments and schools use standard proforma to record the outcomes of annual monitoring, which considers undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision separately. The information collected is complemented by a document prepared by the head of department, which, in the examples seen by the audit team, covered the teacher experience of student learning, but was less explicit in appraisal of the student experience of learning. Course convenor reports seen by the team were of variable quality.

57 The information accumulated through the annual monitoring process is reasonably detailed but the level of detail diminishes as outcomes are summarised at school level for report to the University. The major part of the evaluation of the outcomes of the monitoring process occurs at school level. The process is generally, but not always, completed in time for any proposed changes to be implemented by schools in the subsequent year. Departmental minutes showed that matters relating to annual monitoring were addressed at the relevant departmental and school level committees; the records of discussion are brief and limited to reporting on the progression of the process.

58 In the Briefing Paper the University noted variable engagement by schools and departments with the data available in support of annual monitoring. Documentation related to annual monitoring seen by the audit team confirmed this variability which, in the team's view, limited the potential for the data to contribute in a structured and systematic way to local and institutional discussion of matters arising from annual monitoring. The minutes of the University Teaching and Learning Committee and its predecessor bodies suggest that discussion of annual monitoring at that level makes a limited contribution to quality assurance.

59 The annual review and periodic review processes have in common explicit requirements derived from the full range of external reference elements that make up the Academic Infrastructure and particularly the advice contained in the *Code of practice*. The audit team scrutinized documentary evidence of the operation of the periodic review process and found evidence of a systematic and timely set of activities encompassing; the review event, production of a report, departmental discussions and the production of an action plan, departmental and school-level sign-off, consideration by the former Teaching Enhancement and Quality Assurance Committee Sub-Group, further departmental discussion, a 12-month evaluation with sign-off by department and then the school, and finally consideration by the sub-group of the 12-month evaluation.

60 The review reports seen by the audit team were comprehensive and met the University's requirements; the reports also confirmed the presence and involvement of two external assessors, usually very senior academics, on the review panel, and explicit consideration of matters relating to external reference points. The action plans took variable forms but seemed to the team to be a useful means of assessing and monitoring progress with respect to the outcomes of the reviews, with the responsible individuals mandated to take specific issues forward being identified. The 12-month evaluations analysed in relation to each review recommendation: the delivery method; the original time-scale; the progress made; the indicators of success; the difficulties encountered and, the usefulness and feasibility of actions in practice. The evaluations were helpful and a good indicator of the positive influence of the outcomes of periodic review on the operation of the provision at the departmental/school level.

61 Likewise, the self-evaluation documents prepared by the departments for the review were comprehensive, mainly evaluative in nature and an effective means for the departments to identify the issues confronting them. These documents were accompanied by statistical data, handbooks, option course information, summary of key changes since the last review, external examiners' reports for three years, staff profiles, staff development plans and the previous periodic review report and action plan. In each case, the statistical data were comprehensive. The summaries of changes made were synoptic, but indicated the ongoing attention to the needs of the programmes over the intervening period.

62 The annual monitoring reports accompanying the review documentation showed a reasonable approach to the creation of a school-wide summary from the heads of departments' reports. Although generally adequate, the format, coverage and quality of the latter were variable in quality and usefulness. Information from student feedback was not a major feature of the documented proceedings, although there was reference to the outcomes of the National Student Survey. The array of documentation was consistent among the examples seen by the audit team and provided the review panel with the information and data necessary to reach an evidence-based judgement in line with the stated purposes of the process.

63 On the basis of the documentation and discussion with staff, the audit team came to the view that the periodic review process provided a rigorous mechanism for internal programme review. The institutional Briefing Paper indicated that the link between the operation of the process and the progression of institutional aims and priorities remained weak. In this regard, although the Briefing Paper also indicated that 'the reviews provide[d] the opportunity for the institution to identify common trends', it was not clear from the documentation available to the team how any such trends or institutional issues that arose were dealt with systematically. Consideration of the minutes of relevant school and institution-level committees revealed a lack of structured analysis and synthesis of information derived from the periodic review process in the identification of institutional-level academic priorities, including those that might contribute to more explicitly managed continuous improvement in the learning opportunities available to students.

64 In common with annual monitoring, the periodic review process does not include a strong element of evaluation based upon the synthesis of students' views, which are available from a number of sources. This characteristic of the processes, although ensuring a focus on the academic provision, does not bring the students' experience of that provision to the fore. From its review of examples of the operation of the routine monitoring and review processes, the audit team came to the view that the University was not exploiting the opportunity to gain a full insight into the student experience in its schools, and to disseminate the information it collected from the processes to, contributes to the systematic enhancement of that experience.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

65 While the links between research and scholarly activity and learning opportunities, have always been implicit in its approach to teaching and learning, at the time of the audit, the University was moving to make the relationship more explicit. The Teaching and Learning Strategy and the Research Strategy have been developed in parallel with the link between the two being reinforced during the deliberative process by cross-representation at pro vice-chancellor-level on the two relevant committees. The University also intends that future periodic reviews include evaluation of the strength of the links. The Teaching and Learning Strategy aspires to ensure that future teaching is more comprehensively able to demonstrate that it is informed by cutting-edge research and that it takes place in a research-enriched environment; the implementation plan for the Strategy does not identify the specific actions that will ensure that the aspiration will be fulfilled. Review of the course descriptions available to the audit team showed that courses and options available to students, drew on the research interests of staff with the specific links to current research being particularly clear and strong in the taught postgraduate portfolio.

Management information - feedback from students

66 The University draws on a wide range of surveys and other mechanisms designed to gather student views, including the newly introduced Student Experience Survey, the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, the International Student Barometer, and the National Student Survey. The Student Experience Survey Working Group has drawn up a standard course evaluation questionnaire for use across the University and devised the Student Experience Survey for all second-year students, with input from students on the nature of the questionnaire. At more local levels, there are course evaluation and professional services surveys. There was documentary evidence of operational changes of benefit to students made by service areas in response to student feedback.

67 Staff from professional services analyse the data from external surveys, the outcomes of which are provided routinely to students. The University also supported the Students' Union in conducting focus groups to explore student views of some of the areas of poor performance identified in the National Student Survey. The recently established Student Experience Forum will provide another arena for detailed discussion of the outcomes of student surveys.

68 Departments produce action plans in response to the findings of the National Student Survey for report to the University Teaching and Learning Committee, which also receives an overview summary of the results. Examples of the records of departmental meetings at which students were present, illustrated local discussions about the preparation and implementation of these action plans. There is evidence of effective action at local level in response to the outcomes of the National Student Survey.

69 Matters for attention at institution-level identified in such surveys have often confirmed the findings of the University's own internal surveys, but the audit team's discussions with staff and students suggested that there was disjunction between some findings of external surveys and internal perceptions of the same issues. The recurrence of a number of matters, by way of example, student dissatisfaction with the library provision, indicates that resolution of some issues has not been easy to manage (see paragraph 83). At the time of the audit, a number of strands had recently been identified for particular attention, some of which were being dealt with through bespoke mechanisms under the aegis of the Pro Vice-Chancellor Education; the final outcome of these considerations was awaited at the time of the audit.

70 Students whom the audit team met were, in general, confident that at the local level the combination of formal and informal approaches available to them was effective in allowing them to make their views known and to secure beneficial responses. The students spoke positively about the availability of advice from a number of staff sources and confirmed that there was always the opportunity to see someone to help to resolve problems. Students also confirmed that when students brought matters to the notice of the relevant support services the response was excellent and all necessary support was provided. The students confirmed that they were aware of the outcomes of surveys and action in response at the local level; awareness of action at institutional-level towards continuous improvement in the learning opportunities available to students was more limited.

