QAA

Loughborough University

March 2008

Annex to the report

Contents

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Loughborough University (the University) from 10 to 14 March 2008 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

Outcomes of the institutional audit

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

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit team found that there is evidence that the University is taking deliberate steps to promote quality enhancement, including the appointment of quality enhancement officers and a Pedagogic Research Associate, which is considered a feature of good practice.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

Overall, the audit team found that the University's processes and procedures for postgraduate research programmes make an effective contribution to its management of the quality and standards of those programmes.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the prioritisation of students in the institutional culture (paragraphs 103, 110, 128, 135, 142, 145)

- the thorough approach to the promotion and management of industrial links and placement opportunities to enhance the educational experience of students and the future employability of graduates (paragraph 118)

- the integration of the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in learning and teaching to enhance student support and the student experience (paragraph 124)

- the development of the role of quality enhancement officer and its close link with departments to support enhancement activities (paragraph 155).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- review the management of assessment, progression and degree classification procedures to ensure that they test that programme learning outcomes are met and that equitable treatment of students across the institution is assured (paragraphs 57, 64)

- review the strategic oversight and overall management of collaborative provision to ensure that procedures and practice take appropriate account of the precepts of *Section 2* of the *Code of practice* (paragraphs163, 164, 165, 166, 169, 170, 192).

Recommendation for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- reflect on the processes of programme approval, monitoring and review with a view to ensuring that the opportunities for enhancement afforded by external involvement are capitalised upon; and the outcomes of the processes are fully reported so that good practice is effectively captured and quality enhancement supported. (paragraphs 44, 52, 88, 90, 91, 94, 119, 134).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1   Loughborough University (the University) traces its origins to 1909 when Loughborough College was founded. It became a College of Technology in 1957 and became Loughborough University of Technology in 1966. It amalgamated with the former Loughborough College of Education in 1977 and with Loughborough College of Art and Design in 1998. The Charter and Statutes were amended in 1996 when the title of the institution was changed to Loughborough University to reflect the growth in breadth of its subject disciplines.

2   At the time of the audit there were 12,627 full-time students (10,505 undergraduate, 1,241 taught postgraduate and 881 postgraduate research students). There are 2,062 part-time students (381 undergraduate, 1,499 taught postgraduate and 182 postgraduate research students). International students number 944 undergraduates, 936 taught postgraduates and 429 postgraduate research students, making a total of 2,309.

3   The University describes its collaborative provision as modest in scale. It has recently withdrawn, or intends to withdraw, from several partnerships. Nevertheless, the overall numbers of students on collaborative programmes are increasing. There has been a steady expansion in the numbers of students on validated Foundation Degree programmes at Loughborough College and new programmes have been introduced year by year to provide a comprehensive portfolio in the area of sport, exercise and fitness. The most significant development has been the University's involvement with the British University in Egypt, leading in September 2007, to the decision to approve the validation of the current degree programmes at the British University in Egypt to lead to dual awards of the British University in Egypt and the University. Another new development is a validation agreement with the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Singapore, which allows the Academy to deliver a one-year programme in Graphic Communication leading to a Loughborough University BA Honours degree. The University has a small number of distance-learning modules and programmes, all at postgraduate level in specific niche areas, mostly within the Faculty of Engineering or the Business School. In 2007-08 approximately 530 students were registered at the University as full distance learners and about 100 as part distance learners.

4   The University's mission is:

- to increase knowledge and understanding through research which is internationally recognised

- to provide a high quality international educational experience with wide opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds which prepares graduates for the global workplace

- to influence the economic and social development of individuals, business, professions and communities.

5   The University's vision for learning and teaching is encapsulated in its strategic plan. It considers that 'Loughborough's defining characteristics are its student-centred ethos and outstanding reputation for high quality teaching and student learning…We have an outstanding record in education, working with employers to deliver learning opportunities for our students that provide them with the skills and experience necessary for success in the world of work'. Over the next 10 years the University intends to:

- build its international reputation as a leading United Kingdom (UK) provider of research-informed education

- provide diverse opportunities for all students to develop qualities of critical enquiry and independent learning within a supportive and intellectually stimulating learning environment

- expand its portfolio of activities in order to equip Loughborough graduates and postgraduates for the challenging opportunities of a rapidly changing global environment

- continue to work with its students to listen to their needs and encourage their participation in enhancing the quality of learning and teaching.

The information base for the audit

6   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 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 audit team had a hard copy and electronic copy of all documents referenced in the Briefing Paper; in addition the team had access to the institution's intranet.

7   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.

8   In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the previous institutional audit in 2004 and of an audit of overseas provision in 2002

- reports by QAA of review of Foundation Degree provision in 2005

- reports of reviews by QAA at the subject level since the previous institutional audit

- the institution's internal documents

- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.

Developments since the last audit

9   The previous institutional audit in March 2004 found that broad confidence could be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards.

10   The audit report contained four recommendations that the University was advised to consider:

- develop strategies to ensure that communication across the University's matrix quality

management arrangements are less reliant than is the case at present on the contributions of the Associate Deans (Teaching)

- ensure that an external peer perspective can be brought to bear on the approval of new undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes, updating its Academic Quality Procedures Handbook to reflect its requirement that the external membership of periodic programme review panels does not include serving or recently retired external examiners as the external peer, and that the balance of the membership of periodic programme review panels is less weighted towards those with a direct interest in the programme or programmes under review

- consider how the appointments process for its external examiners might be made more visibly the responsibility of a senior committee, such as the Learning and Teaching Committee

- continue to enhance the development of the Corporate Information Services, to enable the provision of cohort analyses, trend analyses and admissions data to inform annual programme review and periodic programme review.

11   The University described its progress in addressing these recommendations in a Progress Report submitted to QAA in September 2005. Further stages in these and related developments were also described in the Briefing Paper.

12   Various measures have been taken to address the recommendation concerning the pivotal role of the Associate Deans (Teaching) in communication on quality affairs. These include some minor changes to routine approval procedures and the appointment of two quality enhancement officers and a pedagogic research associate to support the work of the Associate Deans (Teaching).

13   The nature of the provision of an external perspective on programme approval was also reviewed by the University in response to the 2004 audit report. The 2005 Progress Report states, 'We are reviewing the guidance given to departments on issues on which external advice and guidance should be sought and aim to ensure that such advice and guidance is sought from independent sources'. Subsequently, the Curriculum Sub-Committee of the Learning and Teaching Committee agreed that 'the seeking of comments from a senior external academic on a new programme proposal as part of the preparation for the operational approval phase should continue to be a requirement'. Guidance on questions to be asked of both academic and industrial reviewers was also issued in order to provide a more structured response for consideration by the Curriculum Sub-Committee.

14   In relation to the concern over the composition of periodic programme review panels, the University has since updated its Academic Quality Procedures Handbook to make it clear that the external member of the periodic programme review panel must not be serving, or have served in the past five years, as an external examiner in the department. It has in addition made it a requirement that the academic staff members on a periodic programme review panel should not normally include any individuals who are making a significant contribution to the delivery of the programmes under review.

15   The University's consideration of the recommendation concerning the appointments process for external examiners was reported in the 2005 Progress Report. The University took the view there that the particular course of action suggested in the recommendation would lead to additional bureaucracy and delay the approval of appointments without adding real rigour to the appointment process. However, the review of both this and a number of related aspects of the external examining process led to an extensive revision in 2004-05 of the Code of Practice on External Examining for taught programmes. The revised Code provides new guidelines for the appointment of external examiners and the information they should receive on appointment as well as describing procedures for handling external examiners' reports. The most recent version of the Code was adopted in June 2007.

16   In connection with the recommendation to continue the enhancement of Corporate Information Services, the 2005 Progress Report stated that a major redevelopment of its in-house student information system was taking place. Implementation of the undergraduate admissions module of the Loughborough University Student Information system took place in October 2006 and most aspects of student-related functionality were delivered for the 2007-08 session. Efforts are being made to produce data, including cohort analysis, in a form to best help departments undertaking annual programme review and periodic programme review.

17   These measures demonstrated to the audit team that the University has seriously considered all the recommendations for advisable action of the previous audit and had made good progress in addressing them.

18   The 2004 audit report also made recommendations judged to be desirable for the University to consider. The first of these recommendations was to 'identify responsibility for overseeing the quality management of collaborative provision more specifically, and review whether, and how, the University's routine quality management arrangements might require enhancement to support collaborative provision'. The 2008 audit team found that aspects of collaborative provision remain an area of concern and this issue is discussed fully in Section 5 (paragraphs 159, 171).

19   Further recommendations for desirable action, including dissemination of good practice described in reports from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies' reviews, specific quality issues in relation to joint courses, and aspects of the periodic programme review process have been addressed satisfactorily by the University.

20   The 2004 audit report noted several areas of good practice which the University has subsequently taken steps both to maintain and strengthen further, including development of the quality enhancement officer and pedagogic research associate roles; the development of the virtual learning environment 'Learn'; links with employers; and the work of the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. These are discussed below in paragraphs 155, 123, 116 and 124. Several of the subsequent developments in these areas continue as examples of good practice.

21   Other key developments since the 2004 audit include the publishing of a new Strategic Plan, 'Loughborough University - Towards 2016' which was approved by Council in December 2006. The plan is underpinned by implementation plans in all key areas of activity. A revised Learning and Teaching Strategy was produced and forms the basis of the current implementation plan for learning and teaching.

22   A decision to establish a Teaching Centre (referred to as the Centre for Teaching and Learning in the Briefing Paper) to support the professional practice of staff has been approved, although plans for bringing this into effect are still under development.

23   The September 2005 Progress Report recorded that a major revision of the Academic Regulations had been undertaken with a view to making them easier for staff and students to use while also changing procedures in various areas to reduce bureaucracy. Some changes of principle were also incorporated. The resulting assessment rules, however, failed to satisfy the present audit team that they can ensure that assessment tests that the necessary programme learning outcomes are met and that equitable treatment of students across the institution is assured, and this issue is discussed more fully in Section 2 (paragraphs 57, 60 to 64).