Role of students in quality assurance

71 There is a well-established system for student representation at institutional level, at school and at departmental level through student membership of committees. At University level, sabbatical officers from the Students' Union sit on Council, Senate, the University Teaching and Learning Committee and the Strategy and Resources Committee. Elected student representatives are appointed to school committees: for example, one undergraduate and one postgraduate representative from each department sit on the school teaching and learning committee. There is also student representation on school student support and development committees, school student fora and school research degree committees. Students are represented at departmental

meetings, the nature of which varies between departments. There are also termly meetings of all the departmental student representatives within a school. Minutes of committees indicate regular attendance by students. The Briefing Paper noted that students were involved 'where appropriate' in individual projects and working groups, for example, student involvement on the Information Technology (IT) Consultative Group, the Library Consultative Group and the Student Evaluation Working Group. The University has also acted to improve communication through executive liaison meetings between senior management and sabbatical officers from the Students' Union.

72 The election of student representatives within departments is managed by the Students' Union with support from the University and is 'promoted as a joint University and Union activity'. Students are supported in their roles as representatives through training provided jointly by the University and the Students' Union. Students attested to the availability and effectiveness of the training, confirming that most representatives took up the training opportunities.

73 There is a student representative scheme, run jointly by the University and the Students' Union, which includes a variety of initiatives designed to improve the effectiveness of the representative system, including a database provided to assist representatives and aid communications. Students who met the audit team confirmed the value of the scheme in supporting student representation. Those involved in the scheme make changes as necessary to improve its functioning, for example, space was created for representatives in Study Direct (see paragraph 81) and an email list keeps representatives informed of developments in the University. Regular reports on the scheme are submitted to the University Teaching and Learning Committee, enabling the University to maintain oversight and to monitor the effectiveness of the operation of the scheme. These reports demonstrate the University's commitment to the continual improvement of the functioning of the scheme. The team saw material illustrative of changes intended to improve the effectiveness of the scheme: for instance, at the time of the audit, a job description for student representatives had recently been devised.

74 In the Briefing Paper the University identified the need for further progress in ensuring that postgraduate research students were represented effectively, particularly at institutional level. This view was confirmed by the audit team in discussion with staff who indicated that the voice of the postgraduate research student was a deficient area and that the planned Doctoral School would represent an opportunity to address this. Within schools, postgraduate research students have the opportunity through annual progress reviews to express their views, should more informal mechanisms prove ineffective.

75 The University's provision for student representation is regarded positively by the University and by most students met by the audit team. Representation generally works well at departmental level; students and staff met by the team confirmed that student/staff consultative meetings, departmental meetings and other fora acted as effective means for the discussion of matters raised by students. The team concluded that the student representative scheme operated on the basis of joint commitment and of continuous improvement, and that this helped to ensure that it remained effective, meeting the needs of both University and students. The team found that the arrangements for student representation were to the purpose and working well.

76 Through discussion with staff and students, the audit team came to the view that there was some disparity between the structured systems in place for student representation and the degree to which the broader student body felt that the University listened and responded to their views. There was a perception on the part of the students that at University level, specific student-led campaigns were the most effective way of securing action on particular issues. There was evidence that while the systems worked effectively at departmental level, they did not allow the University to obtain an overview of student views, to assist in determining priorities for resource allocation towards continuous improvement of the learning opportunities provided for its students.

Resources for learning

77 Responsibility for the strategic management of learning resources rests with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. The library and information technology (IT) are separate services, led by the Librarian and Director of IT Services respectively. Both services are represented on the University Teaching and Learning Committee to which they report annually. The Strategy and Resources Committee, and Council are both involved in the final sign-off of resource proposals, but the budgets for both services are set through the annual planning process with prioritisation within the budgets resting with the heads of service. The Information Services Committee also has a role in determining priorities for strategic investment. In addition, there are other non-permanent groups that contribute to the consideration of resource matters; these include a teaching facilities forum and a library resources access strategy working group. The system for identifying new library resource requirements draws on programme approvals. A system of submitting course reading lists on a termly basis is used to identify changing resource requirements for existing courses.

78 The library provides access to a wide range of traditional and electronic resources. An induction session to the library is included in the overall induction programme. At the time of the audit, the University was piloting 24-hour opening of the library, which was welcomed by the students. The majority of information and communication technology facilities are provided and supported by IT Services, and includes a number of computing suites which are open 24-hours a day. IT Services provides a wide range of short training sessions for both students and staff that can be booked online. The student written submission reported some dissatisfaction with the reliability of resources, which was reflected in the University's internal surveys. Usage statistics are used by the library to evaluate its provision; for example, entry statistics influence opening hours and staffing; borrowing statistics support the acquisition policy and the withdrawal of stock. Data from the Society of College, National and University libraries are used to monitor the operation of the library, for example, spending per capita in comparison with other academic libraries. Similarly, statistics are used by IT Services in appraising the use of computers in teaching and open access spaces.

79 Central resources are complemented in some departments by local library and specialist learning resources, for example, the Music Department houses a working collection of scores and recordings, a Mac-based IT suite, music studio and practice rooms. There is a number of departmental librarians, with well-resourced local facilities providing useful additional access to learning resources for students.

80 The Teaching and Learning Strategy includes the objective to 'promote and refine e-learning strategy' with a target for 'all undergraduates and a significant number of postgraduates to have the opportunity to engage with at least one course with an online component'. A number of local e-learning initiatives have been funded through the University's internal Teaching and Learning Development Fund and, e-learning was identified as the major theme for the academic year 2007-08 of the Fund for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching.

81 Study Direct, the University's virtual learning environment, was launched as an institution-wide service in autumn 2006. Take-up, to at least a minimum presence, has been reasonable and, at the time of the audit, the University was working to extend the use of Study Direct in supporting learning, teaching and assessment. Study Direct is managed by a team involving both IT services and the Teaching and Learning Development Unit, with IT services providing advice on technical matters. The newly appointed Director of Technology-Enhanced Learning will have a role in its future development. Booklets have been produced to support staff in developing the sites for their courses and it is planned that the range will be extended to provide greater guidance and some case-studies. There is also a leaflet introducing Study Direct to students. The University has conducted staff and student surveys about Study Direct and has used the information to inform ongoing development of the system. Students were surveyed six months after the launch and the feedback was positive regarding the impact on their learning, especially where sites were being used to foster discussion or provide activities. The University has concluded that e-learning has the potential to help to improve student access to learning resources.

82 Beyond Study Direct, all programme specifications and course information are available and accessible online from on and off-campus. Many courses and lecturers also provide web pages with access to course details, reading lists, past examination papers, workshop notes and responses to course evaluations; some are used to provide tests or problems and solutions. Study Direct is, therefore, not the only mechanism through which students are able to access materials online, although it does provide the potential for personalized information and for levels of interaction not available through the staff and course web pages.

83 The student written submission recorded student dissatisfaction with aspects of learning resources, a view also expressed by students in discussion with the audit team. Part-time students were of the view that resource and services were centred on the needs of full-time students and were not always available outside conventional term times and did not take due account of their needs. Students at all levels and stages of study reported that the library resources were inadequate for their needs; issues identified were lack of availability of course resources, out-of-date resources, limited access to electronic resources, the currency of journals and dissatisfaction with interlibrary loans and the cost of course 'readers'.

84 A library survey conducted in the academic year 2006-07 led to findings similar to those reported in the student written submission. Successive National Student Survey outcomes suggested to the University more student dissatisfaction with the library than had been apparent from internal feedback. As a result, the University sought to investigate the problems, which were complex. For example, a contributory factor was identified as more than three changes to course reading lists being made from one year to the next, leading to communication between departments and the library regarding the currency of reading lists being improved. The disposal policy of the library means that texts may be sold off if they are not on reading lists and are not used for three years; on occasion, texts have subsequently been restored to the reading list and so that copies have had to be purchased to replace those that were discarded. Academic library representatives have now been identified in departments to improve communication. Staff from the library are not members of school and departmental committees, but may attend by invitation.

85 The Pro Vice-Chancellor Education commissioned the Library and the Teaching and Learning Development Unit to review current practice in taught course provision and, as a result, a 'resource allocation strategy for first year courses' was developed and agreed in November 2007. The strategy requires departments to define expectations of the level of student engagement with items on reading lists, which will determine the provision of books in the library. The University also intends to place greater emphasis on e-books and e-journals; in this context the audit team noted comment in the student written submission that a significant proportion of students had difficulty accessing online journals.

86 The University has succeeded in raising the response rate to the National Student Survey as part of its strategy for improving the outcomes. In discussion with staff, the audit team was told that the University was confident that, over time, the actions it has taken will result in a positive change in the National Student Survey findings in respect of its learning resources. From its review of documentation, including committee minutes, the team concluded that the arrangements for the provision, allocation and management of learning resources in support of learning opportunities were satisfactory. The results of internal and external surveys indicate that there is scope for improvement in the effectiveness of the arrangements, with particular reference to the match between the provision of resources and student learning needs. There was evidence of the University taking action in response to the findings of such surveys; the University will wish to monitor the efficacy of that action in improving the learning resources available to students.

Admissions policy

87 Admissions policy and entry thresholds are set institutionally with the University Teaching and Learning Committee being 'responsible for academic-related admission policy and entry thresholds'. General admissions policies and expectations are set out in prospectuses for prospective students. A comprehensive guide to undergraduate admissions is disseminated to all

staff involved in admissions through an annual briefing; the guide contains detailed guidance on the duties of those involved, on processes and connected policies and is set within the context of policies on equality and diversity and widening participation, as well as those on recruitment.

88 The operation of policy and procedure is managed locally with appropriate support. There are termly meetings involving administrators and academic selectors to support those involved and as an opportunity to raise and debate issues. There are detailed admissions templates to 'distil the selection criteria used by academic selectors' for use by administrative staff. Borderline cases and any exceptions to standard processes are considered and decided upon by academic selectors.

89 Admissions are monitored against targets and reported to the Strategy and Resources Committee; adherence to required practice is monitored by the Admissions Office and any relevant matters are raised at the termly meetings, with substantive issues being referred to the University Teaching and Learning Committee. Admissions are analysed as part of annual overview reports on achievement and progression. Undergraduate admissions procedures are mapped against the guidance in the *Code of practice*, which was used in the design of the revised postgraduate admissions process implemented in the academic year 2006-07.

90 The audit found that the University had a coherent approach to admissions, with clearly defined policies, procedures and responsibilities. The policy is implemented consistently, with the staff involved being supported effectively, allowing the application of the policy to make a contribution to the University's management of the quality of learning opportunities.

Student support

91 The University's student support system combines centrally and locally provided elements. A director of student support in each school is responsible to the dean for the strategic development of student support within the school. First-line support is strongly focused at school level through professional student advisers, and support and advice offered by academic staff as course tutors and as academic advisers. Specialised and generic services are provided at institutional level and include disability advice, careers education, information and guidance and health services.

92 The University provides extensive information online about the range of services available. The general student handbook online acts as a useful point of information about key matters including sources of academic support, some information about assessment, student representation, complaints and appeals and library opening hours, and provides details of some of the expectations regarding studentships. In addition, each service has web pages providing information for students about services as well as links to other internal and external sources of information, support and help.

93 Induction on admission and re-induction in subsequent years are designed to ensure that students have been introduced to academic work and the support available to them and the expectations on them for their learning at each level of study. The audit team considered that re-induction was a helpful approach that assisted students to know what was expected of them at each level of study, and to reinforce important messages which might otherwise be easily overlooked or forgotten since the initial induction.

94 The school student advisers provide students with support and guidance as necessary. They work 'within a common framework of protocols' and offer support, advice and counselling, run the peer-mentoring scheme and act as a means to help students access other specialist services and support. Student advisers work closely with and support academic advisers in departments and, equally, work with centrally provided services to ensure that students obtain the help and support that they need.

95 In meetings with the audit team, students spoke highly of the student advisers and the student adviser system. The scheme is promoted effectively so that students are fully aware of it: web pages for each school provide details of the individual advisers and their contact details and

point to the kinds of help and support available. Situating advisers at school level ensures a knowledgeable and locally focused service, giving confidence both to students and departmental staff who refer students to the advisers. In discussion with the team, student advisers confirmed that they received good support from the University, including as providers of counselling, and in terms of how they were enabled to become knowledgeable about wider services and local needs.

96 The location of student advisers and associated support services at school-level is a distinctive and particularly effective element of the University's approach to student support. The audit team found the role of the student advisers that provides a coordinated local approach to student support and guidance, to be a feature of good practice in the University's management of learning opportunities.

97 The University has an agreed policy regarding academic feedback to students on coursework under which feedback must be provided no later than 15 working days from the submission deadline. There is no standard approach to providing feedback on performance in examinations, but students whom the audit team met confirmed that they received sufficient information on their marks and performance to allow them to apply the feedback to future assessments.

98 More general advice on academic progress is provided through personal tutors known as academic advisers, who meet students periodically to discuss their academic progress and performance. The University has been engaged in prolonged debate to try to establish agreement on minimum entitlements to academic advisory sessions. Successive poor results in this area in the National Student Survey resulted in considerable internal debate, which acknowledged levels of variation and led to a series of planned actions, culminating in agreement on the 'new baseline' for academic support for undergraduates for the academic year 2007-08. The baseline specification reiterated the commitment in the University's Teaching and Learning Strategy that 'every student should have access to a minimum of two one-to-one academic advising sessions per year'. The definition of minimum entitlement established the academic adviser as responsible for the oversight of the individual student's academic progress and intellectual development. The entitlement was communicated to students through web pages and handbooks and, at the time of the audit, its implementation and effectiveness was being actively monitored by the University Teaching and Learning Committee.

99 Programme convenors fulfil the role of academic adviser for taught postgraduate students. The procedures place the onus largely on the taught postgraduate student to seek an advisory meeting as necessary, but it is specified that the convenor should arrange to meet students if there appeared to be any academic problems.

100 The student written submission noted that some undergraduate students were unclear about the role of academic advisers and that some had found it difficult to contact their adviser. Similar difficulties were reported in discussion between students and the audit team, but all of the students were satisfied that there was someone to whom they would, and could, go for assistance if they had a problem. Students can also consult the student advisers on a range of academic-related issues, including: help in accessing information on courses; on academic regulations and procedures; advice on transferring, temporary withdrawal and returning to study; advice if at academic risk, or on examination board decisions and on complaints and appeals. In discussion with the audit team, academic advisers reported that the student adviser system was valuable support to them in their role in that it had not only helped to clarify the extent of the role of the academic adviser but also meant that academic advisers could confidently direct students on to professional and reliable sources of support locally on a range of academic-related and non-academic matters.

101 There is a range of centrally provided student support services, information on which is readily available online and through information issued to students. The central Student Support Unit provides disability and learning support services, there are Psychological and Counselling Services and a Career Development and Employment Centre provides career education, information and guidance. The University provides nursery and crèche facilities, a chaplaincy and

a health centre. Support for international students is provided centrally and both English language and academic practice and study-skills support for international students are offered by the Sussex Language Institute. The Institute also provides study-skills information through extensive resources on its web pages, which the audit team confirmed were very accessible. This resource has been built up over a number of years and from a review of the web pages, the team came to the view that the material covered was both detailed and helpful.