24   There have been several developments since 2004 relating to the institution's arrangements for research students. These include the establishment of the Graduate School and the appointment in June 2006 of its Director. Following the publication in July 2006 of the report of QAA Review of research degree programmes, the University established a Regulations Review Group chaired by the Director of the Graduate School. The Regulations Review Group produced the following recommendations in response to the QAA report: a periodic review of research degree programmes on a departmental basis every three years, a minimum of 12 formal recorded

supervisory meetings per student per annum and the use of a pro forma for annual research student progress reports to be submitted to the Research Student Office prior to re-registering a student. All these recommendations have since been approved by Senate. The Regulations Review Group additionally recommended that each faculty board should co-opt a postgraduate student and from 2007-08 all faculty boards have had a postgraduate student in membership.

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

25   Senate, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, is the overarching body responsible for the standards of awards and quality of provision. Five Senate committees and three faculty boards report to Senate. Membership includes one student from each faculty, elected from within their own number, as well as two students from the Loughborough Students' Union Executive.

26   The Learning and Teaching Committee, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching), advises Senate on matters of policy relating to teaching and learning and is responsible for the maintenance and enhancement of quality in learning and teaching. Membership of the Learning and Teaching Committee includes the Vice-Chancellor, the three Associate Dean (Teaching) post-holders, and faculty representatives. The Librarian and Director of IT Services receive Learning and Teaching Committee papers and have a standing invitation to attend for items of particular relevance to their services. There are two student members appointed by Loughborough Students' Union, one of whom is a postgraduate.

27   The Learning and Teaching Committee's Curriculum Sub-Committee is responsible for scrutinising all proposals for new programmes and maintaining an overview of the entire range of programmes. One of the two student representatives from the Learning and Teaching Committee is a member of this committee. A special British University in Egypt Validation Sub-Committee reporting to the Learning and Teaching Committee has recently been established to handle the collaborative provision with the British University in Egypt.

28   The Programme Quality Team, under the executive direction of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching) and with a Senior Assistant Registrar as team manager, oversees the operation of the quality management framework in respect of taught programmes and acts as a policy advisory committee to the Learning and Teaching Committee.

29   The Student Services Committee, one of several joint committees that report both to Senate and Council, provides strategic leadership and guidance in the provision of student services and support across the University. Students are represented by the Loughborough Students' Union President and Vice-President and another student appointed by the Union.

30   Faculty boards advise and report to Senate on all matters relating to the organisation of education, teaching and research in the subjects of the faculty. They are responsible for monitoring quality issues within their constituent departments. The faculty deans are chairs of their faculty boards and ultimately responsible for quality matters. The faculty's student representative on Senate is a member of the board, along with a further student, normally from the faculty, appointed by the Students' Union Council according to the principle that one of the two student members should be a postgraduate. From 2007-08 faculty boards have also been asked to co-opt a postgraduate research student to membership, making three student members in all.

31   The three faculty Associate Deans (Teaching) support and advise the deans in learning and teaching matters and form a two-way communication channel between the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching), committees and teams at the centre of the institution and academic departments. They are members of the Programme Quality Team and of the Curriculum Sub-Committee.

32   At departmental level, the head of department has responsibility for compliance with University framework regulations and procedures but departments have flexibility in determining their own local arrangements for managing how they achieve this. Most departments follow the

model of having a Learning and Teaching Committee, typically chaired by the Learning and Teaching Coordinator and involving those members of staff who are programme directors. These committees consider learning and teaching matters in detail and bring forward proposals to full departmental meetings chaired by the head of department.

33   In its Briefing Paper, the University details a number of characteristics of its quality management framework in respect of taught programmes. The audit team found a variety of evidence to support the claims made. In respect of the claim for a well-documented and clearly defined framework of regulations, codes of practice and notes of guidance, the team found that the Academic Quality Procedures Handbook proved to be a readily accessible, accurate and helpful document. In addition, the minutes of the Learning and Teaching Committee and Curriculum Sub-Committee provided evidence that the framework enabled the effective overall management of standards. From meetings with staff responsible for the management of standards, there was clear evidence that academic staff were aware of their obligations at departmental level as well as having a good knowledge of the available codes of practice.

34   A further feature highlighted in the Briefing Paper is the flexibility allowed to departments in managing their own approaches to quality management. This is a reflection of the stated aim of the University that its quality management systems 'strike a balance between a necessary degree of central steer to promote consistency and coherence, and sufficient local flexibility to recognise the needs of different departments and disciplinary cultures'. The Briefing Paper further describes that this is achieved both through the expertise of the Associate Deans (Teaching) and close cooperation with central support units.

35   Overall, the audit team found that the University's framework makes an effective contribution to the management of quality and standards. However, the team found that the manner in which these processes were employed did not always succeed in achieving the University's aim of promoting effective practice through its annual programme review and periodic programme review processes (see paragraphs 84 to 94).

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

36   The University states in its Briefing Paper and in its Academic Quality Procedures Handbook that its Learning and Teaching Committee has overall responsibility under Senate for the management of academic standards.

37   Associate Deans (Teaching), as the Briefing Paper states, play a pivotal role in maintaining academic standards, acting as an interface between academic departments and the central management. The importance and effectiveness of their role in this respect was confirmed by both the documentation the audit team saw and also the meetings the team had with the Associate Deans (Teaching) and with other staff. The pivotal nature of the Associate Deans (Teaching) is exemplified in the University's processes for programme approval, annual monitoring, and periodic programme review.

38   Approval for new taught programmes is sought in two stages: strategic and operational. Strategic approval starts with informal discussion between a department and the Associate Deans (Teaching). A proposal in outline form then receives early high-level consideration by the faculty directorate and by the Operations Sub-Committee, a sub-committee of Resources and Planning (from 2008 Operations Committee). The Operations Committee, which is chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and includes deans as well as senior university management, is not primarily concerned with standards. In this strategic phase, matters for consideration include the compatibility of the proposals with institutional strategy and departmental development plans, the availability of resources, and implications for other departments and the support services.

39   In the operational phase, a more detailed proposal incorporating any new module specifications, programme regulations and a programme specification is scrutinised by the Curriculum Sub-Committee which is concerned with securing academic standards and ensuring that account has been taken of external reference and professional accreditation requirements where applicable. It also scrutinises proposals to ensure compatibility with University regulations and guidelines such as those on modular structures. The Curriculum Sub-Committee's recommendations go via Learning and Teaching Committee and Senate to Council for final approval.

40   Proposals to revise programmes are considered initially by an Associate Deans (Teaching) who, following guidance in the Academic Quality Procedures Handbook, designates them as minor or major. Decisions on minor changes are made by the Associate Deans (Teaching). Major changes are processed in the same way as new programmes.

41   The evidence the audit team saw confirmed the University's view that its two-phase approval process provides Senate with the assurance that any new programmes and major revisions presented to it for approval have received scrutiny regarding academic quality and standards.

42   All the University's programmes are subject to an annual programme review. Departments are required to provide, on a programme by programme basis, data on recruitment, programme board decisions on progression and awards, withdrawals, and employment destinations for the previous academic year. The statistical data are accompanied by relevant external examiners' reports, reports of any accreditation visits, staff/student committee minutes, and reports from any external advisory committees. Departments must provide an account of action taken on the feedback from these sources, and where appropriate from employers of former students, as well as on issues raised by the teaching staff. From 2007/08, departments are also being asked to comment on their National Student Survey results. A Departmental Review Body, expected to include appropriate programme directors, is responsible for overseeing the completion and accuracy of the annual programme review documentation. A summative meeting of the review body is attended by the Associate Deans (Teaching) who leads the discussion. The outcome is a brief report for the relevant faculty board and the Learning and Teaching Committee. The examples the audit team saw confirmed that the process was being operated as intended, although there were some variations, particularly in the form and detail of the statistical data and analysis. The emphasis of the procedure was on the monitoring of quality and standards and the audit team confirmed that in this respect it was operating effectively. Further discussion can be found from paragraphs 84 onwards.

43   Each department's complete portfolio of programmes is subject to periodic programme review on a five-year cycle. Periodic programme review documentation includes a self-evaluative commentary, organised under a range of predetermined headings, plus statistical data and reports in the same way as for annual programme review but covering the previous three academic years. A curriculum map and assessment matrix for each programme are also now required, although the examples the audit team saw did not yet include these. The Review Panel is chaired by the relevant dean and includes an external assessor (not an external examiner for the department within the last five years) and the Associate Deans (Teaching); in the case of areas of joint provision, a link person from the other department involved also attends panel meetings. During meetings in the course of the audit, the audit team was informed that plans are in hand to include a student representative on the Periodic Review Panel, and this was welcomed by students.

44   The Review Panel meets students and staff as well as evaluating the documentation. The outcome is a brief and largely anonymous report prepared by Academic Registry for consideration by the faculty board and the Learning and Teaching Committee. As with the annual programme review reports, the audit team felt that more benefit could be obtained from the process if the reporting process was fuller and more specific (further discussion is given in paragraphs 89ff) but they confirmed that in respect of its function of maintaining standards it was operating effectively.

45   The University's procedures for the management of standards are defined in the web-based Academic Quality Procedures Handbook. This includes both policy and guidance for departments as well as templates for use in all the required monitoring procedures. Regulations provide a minimum standard which departments must meet, but some flexibility is allowed in the way this is done and they may be exceeded if there are specific discipline requirements.

External examiners

Taught programmes

46   The University has a Code of Practice for External Examining for Taught Undergraduate and Postgraduate Programmes. This was revised in 2007 and it defines very fully the way in which external examiners are expected to participate in the assessment procedures of taught programmes.

47   Appointments are made by Associate Deans (Teaching) following nomination by departments and are subject to a checklist of criteria for suitability to ensure that they are at the appropriate level of seniority and experience. The Associate Deans (Teaching) will expect a case to be made in support of any appointment that is outside the normal criteria. There is a full briefing and induction procedure for new external examiners specified in the Code of Practice. The evidence the audit team saw suggested that this was not always being fully complied with but recognised that this may have been because some aspects of the procedure were new.