102 Students whom the audit team met considered that they were well informed about the support services available to them, and they knew how to access them and information about them. Those who had had direct experience of services, such as support for students with the attribution of dyslexia, were very positive about that experience. The student written submission confirmed that effective support was provided for students with disabilities. The Career Development and Employment Centre offers services to students and for graduates up to a year after graduation. The service provides career guides, information about job vacancies, a range of workshops and some work experience and shadowing opportunities; it also acts as a conduit to external websites and organizes recruitment fairs. Students are able to book individual sessions with a careers adviser. A credit-bearing career development course is available for undergraduates in a number of disciplines; the course was supported through the Teaching and Learning Development Fund and was piloted in the academic year 2005-06. Building on the pilot, the programme has been extended to other disciplines and, at the time of the audit was under review as part of the development of Sussex Plus (see paragraph 103). In spring 2008, an event entitled 'It's the final countdown' was offered as a day of events to support final-year students to obtain help towards the next steps in their careers. Central oversight of the career development service is maintained through an annual report to the University Teaching and Learning Committee.

103 At the time of the audit, the University was discussing proposals for an initiative entitled Sussex Plus. The plan is that Sussex Plus will integrate elements of personal development planning and careers development 'with the opportunity to develop and evidence skills through a range of experiences and skills/coaching workshops' for students on all taught programmes. At the time of the audit, level 1 personal development planning was under development; level 2 will focus on career development and level 3 will be introduced in the academic year 2008-09. The intention is that there will be a Sussex Plus statement on students' degree transcripts.

104 Two Royal Literary Fund fellows who are established professional writers are available to help students to improve their writing skills. There is also a project on 'Student Academic Practice', which was being established at the time of the audit to provide online tutorials and guidance on generic academic skills aimed primarily at first-year undergraduate students.

105 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University offered a comprehensive and accessible range of services to support its students. There remains some work to be done in the area of personal development planning, given the national expectations on Higher Education Progress files. The establishment of a consistent approach to personal tutoring has been challenging for the University and was the subject of lengthy discussions, which have led to effective academic and personal support.

Staff support (including staff development)

106 The Human Resources Committee advises the Council about the Human Resources Strategy and policies and exercises oversight of their implementation; the Committee reports to Council through the Strategy and Resources Committee. The Director of Human Resources is a member of the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor has responsibility for the academic leadership of human resource matters, including the quality assurance of teaching staff. In the Briefing Paper, the University affirmed its broad commitment to appoint scholars capable of excellence in teaching and research.

107 Prior to, and at the time of, the audit, the University was implementing a significant programme of internal change; accordingly, the University decided to defer the renewal of

the Human Resources Strategy and corporate staff development plan until the new Corporate Strategy was finalised. Existing procedures do cover the relevant matters and the Human Resources section is continuing to develop its processes and procedures through its operational plan. Priorities for completion in the academic year 2007-08 include: developing leadership and management capability, the design of a new reward system for high performance and a range of actions in equality and diversity; priorities for the academic year 2008-09 include the development of an integrated performance management system.

108 The human resource procedures are easy to access on the University's web pages and cover matters such as staff recruitment, selection and appointment, probation, promotion and reward. There are specific policies for part-time hourly-paid staff known as associate tutors. Heads of department have significant responsibilities for 'recruitment, appraisal, mentoring of new staff, staff development and performance review'. Aspects of promotion decisions are delegated to schools, as is responsibility for local induction and the operation of appraisal. Annual reporting of compliance with procedures, or occasional specific requests to deans to confirm compliance, enable the institution to appraise the extent to which the procedures are implemented.

109 At the time of the audit, induction for new staff had recently been revised. Induction consists of a short briefing for all staff followed by a separate session for academic staff, together comprising half a day. There are guidelines on local inductions which, at the time of the audit, were being revised as a checklist to form part of 'an integrated performance management system' to embrace 'induction, probation, career development, performance review, promotion and reward' to be developed and implemented over the coming 18 months.

110 Probation procedures outline a series of criteria that academic staff are expected to be able to meet before appointment is confirmed. The criteria include engagement in teaching and research and having completed, or being near to completing, the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (paragraph 111), if the member of staff does not hold membership of the Higher Education Academy. A committee at school level makes recommendations on confirmation of appointment to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, who makes a decision, subject to confirmation by the Vice-Chancellor, on behalf of Senate.

111 Staff with fewer than three years teaching experience undertake the part-time Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education delivered by the Teaching and Learning Development Unit through the Sussex Institute School of Education. The course is accredited and recognized by the Higher Education Academy and the Staff and Educational Development Association. At the time of the audit, 43 staff had completed the programme. The second module consists of a research project; the results of three of these projects are posted on a dissemination page providing wider access by University staff. The University 'strongly supports' its staff to achieve recognition from the Higher Education Academy and pays the fees for joining.

112 The University's policy is that all new academic staff should be allocated a member of senior staff as a mentor but the University acknowledges that practice 'continues to be variable' and that it needs to develop guidelines to ensure that all new staff benefit from mentoring. All postgraduate research students who are employed as associate tutors must be allocated a mentor.

113 Annual appraisal is a matter for schools which are required to have a suitable policy in place and to report to the University on the number of appraisals conducted as part of the operational planning and performance review process. Appraisal results in a personal action plan. The Briefing Paper signalled the University's intention to develop the appraisal process by moving to a performance-based approach to appraisal, to support the strategic aim of a 'high performance culture' in the University.

114 School promotion boards consider applications for promotion and make decisions or recommendations depending on the grade of post involved; promotions to professor and reader are made by the Academic Promotions, Advancements and Titles Committee, which may appoint a professorial appointing committee where it believes there is a prima facie case for promotion to

professorial grade. There are clear criteria for the promotion of academic staff and guidance notes for applicants with further advice provided on writing a reflective teaching profile.

115 A range of general staff development courses is offered by the Staff Development Unit. Details are available online and in a booklet setting out the opportunities available, including the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and the bi-annual Sussex Associate Tutors Training Programme. There is also a number of courses supporting research. Training is offered on matters such as health and safety and risk assessment. The sole corporate priority for staff development for 2008 and 2009 was academic leadership for 2008 and 2009 with the intention to improve academic leadership and develop leaders from within the institution. At the time of the audit, selected staff were undertaking leadership training through an external supplier.

116 The Teaching and Learning Development Unit provides support for pedagogic matters linked to institutional projects, for example, it supported a project for Science Curriculum Reform (see paragraph 130). The Unit also supports staff in their role as researchers through supervisor training workshops. The University determined that general open-training sessions were not effective and so the Teaching and Learning Development Unit now provides bespoke support to departments on pedagogy and the development of teaching and learning as well as support for projects.

117 For a number of years, the University has supported a broad range of initiatives and projects in teaching and learning through an internal teaching and learning development fund and the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund monies. Staff teams or individuals can bid for funds from the former to support initiatives and innovations in teaching. Information on funded projects, and reports on them when complete, are posted on the Teaching and Learning Development Unit's web pages. There has been funding for both projects led by academics and those located in support areas and connected with the wider student experience; for example the web-based career development course. InQbate, the University's Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Creativity, has also supported a number of projects; information about current projects are posted on InQbate's web pages.

118 Associate tutors with fewer than three years teaching experience are required to attend the Sussex Associate Tutors Training Programme, which includes a variant of the course for those associate tutors employed as demonstrators. The training programme is accredited by the Higher Education Academy and leads to recognition as an Associate of the Academy. Associate tutors are part-time hourly-paid staff; increasingly such staff are employed on open-ended, fractional contracts and are often postgraduate research students. The University regards its approach to assuring the quality of teaching by associate tutors to be robust with a consistent approach and adequate support in place across the institution. In 2003, the University's internal procedures identified some procedural difficulties associated with contractual matters for associate tutors and commissioned a major review resulting in a report to the Senate leading to systematic change, to secure an improved and consistent approach to the conditions of service for associate tutors.

119 The Associate Tutors' Review Group monitors the implementation of the guidelines for the employment of associate tutors and continues to develop the procedures. It also helps to develop good practice, for example, the development of subject-specific training at departmental level. There are web pages that provide information and guidance for associate tutors, those who employ them and those administering the contracts. The web pages provide a single reference point for information, including the handbook for associate tutors, a checklist for heads of department and detailed and helpful frequently asked questions. There is clear guidance on information and support to be provided for associate tutors involved in summative assessment. There are specific guidelines governing the use of postgraduate research students as associate tutors, which ensure that teaching demands do not impinge on the students' research, with a stipulation of a normal maximum of six hours teaching per week. The support for associate tutors continues to be developed; an online course 'preparing to teach' is available and is recommended to all new associate tutors to help to prepare them for their first teaching session.

120 Review of the relevant documentation confirmed that the procedures governing the use of associate tutors were operating in accordance with the stated policies and procedures and that the University continued to be vigilant in monitoring in this area seeking to improve practice. The audit found the University's response to the identification, through its standard processes, of inequities in relation to the conditions of service for hourly-paid staff which has led to a consistent, effectual and vigilant approach to the employment and support of associate tutors to be a feature of good practice in the management of learning opportunities.

121 At the time of the audit visit, the Pro Vice-Chancellor Education was leading a debate on 'enhancing the visibility and reward' for excellent teaching in line with the goals of the Teaching and Learning Strategy. Teaching awards may be presented to individuals making an outstanding contribution to teaching and learning, which embraces the supervision of research students in this context. The awards are open to those supporting learning and those contributing to validated courses as well as those delivered within the institution. There are detailed published selection criteria against which cases must be made. The University encourages staff to apply for National Teaching Fellowships and has aligned its scheme with the national criteria to maximise the chances of success.

122 The coordinating role of the Staff Development Unit and the work of the Teaching and Learning Development Unit enable the University to provide a range of appropriate staff development opportunities. From a review of the relevant documentation the audit team found that Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund monies and internal funding had been used to support agreed priority areas and a number of developments intended to improve the quality of the learning opportunities provided. There are clear indications that a more strategic approach to staff development is being taken which is linked to priorities defined by the executive - namely academic leadership and the development of e-learning. The shift of approach from an open fund supporting teaching initiatives to one that has a centrally set theme is intended to help the University to deliver its Teaching and Learning Strategy and to increase the opportunities for students to experience and benefit from blended approaches to learning. The provision of supervisor training, the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education for less experienced staff, and the training of associate tutors all contribute effectively to ensuring that staff are appropriately equipped and supported to teach, to support learning and engage in assessment.

123 The audit team read a range of the University's documentation and associated reports and minutes setting out and demonstrating its approach to the management of learning opportunities. The team found that the University gathered feedback about the learning opportunities available to its students from a range of internal and external sources, including the outcomes of surveys, monitoring and review activity and reports from external bodies, but that there was scope for greater synthesis and analysis of the intelligence derived from all these sources. The team came to the view that the University's management of student learning resources was secure but that there was potential for the institution to make more effective use of the range of information available to it on the continuing suitability of its provision of learning support and facilities. Accordingly, the team considers it advisable that the University review its approach at institutional level to the use of the qualitative and quantitative management information collected from both internal and external sources with a view to establishing an holistic and methodical approach to the provision of student learning opportunities. As the University considers this recommendation it may wish to give particular attention to the contribution of the annual quality monitoring and periodic review processes to the appraisal and systematic improvement of student learning opportunities.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

124 The University has a Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policy but the Briefing Paper identified the Teaching and Learning Strategy as 'the principal driver for systematic change leading to enhancement of the student experience'. Quality enhancement is defined by the University as 'the process through which we reflect on what we do in order to build on strengths and address weaknesses in a systematic way'.

125 The portfolio of the Pro Vice-Chancellor Education embraces the academic leadership of quality enhancement and the overall student experience for taught programmes; responsibility for enhancement of the postgraduate research student experience at this level is not specified in the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policy. The University Teaching and Learning Committee exercises delegated authority from Senate for 'enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities' and the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policy identifies the Committee as 'the main driver for change and improvement'. Whilst leadership responsibility rests with the Pro Vice-Chancellor Education, key support for quality enhancement is provided by the Teaching and Learning Development Unit through its support and delivery of enhancement projects and by the Academic Office through the dissemination of good practice emerging from quality assurance processes. At school level the directors of taught programmes and of doctoral studies both have enhancement within their remit.

126 The Briefing Paper stated that the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund Action Plan was aligned with the Teaching and Learning Strategy and was 'intended to deliver, with the support of specific funding, systematic changes across the University'. It has been used to support the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and the Sussex Associate Tutor Training Programme, work on student evaluations and a range of other projects, for example volunteering and skills and career development.

127 In the academic year 2007-08 the long-standing Teaching and Learning Development Fund was recast as a Fund for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching. The Teaching and Learning Development Fund was responsive to departmental initiatives rather than being centrally and strategically driven. The new fund is directed towards support for projects addressing an identified theme aligned with strategic priorities, being e-learning/technology enhanced learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching, a strand within the Teaching and Learning Strategy. The theme was identified through a collective corporate decision. The scheme allows for both large-scale projects, from £10,000-£50,000, and for small bids for less than £5,000, when not all monies have been allocated to large projects.

Management information - quality enhancement

128 Consideration is given to destinations of leavers in higher education data at University level and within periodic review. As a result of benchmark comparisons, the University has identified graduate employment as an area where it seeks to improve. A key contributing factor to the relatively poor performance in terms of graduate employability is identified as being the proportion of students who stay in the immediate area after graduation. The University used Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund monies to invest in careers and skills development for students and at the time of the audit was extending its approach as 'SussexPlus' (see paragraph 103).

Good practice

129 The University identifies a range of mechanisms and practices as vehicles to develop and share good practice. Staff who have received teaching awards deliver sessions about effective practice on the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. Where evaluations indicate that an associate tutor is effective in the role, that tutor is asked to contribute to the Sussex Associate Tutors' Training Programme. The University acknowledges that peer observation of teaching works more effectively in some departments than in others, at its best it

is seen as a means to develop and share good practice. The newly established Student Experience Forum (see paragraph 20) has been created as an arena 'to monitor and share good practice on issues relating to student well-being and the wider student experience'.

130 In the Briefing Paper the University drew particular attention to the Science Curriculum Reform Project to update the curriculum and to make the student experience more relevant. The audit team was told that the spur for the reform came from quality assurance processes and the comments of external examiners and that the project was supported through the Teaching and Learning Development Unit and Teaching and Learning Development Fund. The project resulted in the introduction of a revised curriculum for entrants to science and engineering in 2006. The University's Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching in creativity operates as InQbate jointly with the University of Brighton. The project works through Creativity Zones which offer flexible space and resources and extensive technology and are used for workshops and seminars. An associated Creativity Development Fund supports teaching and learning projects.

Staff development and reward

131 The University has clear statements defining teaching excellence and expectations of teaching performance in its procedures for probation and promotion. Teaching awards, supported through the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund, are used to encourage and recognise teaching quality. There are clear criteria and guidance notes governing the provision for teaching awards which is aligned with the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme. The University's Briefing Paper stated that around 12 to 15 staff applied each year for these awards, of whom about six are short-listed to provide a portfolio of evidence, with three or four awards being made. The selection panel for the awards is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and includes student representation.