48   External examiners have the responsibility for confirming the marks on a specified set of modules within a programme. One of the external examiners is nominated as an external programme assessor. This person attends the programme board and has the responsibility of approving the pass list (along with the chair and an independent board member from outside the department). The other external examiners are not required to attend the board, though the audit team was advised that they usually did. This is a relatively light touch procedure but is carefully specified and, provided this specification is complied with, should allow standards to be maintained effectively.

49   External examiners report to the University Examinations Officer, acting on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor, using a standard template. These ask several questions about the standards of the work reviewed and in the sets of reports seen by the audit team the external examiners were always satisfied with the standards achieved by the students. Completed forms are copied to heads of departments and faculty secretaries who summarise them for the Associate Deans (Teaching), with a copy to the head of department concerned. The actual external examiner's report is sent to the Associate Deans (Teaching) only if major issues are identified. There is space on the report form for external examiners to add comments that they do not wish to be disclosed to student representatives. External examiners are advised that they may send the Vice-Chancellor a separate confidential report if that is felt to be appropriate.

50   The head of department replies to the external examiner detailing actions taken or planned and issues to be raised with (or already discussed with) Associate Deans (Teaching), with a copy to the Examinations Office. In the two trail areas reviewed these replies were generally effective, but did not always address all the points raised by the external examiner. The report and reply is tabled at the next departmental staff meeting for the record, and for further action if necessary. In the examples seen by the audit team there was evidence that the issues raised by external examiners were addressed thoroughly at departmental level.

51   According to the University's Code of Practice, from 2007 the report should also be discussed at the next staff/student committee meeting involving student representatives of the programme/s concerned. From the evidence seen, the audit team concluded that this was largely being implemented, although not always by being discussed at staff/student (liaison) committees: in one case it was put on the intranet, and in another it was included on the agenda

of the department's Learning and Teaching Committee, which included a student representative. Copies of the report are included in the next annual and periodic programme reviews and so are seen by Associate Deans (Teaching) at this stage and responded to again if necessary. These responses were very thorough in the examples seen by the team, apart from one exception, produced some time ago.

52   A list of institutional issues is extracted from the faculty summaries for consideration by the Programme Quality Team who recommend further action as necessary and feedback to heads of department. While the audit team saw evidence that such action was taken when appropriate, the examples of these summary reports seen by the team were mechanical collations without any analysis. There was no evidence of their use for the dispersion of best practice. This was one instance where the University might better capitalise on the opportunities provided by external involvement in its quality assurance processes for the identification of good practice and quality enhancement. Others occur elsewhere in the annex and feed into the recommendation given in paragraph 90.

53   Overall, the audit team found that the University's 2007 Code of Practice for External Examining for Taught Undergraduate and Postgraduate Programmes provided effective procedures for using the external examining procedure to maintain the academic standards of the University's programmes and awards and that the changes it introduced were being integrated into departmental procedures.

54   External examiners for postgraduate research programmes are formally appointed by the faculty Associate Dean (Research) who ensures compliance with the criteria specified in the Regulations for Higher Degrees by Research. Consistency across faculties is ensured by the Assistant Registrar, Research Student Office who processes all appointments.

55   Overall, the audit team confirmed that the University has clear and rigorous processes for operation of its external examiner systems and makes appropriate use of independent external examiners in assuring the standards of its awards.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

Taught programmes

56   Overall responsibility for ensuring that the University's regulations and policies for undergraduate and taught masters programmes reflect the Academic Infrastructure lies with the Learning and Teaching Committee advised by the Programme Quality Team. At a local level, the University relies on an effectively informed staff and a system of checks in templates for programme specifications, periodic review and external examiner reports to ensure that external reference points are complied with. All the templates referred to have explicit questions about engagement with the relevant elements of the Academic Infrastructure. The Curriculum Sub-Committee of the Learning and Teaching Committee is responsible for monitoring new programme specifications for engagement with the relevant elements of the Academic Infrastructure. Monitoring of continuing engagement is primarily the responsibility of Associate Deans (Teaching), through external reports and programme reviews and through the annual update of programme specifications, programme regulations and module specifications. The audit team found evidence of this system in the outcomes of the processes, and considered it to be well understood by staff.

57   Departments were consulted on compliance with the Qualifications Framework for Higher Education in 2003. Two-thirds of departments submitted responses and these were considered by the Programme Development and Quality Team, the predecessor to the Programme Quality Team. One area of some concern identified by the audit team arises from the fact that although the University has a credit accumulation system for monitoring progress, it has not until recently required modules to be assigned to credit levels. This has resulted in some ambiguity in the

assignment of levels to modules and the potential for modules to be at the wrong, usually lower, level leading to uncertainty about appropriate learning outcomes and assessment procedures. This was particularly the case for some master's programmes. The problem is recognised by the University and is being addressed. From the academic year 2007-08, the University is requiring all modules to be formally assigned to credit levels. The University considers that this will also facilitate engagement with the recommendations of the Burgess Group and with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. It will also help assure the equitable treatment of students across the University (see paragraph 64). The team encourages the University to monitor the introduction of this change to ensure that there is full implementation of effective credit level descriptors as soon as possible, and that this should be considered as part of addressing the recommendation in paragraph 64.

58   There is good evidence of responsiveness to changes in the Academic Infrastructure. In 2006, the Learning and Teaching Committee revised the guidelines for new programme specifications to incorporate features from the QAA document, Guidelines for preparing programme specifications, published that year. In 2007, the Learning and Teaching Committee revised the University's regulations for double-marking to bring them into line with the September 2006 revision of the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*. Other changes, for example in the subject benchmark statements, are notified to departments and Associate Deans (Teaching) and the latter are responsible for checking their incorporation into the annual update of programme documentation.

59   Further external involvement in the University's processes is discussed in paragraph 77 (professional, statutory and regulatory bodies), paragraph 81 (programme approval), and paragraph 43 (periodic programme review).

Assessment policies and regulations

Undergraduate programmes

60   All University Bachelor undergraduate programmes must comply with Regulation XX in the Calendar but departments may specify additional requirements for particular programmes. Students register for 120 credits each year, unless they are on a placement year, giving a total of 360 credits for an undergraduate programme. To pass a year (or part in the University's terminology), including the final year, the regulations require that students must obtain a minimum of 100 credits and a minimum of 20 per cent in each module. This is a relatively low criterion and it was not clear to the audit team how the University could assure itself that the stated learning outcomes for a programme could be met with a 20 per cent minimum on up to 60 credits. The team noted that some departments already acknowledged this and required their students to obtain 120 credits to pass the year. These comments would apply, with appropriate modification, to integrated master's programmes.

61   Examination scripts are subject to anonymous marking, but coursework is left to the discretion of departments. Projects and dissertations must be double-marked. Coursework must be internally moderated if it contributes 50 per cent or more to the module mark. Group work that contributes 50 per cent or more to the module mark must contain an element of either individual or peer assessment. The audit team felt that, although the two 50 per cent cut-off points were on the high side relative to those elsewhere in the sector, they were acceptable.

62   Programme boards are responsible for receiving final examination marks. Each consists of the head of department as chair, three or more internal examiners (one of whom acts as a deputy chair), an independent member from another department and the external assessor, but the latter can be dispensed with in certain strict conditions. There are no module review boards, so external examiners must see and approve marks in discussion with the relevant internal examiner before they are presented to the programme board. Any mark adjustments suggested by an external examiner from seeing a sample of scripts or other assessed work must be reflected

in similar adjustments to scripts or other assessed work not included in the sample. Programme boards can only change individual module marks for impaired performance due to illness, for example, or as the result of viva voce exams. The University's regulations do, however, allow programme boards to exercise discretion and classify students who have not met the requirements for passing a degree, provided the module or modules involved have a total weight of not more than 20 credits in any part of the programme. This condonement can also be used to facilitate the progression of students between years. After the first year it requires the approval of external examiners, and programme boards are required to include specific details of the reasons for any condonement decisions in their reports. The audit team noted that the Learning and Teaching Committee has been exercised about variability in condonement practices between departments at least since 2004-05. Following discussion in 2007, when it was noted that condonement had sometimes been used inappropriately and that many departments had not included reasons for any condonement decisions in programme board reports, the Learning and Teaching Committee reinforced the requirement to include the reasons for condonements in board reports. In 2008, the Learning and Teaching Committee noted again that there was variability in the extent to which condonement was being used, with four departments condoning more than 3 per cent of students and one 'having an average margin of failure…much higher than any other department'.

63   The average percentage marks for each year are combined in the ratio indicated in programme regulations to determine the programme mark. There is no standard University weighting. The programme mark leads to a classification according to the standard UK scale, but 'At the discretion of the Programme Board, any or all of the Programme Mark thresholds…may be lowered by not more than 3 per cent. In such a case, the revised threshold(s) shall be applicable to all students under consideration by that Programme Board'. There is no alternative profiling scheme for classifying according to the distribution of classes over the component modules.

64   The audit team concluded that, overall, there is a substantial degree of discretion available to programme boards: in the weighting of different levels in degree classification, in the classification thresholds used, and in the condonement of failure to meet progression requirements and classification thresholds. The team noted that the University was monitoring this variance between programmes, but was not convinced by the arguments put forward to justify its continuance. In particular, the team was concerned that it had the potential for giving rise to inequity, for example between students on different programmes taking the same module. The team, therefore, considers it advisable that the University review the management of assessment, progression and degree classification procedures to ensure that they test that programme learning outcomes are met and that equitable treatment of students across the institution is assured.

Taught postgraduate degree programmes

65   All University taught postgraduate programmes must comply with Regulation XXI in the Calendar. Students must have registered for a total of 180 credits, passed 150 credits at 50 per cent or better and gained 40 per cent or better in the remaining modules in order to achieve a master's degree. An overall mark of 70 per cent achieves a distinction, although this may be dropped to 67 per cent for all students on a programme at the discretion of the programme board. The University's regulations give programme boards no discretion for varying the student's outcome apart from taking into account impaired performance from illness, for example, and the results of viva voce exams.

Research degree programmes

66   Overall standards are maintained by the examining process which is prescribed in the Regulations for Higher Degrees by Research and their accompanying Notes for Guidance. This follows a standard format which complies with the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate*

research programmes and national good practice. Preliminary reports are written before consultation between examiners and submitted with the final report to the Research Student Office where they are read by the Assistant Registrar. If the Assistant Registrar has concerns the reports are referred to the relevant Associate Dean (Research).

Management information - statistics

67   The Planning Office produces a University Statistical Handbook. Key performance indicators, one of which is the proportion of students gaining First and Upper Second class degrees are reviewed by Council. A Performance Monitoring Group monitors performance against targets set by business plans, including admissions data, but not progression or completion rates. These are reviewed at departmental level as part of the annual programme review and periodic programme review procedures and if there were a major problem information about this would be passed to the centre by the Associate Deans (Teaching).

68   Some progression and completion statistics are available for downloading from the Student Information System, but the audit team found that in some instances the statistics accompanying review documentation were either modified by hand if they were downloaded, or had been produced independently, and were not always very complete. The University recognised some time ago that there is a weakness in the existing management information system's database structure and is in the process of replacing it with a new system, Loughborough University Student information (LUSI). This has gone live and should fully replace the existing system by December 2008. LUSI is being designed in-house as a collaborative project with input from across the University. It will be integrated with the new virtual learning environment and when fully functional will provide detailed information for both the centre and departments, covering all aspects of student administration admissions and progression, as well as data trends for gender and ethnic minority. Subsequent developments will include online student registration and management of programme regulations providing a single student portal with full integration of academic and administrative functions.

69   A Student Diversity Working Group is charged with analysing data on diversity and as a result of identifying two possible concerns with black and minority ethnic students, including a slightly lower completion rate, has commissioned an internal study of the experience of ethnic minority students. The interim report confirms a substantially lower performance by some of the British University in Egypt student groups, but has not yet addressed the reasons behind this.

70   There are good data available on admission and submission rates of postgraduate research students which is monitored by the Research Team and the Research Performance Monitoring Group.

71   The audit team found that the University currently has available a reasonable but unintegrated set of statistical data on students. However, it makes effective use of these in monitoring student performance. The team also found that Loughborough University Student information is being well and thoughtfully planned and will substantially strengthen the University's ability to monitor and analyse the performance of its students reliably.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

72   The Briefing Paper notes the University's strong commitment to learning and teaching, student involvement that is encouraged and valued, and collegial and cooperative relationships that extend across the University. The learning and teaching quality systems take into account the full range of academic practice in which staff engage, and, therefore, link to research activities and to the development of enterprise activities. Research-informed teaching and student learning opportunities facilitate an engagement with external organisations in business, industry, the public sector and the professions. The University also states its support for close cooperation between central support sections engaged in learning and teaching matters and its promotion of

a culture of ongoing review and evaluation, which it sees as integral to the University's quality systems as a whole.

73   The University has a Learning and Teaching Strategy, for which there is a regularly updated implementation plan. The last iteration was in June 2007. The vision encapsulated in the Learning and Teaching Strategy includes a commitment to providing diverse opportunities for students to develop qualities of critical enquiry and independent learning within a supportive and intellectually stimulating learning environment and to working with the students to listen to their needs and encourage participation in enhancing the quality of learning and teaching.

74   The implementation plan for the Learning and Teaching Strategy is a key output of the Learning and Teaching Committee. The audit team found that the Committee provides an important mechanism for enabling the University to guide and monitor its management of learning opportunities. From discussions in the course of the audit visit and from scrutiny of the minutes and papers of the Committee, the team found that the operations of the Learning and Teaching Committee made an effective contribution to the achievement of the aims of the Learning and Teaching strategy and to the management of learning opportunities.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

75   As noted previously, overall responsibility for ensuring that the University's regulations and policies for undergraduate and taught master's programmes reflect the Academic Infrastructure lies with the Learning and Teaching Committee advised by the Programme Quality Team.

76   The University has reviewed its own practice and procedures against the precepts and guidance set out in the different sections of the *Code of practice* as they were first published, using its own internal documents as the starting point for reflecting on the *Code* and on the basis of such reflection amending its internal procedures where necessary. Later revisions have been reviewed as necessary and significant additions and changes of substance or emphasis have been brought to the attention of members of the Programme Quality Team and, where appropriate, others more closely involved at an operational level in the area concerned, who have been invited to consider whether to recommend any changes to the University's internal procedures. The University's internal codes of practice provide evidence of this consideration. For example, the University considered that National Student Survey results suggested review of assessment and feedback procedures and the revised *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students* was used as a guide to shape proposals for change.

77   Many of the University's programmes are accredited by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. Departments take responsibility for managing relationships with accrediting bodies, and the processes for annual programme review and periodic programme review show evidence of including the outcomes of such engagement as part of routine review. In some instances, recommendations from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies have implications for university-wide policies and processes, and the route through the Associate Deans (Teaching) to the Programme Quality Team and, where applicable, to the Learning and Teaching Committee and Senate is evidenced.

78   Overall, the University makes effective use of the *Code of practice* and other reference points, but the University's attention is drawn to the need for further engagement with the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* (see paragraph 170).

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

Programme approval

79   The University has a two-phase approach to the approval process for new programmes and to major changes. Details of the process have already been given from paragraphs 38

onwards. In the two trail areas, the audit team was able to follow the path of operational programme approval arrangements for new programmes. Details of the procedures are readily accessible on the University's website; relevant templates are available from the Template Shop.

80   The University uses a pro forma template for submission of new programme approval. Documentation seen by the audit team confirmed that the completed templates and related documentation (programme specifications and assessment matrices) meet the requirements of this system. The minutes of the Curriculum Sub-Committee provide evidence of appropriate scrutiny of submissions with follow-up actions on those issues requiring them.

81   The submission process for a new programme includes a requirement for external input. This had recently been reviewed, and the requirement reaffirmed. A standard letter has been drafted for departments to use when approaching an external reviewer, seeking responses to specific questions. At least one external senior academic is approached. An existing external examiner is often used for this purpose, but the process also allows for an industrial/commercial viewpoint where relevant to the nature of the programme.

82   The examples of programme approval processes sampled by the audit team preceded the establishment of the 'standard letter' approach to external input to programme approval. Examples from the trail areas show that the external input is sought and made available as part of the information for consideration by the Curriculum Sub-Committee. The range of comment is not wide. The areas questioned by means of the standard letter are limited and concentrate on standards issues. While, therefore, the University receives general reassurance that the programme is of an appropriate standard and content, the opportunity for enhancement of curriculum design and delivery is not necessarily taken by the external assessor. Again, this is an instance where the University might better capitalise on the opportunities provided by external involvement in its quality assurance processes for the identification of good practice and quality enhancement. The University will wish to take this into account in addressing the recommendation in paragraph 90.

83   The University considers that its two-phase approval process provides Senate with the assurance that any new programmes and major revisions presented to it for approval have received scrutiny, not only as regards academic quality and standards but also in strategic and resource terms. The audit team found that the University's management of changes to programmes and development of new programmes was largely effective in assuring that the quality of learning opportunities is assured.

Annual and periodic programme monitoring

84   The University requires that departments review all taught programmes annually and that a periodic programme review process, encompassing a department's complete portfolio of programmes, is undertaken on a five-year cycle. Details of these processes have been given in paragraphs 42 to 44. The audit team reviewed the evidence of these processes from within the trail areas.

85   Both annual programme review and preparations for periodic programme review are the responsibility of a departmental review body, and involve gathering and considering a wide range of information such as data on recruitment, programme board decisions on progression and awards, withdrawals, and employment destinations for the previous academic year. Relevant external examiners' reports, reports of any accreditation visits, staff/student committee minutes, and reports from any external advisory committees are also considered. In the case of annual programme review, student feedback on the programmes is reviewed. The audit found that, through examination of the documentation and discussion with University staff and students, the comprehensive and systematic operation of annual programme review processes was evident and that the review process is undertaken in line with stated practice and protocols.

86   The audit team was interested in the operation of the departmental review body process. The detail of the discussions by the departmental review body of the information base is gathered only informally, by the Associate Dean (Teaching), who produces a summary report across the department's provision, for consideration by the relevant faculty board and the Learning and Teaching Committee. This summary includes consideration of review outcomes in relation to collaborative programmes.

87   Discussions with staff from the University confirmed that the University recognises that this approach, while effective in demonstrating quality assurance, may be less effective in supporting quality enhancement. The University has already moved to enable the quality enhancement officers to participate in the annual programme review departmental review body meeting and compile more detailed, enhancement-oriented reports. The audit team endorsed the value of this and took the view that this was a helpful development.

88   Annual programme review considers the reports of external examiners. The template used by the examiners does not include specific questions about areas such as resources, facilities or other broad areas of student support or access to learning opportunities, and comment during annual programme review, therefore, is limited in connection with such matters. Together with the concise nature of the summary reports of issues identified by external examiners that are seen by central University bodies (see paragraph 52), this may inhibit the ability for the University to capitalise on the opportunity for independent views on these matters and their contribution to quality enhancement.

89   Periodic programme review encompasses a department's complete portfolio of programmes on a five-year cycle. Details of the process have been given in paragraphs 42 to 44.

90   A periodic programme review report is produced by the Academic Registry according to standard headings. The reports of periodic programme review seen by the audit team were summary reports, set out according to a format in line with expectations regarding publication of such reports for the Teaching Quality Information website. They gave little information, if any, about any contribution of the external assessor to the process and its outcomes. Given the size and diversity of provision often being considered in the course of one periodic review, the audit team felt that the summary nature of the periodic programme review reports did not allow the University to capitalise on the possibilities for identification of good practice that the process presented, and that outcomes and recommendations from individual periodic programme review might be more effectively captured and used.