132 The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Policy states that the University has 'a management framework for the development and support of...enhancement, for fostering a climate of review and reflection, and for leading and setting targets for enhancement'. At the time of the audit the University was working on developing a systematic and embedded approach to quality enhancement and modifying its quality assurance procedures to assist it in achieving this aim. From its reading of the documentation and discussion with staff and students the audit team concluded that the University endeavoured to improve the learning opportunities provided for students through a range of mechanisms to support developments in teaching and learning, innovations and change. The team found that the approach to dissemination of good practice within the University was relatively passive, for instance, reports of funded projects are posted on web pages. The team found limited evaluation of the impact or effectiveness of the University's overall approach to enhancement for students and their learning but, in the view of the team, the development and implementation of the student evaluation and continuous improvement strategy has the potential to make a significant contribution in this area.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

133 The University is a partner in a range of partnership arrangements for the delivery of collaborative provision. Apart from one articulation agreement, all the partners are based in the United Kingdom. There are six institutions involved in validation arrangements and two further education providers to which foundation year provision is franchised.

134 The University's approach to the management and regulation of collaborative provision is stated in a range of documents which set out, amongst other things, the University's policy on franchising and validation, its requirements with respect to agreements, its expectations for the operation and monitoring of collaborative arrangements and the processes for assuring the academic standards and quality of collaborative provision. All these documents are clear, comprehensive and explicit about the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved in collaborative arrangements.

135 The Collaborative Provision Committee oversees the operation of the University's collaborative arrangements and the associated processes and procedures. There are active steering groups for each collaboration, which operate to common terms of reference including: discussion of strategic developments within both institutions that might have a bearing on the relationship; consideration of relevant developments within the higher education environment; scrutiny of review reports from external agencies and professional bodies to identify necessary actions; discussion of academic linkages; the current provision, proposed changes and developments; and, since the academic year 2007-08, the sharing of good practice with a view to the enhancement of academic quality. The Committee also monitors progress in the fulfilment of conditions and recommendations resulting from recognition and re-recognition of institutions and validation of programmes. The Committee undertook a comprehensive mapping exercise of the University's processes for the management of its collaborative provision against the relevant guidance in the *Code of practice*. Scrutiny by the audit team of documentation relevant to the operation of the University's collaborative provision confirmed that the University's policies and procedures in this area were fully in alignment with the guidance in the relevant sections of the *Code*.

136 The University has a standard memorandum of agreement which is accompanied by a series of annexes covering institutional recognition, validation of taught programmes, administrative arrangements for students, assessment procedures, complaints and appeals, staffing arrangements, use of the University name, details of the steering group, a schedule of payments, confidentiality and termination arrangements. The memorandum and annexes are explicit about the roles and responsibilities of the parties to the agreement.

137 A partner handbook sets out the policy frameworks in the area and the requirements and schedules for reporting to the University on the operation of the provision. The handbook also provides definitive information on the Collaborative Provision Committee, examination boards and examiners, link tutor requirements, memoranda of agreement, protocols for changes to the provision, network days and staff development, and the approach to certification of awards, which meets the expectations of the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice*. The audit team found the document to be comprehensive, providing a clear and suitable framework for the operation of the University's collaborative provision.

138 The approval of potential partners is subject to scrutiny at the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group, and the University Teaching and Learning Committee, in accordance with set procedures. The recognition of institutions is time limited and subject to re-recognition. The delegation of authority to validated institutions does not extend to the appointment of external examiners who operate under the terms of the University's requirements with respect to all such examiners. External examiner reports are scrutinised by the staff in the Partnership Office and considered by the Collaborative Provision Committee which acts in a way analogous to a school teaching and learning committee in relation to the procedural requirements in this area. The Collaborative Provision Committee receives annual examination board reports from each partner.

139 Programmes of study operating at partner institutions are approved through a formal validation event with external representation and a process requiring alignment with the relevant external reference points. The audit team examined documentation providing an illustrative example of a validation and recent review of a Foundation Degree programme delivered in a partner institution. The validation document was professional in tone and included all the information required by the University's validation process. The content of the proposal was analysed in relation to the relevant subject benchmark statements, including the Foundation Degree benchmark statement. There was full consideration of the potential market for the programme and of the resource requirements. The programme specifications included the assessment schedule and other assessment related matters. The documentation included letters of support from the relevant industry. The Collaborative Provision Committee's validation panel had the necessary external representation. The recommendations and conditions attached to the

approval were addressed conscientiously and fulfilled in a consultative process between the two institutions.

140 The Foundation Degree programme was reviewed in 2008 through consideration of a reflective analysis from the course team which was evidence-based and referenced to the Academic Infrastructure, together with supporting statistics and external examiner comment and the responses thereto. The review panel included external academic and industry representation. The audit found that the review was thorough and placed the College in a strong position to prepare for the revalidation to be undertaken in 2009.

141 Other examples of approval, monitoring, review and re-recognition for collaborative provision were provided by the University and reviewed by the audit team. They were all illustrative of rigorous procedures being conscientiously applied in a manner which assured the quality of the provision, addressed student need and ensured that the academic standards of the awards involved were secured. The outputs from the relevant processes are reported through the relevant University committees in a transparent manner securing explicit and rigorous institutional oversight of the operation of the provision.

142 In addition to the procedures described above, the Pro Vice-Chancellor Education has executive oversight of collaborative provision. The day-to-day operation of the activity is managed by the Partnership Office. The Partnership Office seeks to ensure that procedures and agreements for the whole spectrum of collaborative activity take account of the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*. Staff of the Office hold regular meetings with each of the partners and each partnership has a link tutor who meets the partner at least twice a year and reports independently to the Collaborative Provision Committee. The Committee also receives reports from examination chairs and/or observers.

143 A Joint Planning Group oversees the partnership with the University of Brighton, including the development of any joint degrees; membership of the Group comprises the vice-chancellors, pro vice-chancellors and the most senior administrative officers of each University. There are joint degrees regulations covering admission and registration, attendance, examination and awards and appeals that define where each individual institution retains those powers established by Charter or articles of Governance. The bespoke arrangements necessary for the management of academic quality and standards were found to be based on clear and defensible principles and to operate through clear, comprehensive and rigorous procedures, overseen by high level committees able to deal with the strategic and academic management of the relationship.

Brighton and Sussex Medical School

144 Brighton and Sussex Medical School was established in 2003 as a collaborative arrangement between the University and the University of Sussex. The Universities determined that, given the size and scale of the venture, the existing arrangements for joint awards of the two Universities would not be appropriate, and, accordingly, a bespoke set of policies, administrative procedures and operational protocols governing academic standards, quality assurance and enhancement, administration and finance was agreed. The University of Sussex is responsible for administering the employment of staff and the finances held in common, and the University of Brighton is responsible for student administration.

145 The Joint Approval and Review Board is the primary body responsible for the academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience at the Medical School. The Board is accountable both to the Senate of the University of Sussex and the Academic Board of the University of Brighton and ensures that the academic standards of the awards of the Medical School and the associated policies and procedures and oversight of learning opportunities are consistent with those of both parent institutions. Significant cross-membership of the Board and its subcommittees with the parallel committees in each parent institution is designed further to ensure joint ownership of the programmes. Complaints and appeals are administered by the

University of Brighton with joint representation on panels. The Medical School has extensive involvement with external reference points, in particular the General Medical Council and local National Health Service organisations. The provision offered by the medical school is fully compliant with the requirements of the General Medical Council.

146 The terms of reference and the functioning of the Joint Approval and Review Board ensure that the processes and procedures governing the operation of the Medical School articulate effectively with those of both parent institutions, and that the division of responsibility between the Universities is clear. Minutes and documentation from the Joint Approval and Review Board demonstrate effective stewardship of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities in the Medical School. Meetings with staff of the Medical School and review of relevant documentation indicated to the audit team that students and staff derived considerable benefit from the range of learning opportunities afforded to staff and students of both institutions through the joint arrangement. The audit found that the University was vigilant in meeting its responsibilities for the joint provision of the Brighton Sussex Medical School and that the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities was secure.

147 The arrangements for stewardship of academic standards and quality in the University's collaborative provision were scrutinised and tested through reading of the relevant documentation and discussion with staff. The arrangements were found to be fully in line with the terms of the Academic Infrastructure and to provide a robust and defensible means for providing assurance on academic standards and quality to all interested parties, including students. The audit found the University's approach to the management of collaborative provision which is characterised by well thought out and supportive processes for quality assurance and enhancement to be a feature of good practice in the University's management of its academic provision.

Other modes of study

148 There are two overseas distant research degree schemes. On one of these the students at a partner institution are registered students of the University, and are taught by University staff through workshops in both countries. Students are supervised by University staff and the formally approved arrangement is subject to annual monitoring with reports to the Doctoral School Committee. At the time of the audit, arrangements for a fourth cohort of students at the partner institution were being negotiated. In the other case, an International Professional Doctorate in Education, students are drawn from a range of locations but again are registered with the University and are supervised by University staff. Tuition is by intensive processes through a summer school at the University in Sussex followed by a research thesis. Electronic resources are available to students through the normal University provision. In this case too, no additional academic risks that are not addressed through the University's normal quality assurance processes appear extant. Scrutiny of the relevant documentation established that the University's approach to the management of distributed and distance learning was in alignment with the relevant sections of the *Code of practice* and was operating as intended.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

149 Research features strongly in the strategic priorities of the University both as an activity in its own right and as a driver for teaching. At the time of the audit, the University was considering the University Strategic Plan: Draft White Paper document in which Goal 1 was 'Innovative research and scholarship' glossed as 'to undertake research of international recognition which transforms world economies and societies and develops leading-edge scholarship, bringing together work across different disciplines'. The Briefing Paper indicated that the University was seeking 'significant growth within the research strategy' and that 'postgraduate research programmes [were] set to become a major strand within the new corporate strategy'.

150 The Briefing Paper signalled the intention to found a Doctoral School to 'oversee the development and coordination of postgraduate and postdoctoral research activity'. In discussion with the audit team senior staff pointed to the academic year 2009-10 as the most likely period for the establishment of the Doctoral School, a year later than originally envisaged. The University intends that the School be a 'fifth strand in the current Research Strategy', in line with the 'importance of research students/postdoctoral researchers to the University's wider research function and objectives'.

151 The University has a clear governance structure for research encompassing institutional, school and departmental level decision-making. At institutional level the focus for strategic development is the Research Committee which is a subcommittee of the Senate and has the main responsibility for the creation of the Research Strategy. There is also a systematic research governance committee structure at University and school level to 'cover statutory and ethical compliance, research integrity and, where appropriate, sponsor specific requirements'. Institutional oversight of arrangements for postgraduate research degree programmes is undertaken by the Doctoral School Committee with school research degree committees acting at the local level.

152 The University has a Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes which was updated in June 2006. There are three sets of regulations for Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy, for Professional Masters and Professional Doctorates, and for Research Degrees in the Brighton and Sussex Medical School. The University's Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes is incorporated, along with regulatory information, in a comprehensive Handbook for Directors of Doctoral Studies, Research Programme Convenors and Research Supervisors on research student policies and procedures (hereafter referred to as the Handbook for Directors of Doctoral Studies) which is updated annually. The complementary Handbook for Research and Professional Doctorate Students, issued to all postgraduate research students after registration is also updated annually. Approval and monitoring of these documents is a key element in the terms of reference of the Doctoral School Committee.

153 Documentation, including a mapping of the University's practice against the advice of the section of the *Code of practice* on postgraduate research programmes, and relevant handbooks, demonstrates that the processes for examination of postgraduate research students are designed to ensure that academic standards are maintained, both through procedures and by the appointment of directors of doctoral studies in schools with clearly defined responsibilities in this area. The documentation also points to the University's intent to achieve good practice in supervision and support, particularly at department and school level.

154 A 'Research at Sussex' document makes reference to 'excellence...in a broad range of disciplines' and of an 'academic community' with 'strong and distinctive strengths'. Postgraduate research students are thus recruited to departments where research has a strong presence alongside teaching or which have research centres dedicated to research. The websites of departments across the University show regular programmes of seminars for postgraduate research students, the utility of which was confirmed by students in meetings with the audit team. The audit team found the strong and relevant programme of seminars offered by the Sussex Law School to be particularly noteworthy.

155 The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey carried out in 2007 found that 67 per cent of respondents considered that the research environment at the University met or exceeded their expectations. The University presented an analysis of the results to the Doctoral School Committee in the autumn of 2007. The Briefing Paper noted the necessity to give attention to 'the need to provide research students with a sense of belonging and integration within a vibrant research community; general limitations in terms of infrastructure and resources...'; and variability in provision of 'Roberts' skills training'. The Briefing Paper indicated that the University anticipated that these matters would be 'in part addressed through the introduction of a Doctoral School'.

156 The Handbook for Directors of Doctoral Studies and the Postgraduate Admissions Handbook covering both taught and research programmes, available on the University website, set out systematic policies for admissions. In relation to qualifications, for example, the Handbook for Directors of Doctoral Studies includes the stipulation that '[t]he entrance requirements for a programme shall be determined by the Doctoral School Committee' ; the Admissions Handbook indicates that the 'standard academic entry requirements for admission to...a research degree in science is at least a good honours degree or some other qualification that is recognised by the University as equivalent...The standard academic entry requirement for admission to a research degree in the humanities or social sciences is a masters' degree'. The Handbook for Directors of Doctoral Studies is more specific about the criteria for admission which include requirements for the candidate's level of qualification, language competence, and the validity of the proposed research project, and also criteria relating to the research environment and University resources. Both documents demonstrate that decision-making in this area is systematic and managed at an institutional level. In particular, final decisions on the admission of individual students are made first by the prospective supervisor in the department or research centre but then on the authority of the director of doctoral studies of the relevant school in conjunction with the registrar and secretary or nominee. The director of doctoral studies must be involved directly in cases where the candidate does not meet the standard entry requirements.

157 The Handbook for Directors of Doctoral Studies sets out the responsibilities for the induction of new postgraduate research students at both formal and informal levels. As part of induction, students are provided with a number of documents, but the key focus is the requirement that 'departments or Graduate Centres should arrange meetings for new students presided over by Directors of Doctoral Studies or nominees at which students should be familiarised with 'The Responsibilities and Duties of Research Degree Supervisors and Students'. These responsibilities and duties are clearly worded and included in the handbooks and the directors of doctoral studies or their nominees are responsible for complementing the regulatory guidance with more informal advice as necessary. As the previous paragraphs indicate, the University has put in place a framework for selection, admission and induction which is, in all respects, sound in ensuring equitable treatment for applicants and newly registered students.

158 The University's rules for supervision and the expectations it has of supervisors are set out principally in the Handbooks for Directors of Doctoral Studies and for Students referred to above, and in the University's Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes. Here, as elsewhere, the different levels of the University work together, with the University setting out a policy and regulatory framework which is implemented at departmental level, and monitored at school level. In key respects the University's requirements for supervision mirror the relevant precepts and guidance in the *Code of practice Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, in particular setting out clearly for students and staff that there must be a 'main' supervisor who will be a 'clear point of contact in the event of difficulties'. In addition, students and staff are told that the University requires the appointment of an 'additional supervisor' to 'provide advice and support when the "main" supervisor is not available'. Students are assured that 'in the event of loss of a supervisor' the department and school are responsible both for finding a replacement and for support during the interim period.

159 The University Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes includes clear criteria for the appointment of supervisors including a requirement that the main supervisor is an experienced and permanent member of staff. The University sees it as 'desirable' that main supervisors have had experience of examining research degrees at other institutions, and that all supervisors should have undergone training for the role. The University provides some of this training through the Teaching and Learning Development Unit; staff are also advised of other courses from external providers. Evidence seen by the audit team indicates that this framework generates an effective supervision system. In the submission to the QAA Review of postgraduate programmes the University was able to report that 'overall progression and outcome trends were broadly in line with sector-level performance and, in some areas...we perform somewhat better than the norm'.