91   Bearing in mind the examples identified elsewhere (paragraphs 44, 52, 88, 90, 94, 119, and 134) where the audit team considered that quality assurance processes might more effectively contribute to quality enhancement, the team recommends that it is desirable for the University to reflect on the processes of programme approval, monitoring and review with a view to ensuring that the opportunities for enhancement afforded by external involvement are capitalised upon; and the outcomes of the processes are fully reported so that good practice is effectively captured and quality enhancement supported.

92   Departments are required to produce a written response to the panel's report, indicating how they intend to act on any recommendations. The periodic programme review report and the department's response are submitted to the next faculty board and Learning and Teaching Committee meeting for discussion. The Learning and Teaching Committee is responsible for monitoring whether periodic programme review has been completed. The audit team confirmed this process through scrutiny of the documentation and committee minutes.

93   Departments are asked to monitor actions from periodic programme review through the annual review process. In addition, the University stated that departments are asked, as a recent development, to provide a follow-up report to the faculty board and Learning and Teaching Committee 12 months after their initial response to the periodic programme review report.

94   Departmental responses seen by the audit team were comprehensive but information regarding responses to points of recommendation was condensed. This made it difficult to be assured that loops were indeed closed during follow-up to the reports. In addressing the recommendation in paragraph 90 the University will wish to consider ways in which the reporting of action against recommendation points is documented so that outcomes are fully reported upon and that action plans as a consequence are able to be tracked for completion.

Management information - feedback from students

95   The University's student feedback procedures apply to all taught programmes at all levels. A standard set of questionnaire forms covers modules, programmes, and projects, placements and dissertations, and includes a number of general questions relating to central services and space for departmental questions to be added. The forms all include space for qualitative statements. In meetings with students as part of the audit, students confirmed the systematic and comprehensive gathering of feedback, and provided examples of actions taken as a consequence.

96   Use of the feedback responses is subject to a University 'Code of practice on student feedback'. The audit found that responsibility for scrutiny of feedback responses rests primarily with academic departments and this is undertaken. The pro forma used for annual programme review requires departments to indicate what methods are in place to deal with module feedback, what issues have been identified through student feedback and what action has been taken. This was confirmed in the audit trail areas.

97   Annual monitoring discussions include consideration of feedback, and this is clearly indicated in the Associate Deans (Teaching) summary reports. The audit team was informed, for example, that one faculty Associate Dean (Teaching) checks for scores that fall below a certain threshold, and the relevant department is asked to follow up.

98   Reports are requested from the relevant central service providers (Library, Computing Services, and Media Services) on the general questions with low scores (below 3.0) and the Academic Practice and Enhancement team compiles an annual report on these to the Learning and Teaching Committee. Student feedback is also obtained separately on a regular basis by the support services, for example the Library and the Careers Centre.

99   Departments are required to include an evaluation of their treatment of student feedback in their periodic programme review commentary, as well as providing the last three years' annual programme review documents. Periodic programme review panels are required to meet privately with student representatives in the department, to ascertain their views on the quality of provision and triangulate with the information provided by the department. Before the end of the periodic programme review visit, the panel reports back to the department on its discussions with the students and on any specific issues identified. Due to the summary nature of the periodic programme review reports, the audit team was unable to determine the extent to which this may trigger discussion or feed into recommendations for future action.

National Student Survey

100   The University has achieved high response rates on all three years of the National Student Survey so far and has noted the strong performance in the results. National Student Survey results have been subject to extensive analysis and discussion within the University on each occasion, with statistical summaries being presented to the Learning and Teaching Committee and Senate and more detailed data being circulated to all departments. Centrally, discussions have been led by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching) working through the Programme Quality Team or a sub-group of the team.

101   Departments are asked as part of annual programme review to comment on their most recent National Student Survey results, relative to the results of other comparable departments (internal and external) and previous years. Departments have been encouraged to discuss their

National Student Survey results in staff/student (liaison) committee meetings. Departments take the results seriously and are interested to understand the student perceptions behind them. The audit team found an example where a department changed its module feedback forms and found that students were more critical of the lack of feedback from examinations than they were of the quality of feedback on coursework. As a result, staff are now providing generic feedback to students about their examination performance, and exploring effective ways of doing this and pooling their experience.

102   National Student Survey results in the area of assessment and feedback to students on their performance has led to reconsideration of policy areas and subsequent changes, including, for example, the decision to include a 'method of feedback' field in module specifications in future.

103   The audit team agreed that the University places considerable value on all of these ways in which students are able to comment on and influence the operation of programmes. The team found that this contributes significantly to the management of the quality of learning opportunities. It is indicative of a high level of prioritisation accorded by the University to the role of students in contributing to its quality systems. This prioritisation of students in the institutional culture is considered to be a feature of good practice.

Role of students in quality assurance

104   There is student representation on all major committees including Council, Senate, faculty boards, the Learning and Teaching Committee, Curriculum Sub-Group and Student Services Committee. The Executive Management Group meets with the Loughborough Students' Union Executive once a term. The Union's President and others actively participated in the development of the University's latest strategic plan and provided feedback on the draft. Students have been involved in the subsequent development of implementation plans, particularly those for Learning and Teaching, the Student Experience and Internationalisation, and will continue to be involved in putting these plans into operation, for example, as members of steering groups for specific activities.

105   The audit team heard from students in the course of meetings that representative arrangements were working well and this was valued by the students. The audit found that the relationship building between the senior executives and the Students' Union officers was unusually close and appeared to work well for both parties.

106   Each department has at least one formally constituted staff/student (liaison) committee. A University Code of Practice setting out minimum requirements is included in the Academic Quality Procedures Handbook. Heads of department report to these committees on the statistical outcomes of student feedback questionnaires. The audit sampled minutes from the staff/student (liaison) committees in the trail areas and found that agendas covered a wide range of issues and that minutes were indicative of a high level of communication and openness to discussion. The audit also found evidence of a dialogue with students during the drafting stage of the periodic programme review self-evaluation paper, via the staff/student (liaison) committee.

107   Training for new student course representatives is provided at the start of the year by the Loughborough Students' Union Vice-President (Education). This has been variously supplemented year by year, as resources permit, by a web-based handbook, a course representative's pack, and a discussion forum.

108   The University has also supported a Loughborough Students' Union initiative to establish a student committee within each department. The Union's Department Committees Officer (a part-time post filled by a final-year student) and the Vice-President (Education) meet with the department committee chairs once every three weeks, and also regularly with the other core members, for a two-way exchange of information. The University feels that this has helped to strengthen communications between Loughborough Students' Union and students in

departments and to identify common issues across departments which may be taken up with the University by the Union when appropriate. During discussions with students, the audit team found that this view was not unanimous and that some students felt that the staff/student (liaison) committee system was less effective as a result of these changes. This is clearly an area which the University will wish to keep under review.

109   Following successful trialling in the 2007 periodic programme reviews, the Vice- President (or the second Learning and Teaching Committee student member) has also been invited to participate in future as a full member of periodic programme review panels. As this is a recent development, the audit team was unable to test the effectiveness of this arrangement, but expects that this is an area which the University will wish to keep under review.

110   The audit team agreed that the University supports and values a wide range of student representation in its management and planning for enhancement of learning opportunities. The team found that this contributes significantly to the management of the quality of learning opportunities and is a part of the good practice identified in paragraph 103.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

111   The University describes itself in its Briefing Paper as a research intensive institution and this was supported by several examples of the research taking place across the institution. In relation to the links between research and teaching, the Briefing Paper and supporting documents presented several instances of how the research activity of academic staff has been used to enhance the learning opportunities for students. One such example was the creation of a new MA/MSc programme which stemmed directly from collaborative research across different sectors of the University. Also listed was a large number of examples where student projects had led to conference papers written jointly by the student and their supervisor.

112   In its meetings with students, the audit team was presented with further examples of the way that the research activity of academic staff had contributed to teaching and learning. This was particularly noted by undergraduates and postgraduate research students. More indirect benefits of research to learning and teaching in the form of access to equipment bought from research funding was also mentioned.

113   Alongside this kind of contribution is the pedagogical, discipline-based research within departments and, most notably, the University's two Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs). Various benefits of engCETL's work include informing the development of the curriculum and developing links with industry for the benefit of students. Six PhD students within engCETL are undertaking research into design and engineering pedagogy.

Other modes of study

Distance learning

114   The scale of distance learning provision in the University is modest. New programmes are subject to the standard University procedures for approval, monitoring and review. Additionally, however, a dedicated Distance Learning Coordinator provides feedback and comment on new programme proposals before being presented to the Curriculum Sub-Committee for approval. The Coordinator confirmed to the audit team in a staff meeting that use was made of a checklist derived from the *Code of practice* during this procedure. External examining procedures apply as normal. Student feedback is collected but in some instances questions are tailored as appropriate to the distance learning provision.

Sandwich programmes and placements

115   Sandwich programmes are widespread across the faculties of the University. About 40 per cent of students are registered on sandwich programmes and an additional qualification is

available to students who take advantage of the placement opportunity. Although it is ultimately the student's responsibility to find a suitable placement, support is provided both by departments and the University Careers Centre.

116   The audit team found the University's approach to management of placements exemplary. Students are exceptionally well-supported both before and during placement. The Careers Centre organises work shadowing schemes and sessions on preparing for placements are held in departments. The engCETL offers preparatory workshops and the University makes use of a guide produced by the Higher Education Academy, Engineering Subject Centre.

117   Undergraduate students confirmed in meetings with the audit team that the placement scheme had been strongly promoted by their departments and they had been encouraged to participate. They also reported that the practical support provided before placement by their department and the Careers Centre had been invaluable. Subsequent support during placement involves a minimum of three visits by a placement tutor and students confirmed that further support was readily available to them when needed. Postgraduate students also reported that they had been given help in finding placements for their projects and considered this likely to be very useful in enhancing their employability.