160 The University has a robust process for the monitoring and review of the progress of postgraduate research students, clearly set out in the Handbook for Research and Professional Doctorate Students, in the Handbook for Directors of Doctoral Studies, and in the University's Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes. The process involves consideration and action at three levels, but with a particular focus on the school level. Thus, within the department, the student and the supervisor produce separate reports, using a standard template; an annual review meeting is also held between the student and one other person (nominated by the Director of Doctoral Studies) who is not the main supervisor. The reports and notes of individual annual review meetings are then reviewed by a departmental-level group with a good spread of supervisory experience. The group identifies those students whose progress gives some cause for concern, or where problems have been identified and flags those cases which require attention by the Director of Graduate Studies. The Director of Graduate Studies is responsible for approving (or not), the progression of all research students on behalf of the school on the basis of the departmental recommendations. The handbooks also specify the actions to be taken if the review reveals a lack of progress or any other problem.

161 The University also has processes for more generalised learning from the annual review meetings and reports. Schools are required to take an overview of student progress through a school-based committee chaired by the Director of Doctoral Studies which embodies summary outcomes and any action which might require university-level attention. This loop has led thus far to action on specific issues largely related to individual students rather than matters with institutional significance.

162 The Handbook for Research and Professional Doctorate Students indicates clearly that the first focus for the development of research skills rests with students and their supervisors. The Handbook for Directors of Doctoral Studies states squarely that primary responsibility for training in direct research skills rests with departments but the Teaching and Learning Development Unit through the SP2 Sussex Postgraduate Skills Programmes also plays a role in this respect. Specification of training needs and completion of training are also a very significant part of the student annual review form and in this way take-up by students comes to the attention of the Director of Doctoral Studies along with other performance issues.

163 The extent of the postgraduate research programme and the overall strength of the research environment in most departments and the focus on training matters within the annual review process together represent a sound basis for training in preparation of the thesis. The University specifically requires that students be offered training in preparation for their examination; however, students meeting the audit team indicated that the nature of this training depended on schools and that there was some variability in practice. The team considers it desirable that the University take stock of departmental practices in the support and preparation of postgraduate research students for assessment to encourage consistency of approach across the institution.

164 The provision of training in transferable skills is the main focus of the University's SP2 Sussex Postgraduate Skills Programme. The postgraduate research experience survey indicated some student dissatisfaction with provision in this area and the University's own review confirmed the need for greater consistency in the delivery of research-skills training. There is evidence of good practice here driven both from the centre and to capture good practice in schools. Evidence of change in response to the review findings comes in the introduction of a three-day Personal Skills Course for DPhil students and the Profolio Professional Researcher Development Programme. This latter focuses on transferable skills in 'workshops...[held] in the learning space of the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Creativity...[an] innovative learning environment [which] allows face to face approaches to be combined with the use of technology, in a blended and highly stimulating way'.

165 The University is of the view, with which the audit team concurs, that the approach to the allocation of Roberts Funding in the future will be a significant factor in the further development

of research training. The Briefing Paper indicated that the 'vast majority (80%)[of the funding]' was distributed to the schools but that it was likely that in the future a greater proportion of the monies would be retained for central provision and management with less being provided to the schools. A progress report from the Doctoral Skills Working Group noted work in progress towards a 'new programme of skills training' for the academic year beginning in autumn 2008. The training programmes for those postgraduate research students recruited as associate tutors is relevant here, both in specific terms of providing training for an academic career, and more generally for the transferable skills acquired through this training and work.

166 The University has a number of feedback mechanisms whereby the quality of the postgraduate research study experience, and to a lesser extent the performance of postgraduate programmes generally, is monitored, of which the annual review process and the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey are the most significant. Committees play a part both as conduits for feedback and as places where feedback is discussed and acted upon. Thus postgraduate research students are automatically represented in the school student forums, and may also be members of the University Student Experience Forum. School research degrees committees have a duty to consider the annual review reports and the Doctoral School Committee has an analogous item in its terms of reference.

167 The University has processes for the examination of research degree students which align with the description of features of research degree assessment in the *Code of practice, Section 1: postgraduate research programmes*. The criteria for appointment as an external examiner are clear and are readily accessible in the University's Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes, which also sets out that each examiner must separately complete a report on the thesis before there can be any discussion with other examiners. Academic standards are further assured by the fact that all decisions made by examiners are subject to ratification by the Research Degree Examination Board or Professional Doctorate Examination Board on behalf of Senate. The University's Code of Practice takes note of the factors that the section of the *Code of practice* on postgraduate research programmes indicates should be considered in examination arrangements. Thus it allows also for the appointment of additional examiners where the subject of the thesis is interdisciplinary, and specifies a five-year embargo period on the appointment of former members of staff. It also allows for an examination panel having an independent chair in addition to the examiners, but this is only 'where it is school or departmental level policy, or where there are particular circumstances that warrant it'. The audit found that the framework for assessment of postgraduate research students was sound.

168 Scrutiny of relevant documentation, including handbooks and committee minutes confirmed that the University's structures and processes for the management of its research degree provision were sound and operating as intended. The University's approach meets the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: postgraduate research programmes* in respect of the academic standards of the awards. In the view of the audit team the establishment of the Doctoral School will provide the University with a vehicle for systematic enhancement of the quality of postgraduate research programmes across the institution.

Section 7: Published information

169 The University uses printed prospectuses and its website to publish information for prospective undergraduate and postgraduate students and other interested parties. Information in both the printed prospectuses and the website is organised logically, by subject area; details of joint degrees are included in both subject areas. The University also includes information for undergraduate students about both studying and student life at the University, illustrated by short comments from existing students. This approach allows a prospective student rapidly to find overall details of a particular subject area, and go on to easy access to a departmental website which carries larger amounts of information about programme specifications and courses. Additional information can be accessed via the website, indicating that the University

is making good use of this means of communication. Review of a sample of prospectus and web-based material confirmed that the information about programmes, including entry requirements and the regulations was accurate and up to date.

170 The University has clear procedures for generating and checking copy and to avoid the potential for inconsistency arising from departmental exercise of devolved responsibilities. Although individual departments originate the copy for the prospectus, the Academic Office checks and signs off documents for publication. The audit team confirmed that the University had suitable processes to manage the accuracy of published information, including a Code of Practice agreed by the Information Services Committee.

171 Information about the University is provided in the standard format on the Unistats website. Teaching Quality Information was the subject of comment in the previous audit. The update on developments since 2004 provided for the audit team stated the University's view that programme specifications were 'formal records of the curriculum delivered' and as such 'of most use to academic and administrative officers rather than prospective students'. The University believes that prospective students' 'requirements for information are better served by the University's prospectuses and recruitment material' and that 'programme handbooks written specifically for undergraduates/and or postgraduates are a better medium for communicating the detailed information about programmes'. The handbooks are available on the University's website.

172 For registered students there are several sources of published information to enable them to understand programme requirements and choose courses. There is general access via the websites for individual departments to programme specifications and a relatively brief description of each module within the programme. Students can access overall details of learning outcomes, assessment methods and teaching methods. Schools and departments publish a good deal of information useful for registered students on their websites. Handbooks are increasingly available in electronic form within Study Direct (see paragraph 81). A number of departments provide students with 'guest' access to full information about a course and the experience of students studying the course but there is also a number of sites closed to guests. The University is aware of the inconsistencies in this area, and the audit team was informed by senior staff of the University that it aimed to improve Study Direct as a teaching technology but also as a vehicle for the consistent publishing of information by bringing it more directly and systematically within the control of the newly appointed Director of Technology-Enhanced Learning.

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

RG 392a 09/08

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ISBN 978 1 84482 878 4

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786