118   The Careers Centre coordinates an annual meeting of departmental industrial training tutors. This provides a vehicle for sharing good practice and confirmation was provided in the audit team's meeting with academic staff involved that this was of great value to them in their work. Minutes of these meetings showed evidence of extensive monitoring of the uptake of placement. In particular, the factors preventing or discouraging students from taking placements had been analysed and responses had been developed. One example of a measure that had subsequently been adopted further to encourage students to participate in placements was to start promoting placements to Part A students. Overall, the thorough approach to the promotion and management of industrial links and placement opportunities to enhance the educational experience of students and the future employability of graduates is considered a feature of good practice.

119   The Briefing Paper states that 'the placement experience of final-year students is routinely followed up by periodic programme review panels'. While the audit team had no reason to doubt this statement, it was unable to find evidence of this in the documentation made available, including the periodic programme review reports contained in the sample audit trails. This is a contributory factor in recommending that the University review the periodic programme review process to ensure that outcomes are fully reported (see paragraphs 90 and 94).

Resources for learning

120   The Briefing Paper provided a clear guide to the University's centrally provided learning support arrangements with substantial sections devoted to the Library, IT services, Media services and e-learning technology. In addition to central arrangements, learning support is also provided through the two CETLs and students have access to study skills support, English language tuition and dedicated support facilities for students with additional needs.

121   In respect of the Library, there was a wide variety of evidence available to indicate strategically planned interaction with its users in order to provide a useful learning resource. Academic librarians liaise with academic departments over service development and delivery at a number of different points. Librarians are also involved in considering the resource implications of proposals for new and revised programmes. Library liaison officers within departments work with the academic librarians, particularly on the development of the collection. A student perspective on strategic and operational discussions is enabled through participation of a Loughborough Students' Union Executive member on the Library Management Group. In addition to library-related data gained from module and programme feedback, research carried out by the Library's Marketing Group serves to inform the cycle of planning, monitoring and reporting. Overall, Library progress against objectives is discussed in the Librarian's annual report to Senate.

122   Student feedback on their experience of services provided by the library was very positive. Induction sessions conducted by library staff were described as very helpful by a range of undergraduate students. The sessions also contained induction in the use of the University's virtual learning environment. Postgraduates also praised induction sessions along with other library services including interlibrary loans and the ready availability of senior librarians for consultation.

123   The Briefing Paper describes the re-development of the University's virtual learning environment 'Learn' using the 'Moodle' open-source platform, and during its visit the audit team was given an update on the progress of the pilot scheme that was running during the current academic year. The team heard numerous mentions from both staff and students about the helpful support they had been provided with in trialling the new system. This provides evidence of the statement that each project is undertaken 'with a deliberate emphasis on staff and student liaison'.

Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) as a resource for teaching and learning

124   The University has two CETLs, both established in 2005. As evidenced below, the audit team considers that the integration of the CETLs in learning and teaching to enhance student support and the student experience is a feature of good practice.

125   engCETL's origins are in the provision of teaching and learning support within the Engineering Faculty and the Engineering Education Centre. While engCETL now has a wider remit it continues to provide a valuable resource to students and staff. Academic staff within the seven associated departments can bid for time from core staff within the Centre to aid them in various ways, including the development of learning and teaching resources, and the enhancement of industry links. Proposals are judged against criteria such as improvement in the student learning experience, good practice, transferability and satisfying the core aims of the CETL. Direct student involvement comes via a range of workshops including those on technical report writing and placement preparation. engCETL has also been instrumental in the provision of newly developed design teaching space. Engineering students that the audit team met were particularly enthusiastic about the facilities this offered to them for their group project meetings. Their collaborative project with industry was another benefit provided through engCETL's extensive industrial network.

126   sigmaCETL has its origins in the Mathematics Education Centre but has widened its concern from the teaching of mathematics to engineers to include support for mathematics education across the University. The ready accessibility of useful help was praised by both undergraduate and postgraduate students that met the audit team. Included in this was the additional support available to help students with the mathematics in their Part A modules. It was suggested by some students that it might be helpful if the Centre could maintain a list of staff who could advise on particular topics. Other students described the benefits of the support rooms and associated equipment. Postgraduate students were appreciative of the one-to-one help and individual study programmes provided for them by the Centre.

127   The University's approach to e-learning is described in detail in the Briefing Paper where it is characterised by five themes. These include a commitment to providing support for staff engaging with e-learning in recognition that there may be considerable additional effort involved in adopting e-learning. Evidence of this commitment can be found in the University's use of the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund to appoint faculty-based online learning development officers to provide direct assistance to staff. Other evidence demonstrating that evaluation of the effectiveness of this support had been carried out included the surveys of staff and students and carefully planned piloting of new developments. There were many references from both staff and students to the effective support they had received in relation to e-learning initiatives. However, some students from the School of Art & Design expressed the view that the system might be more widely used within their school since they had seen the benefits elsewhere in the University.

128   The survey of students reported in the student written submission indicated no significant dissatisfaction with the level of resources. It was also notable that the representative students from partner institutions felt positively supported in their use of resources on campus, another example of the prioritisation of students in the institutional culture already noted by the audit team (see paragraph 103). The overall conclusion reached by the team through its meetings with staff and students and its scrutiny of documentary evidence was that the University's arrangements for the provision, allocation and management of learning resources were robust and effective.

Admissions policy

129   The University's Admission Policy was last revised in November 2007. It makes a clear commitment to admissions procedures which are 'fair, explicit and which are implemented consistently'. The Policy refers to the Equal Opportunities Code of Practice and the policies on Widening Participation and the Admission of students with disabilities. It has been reviewed by the officers concerned in the light of the revised *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education*, published by QAA.

130   The Policy includes a clear account of the responsibilities of individual departments in the admissions process. Induction opportunities are made available to new admissions tutors and regular plenary meetings are held for undergraduate and taught postgraduate admissions tutors respectively to allow for the dissemination of process changes, curriculum developments and good practice.

131   Monitoring of decision-making is undertaken by centrally based undergraduate and taught postgraduate admissions teams to ensure consistency. General oversight of undergraduate and taught postgraduate recruitment and admissions is carried out by the Student Recruitment Team. Candidates who have special needs are asked to identify those needs at the application stage and their application is referred to the Disabilities and Additional Needs Service who review the applicant's needs in conjunction with departments. The audit team judged these measures to be most effective in achieving the stated aims of the policy.

132   There is an equally well-formulated and well-documented process for the admission of research students. The Academic Quality Procedures Handbook contains a Good Practice Guide aimed at research student recruitment which describes in detail the procedures and the recommended interaction between departments and the Research Student Office. The University thereby ensures that its requirements are met and that they are consistently applied across the institution. Advice to departments is highlighted to ensure that decisions are reached without due delay.

Student support

Personal tutoring

133   University policy on the provision of personal tutoring and academic guidance for students is laid out fully and clearly in the Academic Quality Procedures Handbook, Appendix 16. This requires departments to have effective and consistent support mechanisms in place for both undergraduate and postgraduate taught students but does allow them flexibility to suit the particularities of their discipline. Departments are, however, subject to minimum standards. This includes the requirement to publish details of their tutoring arrangements in their departmental handbook and, generally, to ensure that students are aware of the tutoring system. Personal tutors are also expected to keep retrievable records, written or electronic, of all formal meetings with their tutees. An increasing number of departments are using a web-based system for recording meetings. Additional tutor support is provided for placement students as described in paragraphs 116 and 117.

134   The method by which the institution maintains an oversight of the operation of the personal tutoring system within departments is through both annual programme reviews and periodic programme reviews, where departments are required to provide a commentary on the effectiveness of their local arrangements. While the audit team had no indication from any sources that the mechanisms in place for personal tutoring were not sound, the method for monitoring their effectiveness through annual programme review and periodic programme review is subject to the reservations indicated previously and leading to the recommendation in paragraph 91 to review the annual programme review and periodic programme review processes to ensure that the outcomes are fully reported.

135   Student feedback indicated general satisfaction with the tutoring system. The small-scale survey reported on by the student written submission showed that all students surveyed were aware of the personal tutoring system. Undergraduate students described how they were made aware of the tutoring system during induction. One scheme described was the running of tutor group mini-projects during induction which had enabled students to get to know both their tutor and other members of their tutor group. This appears to be a feature of good practice and a further example of the prioritisation of students within the institutional culture (paragraph 103).

136   Considerable variation in tutoring practice was reported. Some students were expected to attend weekly, timetabled tutor sessions. Others recounted a more informal approach but felt that this was appropriate as staff were felt to be more generally accessible to them in their discipline. In all the cases that the audit team explored, however, students were clearly aware of the opportunities available to them and realised that it was their responsibility to exploit them to their best advantage.

Personal development planning

137   The Briefing Paper draws attention to the institution's commitment to providing students with opportunities to engage in personal development planning. This policy is clearly laid out in the University's Progress Files and Personal Development Planning Policy Statement alongside which sits an accessible briefing sheet for staff on personal development planning.

138   An electronic personal development planning system, RAPID, has been developed in-house to support students in personal development planning, reflective learning and self-directed learning. The use of this resource has been supported by a raft of activities and policies aimed at ensuring effective take-up. Student recognition and use of this resource is, however, currently limited and it is recognised that there have been difficulties in engaging staff and students.

139   A project surveying the uptake and employment of RAPID for the purpose of personal development planning is described in the Briefing Paper. The outcome of this project was subsequently fed into the implementation of a set of measures designed to strengthen the take up and quality of personal development planning by students. The University also recognises, however, that the take-up by students is not as strong as they would like. In exploring this issue further, the audit team heard evidence from students that they had been exposed to the issues of personal development planning through various sources including specially developed lectures and workshops. Students also told the team that they had largely not involved themselves in personal development planning.

140   The audit team was concerned that the emphasis being placed by the University on the use of RAPID to increase the uptake of personal development planning activity does not appear to address the issues of take-up as presented by students. The team noted that this same conclusion was reached by some staff during their review of personal development planning and was also independently expressed by other involved staff members during their meetings with the audit team. The audit team encourages the University to continue its reflection on and evaluation of personal development planning to ensure appropriate uptake and engagement by students.

Student guidance and welfare

141   In its Briefing Paper the University highlights as one of its distinctive features, its 'extensive network of academic, guidance and welfare support services for students'. This network includes both the resources for learning and academic guidance discussed above along with a range of additional support facilities and services, the major contributor being the Department of Student Guidance and Welfare. The Director of the Department is responsible for the overall management and planning of its many sections. The effectiveness of services is monitored by the Student Services Committee, advised by the Student Support Sub-Committee, who also undertake the formulation of policy. All the sections of the Department have mechanisms for evaluating their effectiveness, most prominently the collection of user feedback.

142   The University claims that 'common to all of the central support services involved is a commitment to delivering a high quality service focused on the needs of our students'. In their meetings with the audit team, students provided several examples of the practical success of this approach. This included the Disabilities and Additional Needs Service, where students rated the advice and support as excellent. The Careers Centre was also frequently mentioned as providing very useful assistance, both in relation to preparation for placements and on more general careers advice relating to areas such as developing business and entrepreneurial practice. Another aspect of the support services that the team explored was the University's promotion and advertising of the services to the whole student body. Students were very positive in their assessment of the organisation and effectiveness of the services. All this served as a major practical example of the prioritisation of students in the institutional culture noted as a feature of good practice in paragraph 103.

International students

143   The University has a substantial body of international students, both undergraduate and postgraduate, for whom additional support and provision is made through a number of agencies. Policy for the support of international students is determined by the Student Services Committee on the advice of its International Students Support Network. The International Office provides both pre and post-registration support, including publication of a Welcome Guide for International Students, as part of the University's student recruitment activities. The Office contributes strategically to international student support issues through its participation in the Student Support Sub-Committee, and by working with the Careers Service and the Alumni Development Office. The English Language Study Unit provides language support to international students throughout the year and provides newsletters and a social programme for international students. Two international student advisers give individual help, advice and personal support on a wide range of issues and coordinate with the Welfare Adviser within Loughborough Students' Union's Student Advice Centre.

144   The induction process was praised very highly by some of the international students whom the audit team met. In particular, they highlighted the personal support provided as very useful. Continuing support beyond induction was also mentioned. Other students reported a less structured experience but had no particular problems. However, the findings reported in the student written submission concerning the experiences of international students are more variable, but the very small number of students surveyed makes it difficult to draw conclusions from the evidence presented there.

145   The audit team found the University's student support mechanisms highly effective in maintaining the quality of the student's learning opportunities. Students displayed a keen awareness of the range of academic and personal support services available and expressed confidence that they would be received well when seeking to make use of them. This is a further reflection of the prioritisation of students in the institutional culture, noted in paragraph 103.

Staff support (including staff development)

146   Professional development has the lead role in providing staff training and development on teaching-related matters, supplemented by contributions from a number of other support services. The two University-based CETLs are another source of professional development support (see above under Resources).

147   Within professional development, the Academic Practice and Enhancement Team is responsible for most learning and teaching provision. This includes the management and delivery of two Higher Education Academy-accredited programmes, the New Lecturers' Route and the Associate Teaching Route. A short Teaching Skills Course for postgraduate students is also provided and this also caters for the needs of research assistants/associates who teach.

148   Departments vary in their approach to continuing professional development. The Academic Practice and Enhancement Team offer sessions to departments on request and will facilitate at teaching 'away-days'. Heads of department may identify issues and needs of their staff. The audit team was presented with examples of how issues can be picked up in annual programme reviews or from student feedback and then addressed via help from the Team.

149   Appraisal is a process operated in different ways between departments; it also deals with staff development needs.

150   Support for e-learning within professional development is led by the E-learning Team which contributes to the general workshop programme, provides support to individual members of staff on matters linked to e-learning practice, and produces a periodic newsletter. The support provided by this Team was praised by various members of academic staff during meetings with the audit team.

151   The University has had two promotion routes to senior lecturer, one for research and one for teaching. In the light of the emergence of third-stream funding and other external developments, promotion procedures were being reviewed at the time of the audit.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Overview

152   The University considers that it has achieved a national reputation for high quality teaching and student learning and has excelled in a number of measures of teaching quality. Quality enhancement was traditionally delivered by an assurance-based approach, through the policy framework relating to learning, teaching and assessment but now that approach is augmented by a development-led approach. Outcomes of this include the establishment of two Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (see paragraphs 124 to 126); the establishment of the University's Teaching Awards Scheme which targets funding to support pedagogical practice development; and the development of Higher Education Academy-accredited provision for new academic staff (paragraph 147).

153   The evidence that the institution has taken deliberate steps to promote quality enhancement comes from a number of sources: the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the Implementation Plan, following from the institutional Strategic Plan, includes an objective which seeks to enhance systematically the quality of learning and teaching provision; the recruitment of additional staff to support quality enhancement: a Head of Academic Practice and Enhancement, a part-time Assessment Practice Development Officer for two years from 2005, two full-time quality enhancement officers in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities and in the Faculty of Science and a full-time Pedagogic Research Associate who has a similar brief in the Faculty of Engineering; the planned establishment of a University Teaching Centre which will develop and lead the University's quality enhancement strategy. The latter two initiatives are described in more detail below.

154   The University declares its key quality enhancement principles as being strategic purpose; departmental focus; student involvement; partnership approach (referring to partnerships delivering quality enhancement within the University); and an enquiry-based culture and continuing professional development.

Quality enhancement officers and 'effective practice'

155   The University characterises the quality enhancement officers (taken here to include both the quality enhancement officers and the Pedagogic Research Associate) as being engaged in an organised process of the dissemination of 'effective practice'. The University uses this term in preference to 'good practice', since it considers that it denotes 'the situational nature of practice', whereas good practice is taken to imply an absolute judgement. An example quoted of this is the identification of good practice in student induction, which has been written up by the quality enhancement officers as pedagogically focused case studies. The quality enhancement officers have also recently been engaged in the review meetings within the annual programme review process and have effectively distilled evidence of good practice and are in the process of disseminating this to departments. The audit team considers the development of the role of quality enhancement officer and its close link with departments to support enhancement activities is a feature of good practice and illustrates an institutional prioritisation on the learning experience.

156   Further, the quality enhancement officers have been engaged in reviewing the periodic programme review reports to extract evidence of effective practice, and although this process has had some success, it nevertheless has been hindered by the limited detail in these reports. The audit team encourages the University to bear this in mind as it addresses the recommendation in paragraph 91 to review annual programme review and periodic programme review to ensure that enhancement opportunities are capitalised upon.

Teaching Centre

157   The proposed Teaching Centre (previously referred to as the Centre for Learning and Teaching) is aimed to 'support the professional practice of staff' and will collaborate with the activities of the two CETLs, the library, e-learning team and other parts of the University involved in quality enhancement. At this early stage, this can only be noted as a laudable aim by the audit team.

Management information - quality enhancement

158   The University's use of and proposals for the use of management information have been described from paragraphs 67 onwards.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

Background

159   The University describes its collaborative provision as 'modest' in scale and collaborative provision is not central to the institution's strategy. Management of the acquisition of new partners is a responsive one, as opportunities arise. At the time of the audit, the University's collaborative provision comprised eight partnerships, of which four were international.

160   Across seven of these eight partners, provision is fairly limited in both number of programmes and of students, with a total of around 300 full-time equivalent students (2006-07 figures) on 19 programmes. The establishment in 2006 of a partnership with the British University in Egypt is a significant development of considerably larger size and complexity.

161   Recent history of the University's collaborative provision has involved some cessation of validation arrangements both for business considerations and to meet a policy objective of ensuring that the academic disciplines delivered generally reflect the expertise within the University's departments. Since the last audit, this has resulted in the loss of some programmes at

Loughborough College and the closure of relationships with institutions in Peterborough, Nottingham and Stamford. This process is being continued, with the transfer of programmes at Markfield Institute of Higher Education, an institution focused on Muslim studies, to the University of Gloucestershire, with effect from spring 2008.

Response to recommendations of the last audit

162   The 2004 audit gave rise to a recommendation that it was desirable to 'identify[ing] responsibility for overseeing the quality management of collaborative provision more specifically, and review[ing] whether, and how, its routine quality management arrangements might require enhancement to support collaborative provision'. No explicit reference to this was made by the University, either in its immediate response, nor in the Briefing Paper. The refocusing of collaborative provision away from subject areas not covered by the University's departments can be seen as accommodating some but not all of these concerns, and the management of quality and standards of collaborative provision remains an area of potential weakness, as detailed below.

The British University in Egypt

163   Notwithstanding the general approach of not validating collaborative provision which does not reflect academic expertise at the University, there are some areas of provision, notably petroleum and gas engineering, where an exception has been made for the British University in Egypt. The partnership with the British University in Egypt has developed since early 2006 and has a much larger scope than the University's previous collaborative provision. The University is currently the major validating partner of the British University in Egypt, with Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh validating nursing programmes. The first cohort of undergraduate students was admitted in 2005-06. The British University in Egypt has grown rapidly with 777 full-time equivalent students on University programmes in 2006-07 and a total 1,500 full-time equivalent students in 2007-08. Initial aspirations were for growth to 6,000 students in 2009-10. The University has adjusted procedures to try to accommodate the challenge of the scale and rapid start-up of this project. A revised approach to institutional and programme validation has been employed and a new Associate Deans (Teaching) appointed for the British University in Egypt. The institutional validation panel report has been followed up by a series of the British University in Egypt Validation Subcommittee meetings which have tracked conditions from the original institutional validation and issues arising at that point, and also identified some programme-level concerns. The decision to approve validation of programmes was delegated to the British University in Egypt Validation Subcommittee, which confirmed validation at its meeting in September 2007 to apply retrospectively to students who commenced undergraduate studies in September 2006. This retrospective approval and the public association of the University's name with the British University in Egypt, prior to validation, had the potential to put the University's standards at risk and in addressing the audit team's recommendation in paragraph 170 the University will wish to consider this.

164   The Associate Deans (Teaching) and basic administrative support for the British University in Egypt is costed within the financial annex of the Validation Agreement. However, extra supporting infrastructure is likely to be required to manage any continued rapid pace of development. In addressing the recommendation in paragraph 170 the University is advised to consider what structures may need to be put in place to ensure appropriate oversight as growth continues.

Legal agreements

165   The Academic Quality Procedures Handbook refers to the importance of having legal agreements in place between the University and its partners to ensure clarity regarding the rights and obligations of both University and partner (as referenced in the *Code of practice, Section 2, Precept A10*). In the case of the British University in Egypt, there was, at the time of the audit, no legal agreement in place (although a clear intention to have such is signalled in the initial

Memorandum of Understanding) when 1,500 students were enrolled on University programmes. The audit team strongly advises that the situation with regard to the legal agreement is finalised quickly as part of the University's action in response to the recommendation in paragraph 170. The legal agreements seen by the audit team are variable in structure and content which might suggest a lack of oversight in this area and the University may also wish to review this.

Published information

166   Monitoring of the publications and marketing of University programmes at partner institutions is in part devolved to the cognate department at the University, but there appears to be a lack of clear understanding regarding the dispensation of this role and who is responsible to ensure regard is made to Precept A28 of *Section 2* of the *Code of practice*. As a result, there is some potentially misleading information on some partner web pages. In particular, the Markfield Institute of Higher Education website contained prominent and repeated coverage of the University at the time of audit, but no reference to the University of Gloucestershire, although recruits to programmes in February 2008 were admitted onto University of Gloucester-validated awards. The application forms downloadable from the Markfield Institute of Higher Education website bore the statement 'Validated by Loughborough University'. Recruits onto this programme could have been misled as to the validating body of the award for which they were applying. The British University in Egypt website describes it as operating 'within the framework of the UK Quality Assurance Agency' which might be taken to suggest that the institution, rather than those awards validated by UK higher education institutions, receives direct QAA oversight. Further, the legal agreements seen by the audit team made no specific reference to the responsibility of the University to oversee all publicity and the partner institutions to seek agreement on all such material, although they variously do indicate that the partners should themselves ensure accuracy of such information. In addressing the recommendation in paragraph 170 the University is advised to review the processes and procedures covering the oversight of published information in collaborative provision.

Approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision

167   The University policy recognises two routes regarding the approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision. The first of these is described as 'validation', defined as 'the process by which the University as an awarding institution judges that a programme of study developed and delivered by another institution is of an appropriate quality and standard to lead to an award of the University'. The second is described variously as 'other collaborative provision', 'other forms of collaborative provision' or 'collaborative provision'. No clear definition of (other) collaborative provision is given in Academic Quality Procedures Handbook, Appendix 23 or the Briefing Paper but in a meeting during the briefing visit was defined as 'joint provision, for example that offered in partnership with other UK Higher Education Institutions'. The primary differences between the two routes (the detail being laid out in the Academic Quality Procedures Handbook, Appendix 23) are that (i) in the case of 'validated provision', a validation panel considers the programme proposal in detail and then reports to the Curriculum Sub-Committee, whilst in the case of 'collaborative provision' the scrutiny is carried out by the Curriculum Sub-Committee itself, as for any internal University programme; (ii) monitoring and review is treated differently: in the case of 'validated provision' annual and periodic monitoring documentation is constructed by the partner institution and the relevant panels chaired by the appropriate Associate Deans (Teaching), whereas 'collaborative provision' is treated as provision within a department at the University. Validated provision is subject to an annual updating process, also overseen by the relevant Associate Deans (Teaching), which mirrors the internal process.

168   There is considerable variation in the nature of partnership provision which falls under the 'collaborative' category, from module-sharing with another British university, through a franchise arrangement with some local variations, to a franchise arrangement where some of the teaching and all the assessment oversight is undertaken by University staff. There is some potentially

conflicting or confusing terminology applied; for example, the local variations to the Nangyang Academy of Fine Arts programme (nominally classified as 'collaborative' provision, as opposed to 'validated') were approved by a validation panel.

169   The lack of clarity over the differentiation between 'validated' versus 'collaborative' extended to a confusion as to the appropriate regulations to apply to a particular programme. In a meeting during the audit visit it was stated that the Validation Handbook was used to apply to all partners with the exception of the British University in Egypt, but the Handbook itself states that it is restricted to 'validated' schemes only', which are stated as those at Loughborough College and Markfield Institute of Higher Education. In addressing the recommendation in paragraph 170 the audit team considers that it would be advisable for the University to review the processes and procedures for managing collaborative provision to avoid such confusion and to ensure that appropriate adjustments to routine quality management arrangements to support collaborative provision are in place.

170   Taking into account the findings above the audit team recommends that it is advisable that the University review the strategic oversight and overall management of collaborative provision to ensure that procedures and practice take appropriate account of the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 2*, published by QAA.

Good practice

171   It was apparent that there was evidence of some effective links with collaborative partner staff, and the relatively small student cohorts on most collaborative provision schemes allowed sufficient overview of most elements of provision. There was also evidence of some good practice. This included some overseas collaborative partner staff undertaking staff development when on the University campus, although this was driven by the individual staff concerned, rather than being part of an overarching policy. It was apparent that access to learning and other resources for students, which has been a source of concern from the student body in the past, has been improved recently.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

Background

172   Formally, the committee responsible for research degree programmes is the Research Committee, although most of its business is managed by the Research Team which has a largely overlapping membership. The Research Team is led by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) and, in addition, comprises the three Associate Deans (Research), the Director of the Graduate School, the Director of the Research Office and the Research Student Office Manager. The newly established Graduate School is responsible for the provision of transferable skills training and improving the University experience of postgraduate students. The Director of the Graduate School reports to both the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching) and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) and is a member of the Learning and Teaching Committee, the Programme Quality Team, the Research Team and the Student Support Sub-Committee. At the departmental level, the Director of Research is responsible for various aspects of research degree programmes such as monitoring student progress and transfers from MPhil to PhD. The audit team examined a range of evidence evaluating the effectiveness of this framework.

173   Quality management for research degree programmes is the responsibility of the Research Team whose recommendations are subject to the approval of Research Committee and Senate. Both the Research Team and the Research Committee are chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) with the former acting as an advisory body to the latter which then provides the formal reporting route to Senate.

174   In 2006, the Research Team established a Regulations Review Group chaired by the Director of the Graduate School with a very wide remit to review the University's Regulations for Higher Degrees by Research. This is an ad hoc committee but it will remain active at least until the end of 2007-08. Its initial concerns have been with introducing standards for supervisory contact and progress monitoring. Although this is still largely left to departments, the audit team saw good evidence that departmental procedures are now strong in these areas.

175   The postgraduate research provision has recently been reviewed as part of QAA's Review of research degree programmes (July 2006). This review came to a judgement that 'overall the institution's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree programmes provision was appropriate and satisfactory', and noted good practice in the application of a centralised admissions process. Three areas were noted which it was suggested that the institution consider, namely introducing mechanisms for effective research degree programmes review; centralised monitoring of progress records and consideration of specifying a minimum number of supervisory meetings per year; reviewing institutional level postgraduate student representation.

176   Since the review there has been a suite of developments partly in direct response to the outcomes of this review, notably the establishment of a Graduate School; the appointment of a Graduate Director; the development of a personal development plan programme for research students; the establishment of research schools as a focus for interdepartmental research activity; a review and revision of the postgraduate regulations under the Regulations Review Group. These are discussed below.

177   Postgraduate qualification rates are high. Overall, there is a clear institutional focus on research in the strategic plan and there are indicators of a strong institutional research environment.

Graduate School and Director of the Graduate School

178   Proposals to initiate the establishment of a University Graduate School were passed by the University Council in July 2005. The School 'will encompass all postgraduate students and the perceived benefits include the creation of an enhanced postgraduate community, an enhanced postgraduate ethos at Loughborough, and increased opportunities for collaboration between departments on postgraduate programmes and research student training' and 'the pursuit and promotion of the highest quality experience for the University's post-graduate students in accordance with the University's current Strategic Plan'. The Director of the Graduate School was appointed in June 2006 and was established as an ex officio member of Senate. The Director represents postgraduate (both postgraduate taught and research) perspectives on internal and external committees and acts as a link between teaching and research and is responsible for the distribution of the postgraduate research student training funds from Research Councils. Postgraduate research students are relatively unaware of the Graduate School itself but this is not perceived as an issue at this stage, as it is the emergent outcomes of the School's activities that are of key importance to students.

Postgraduate research students' training programme

179   There is a varied programme of transferable skills available designed to ensure that the training opportunities suggested in the *Code of practice* are available to all postgraduate research students. Postgraduate students indicated awareness of the availability of such opportunities, although they suggested uptake was variable and differently managed in different departments within the University, with some students indicating a threshold expectation of 30 credits of professional development (including activities such as conference attendance) to transfer from MPhil to PhD, though this was not recognised as a common pattern amongst the staff. Analysis of student feedback to the transferable skills programme indicated some mixed attitudes to such training but a general majority indicating satisfaction with the perceived impact on research skills and future careers.

Regulations Review Group

180   The Regulations Review Group was established to address a number of issues raised by the 2006 Review of reasearch degree programmes, notably developing effective review of research degree programmes; introducing centralised monitoring of progression; regulating the minimum frequency of supervisory meetings; and improving postgraduate student institutional representation. The responses to these issues can be summarised as a periodic review process for research degree programmes will be adopted, being piloted in early 2008; the adoption of a standard pro forma to record research students' annual progress; the establishment of a minimum expectation for 12 formal recorded supervisory meetings per student per annum; each faculty board has co-opted a postgraduate research student and a number of other measures to increase their representation have been adopted. Students were found to be well aware of these changes, which appeared to have been effectively and thoroughly disseminated to departments and delivered by them.

Research schools

181   Four interdisciplinary research schools were established by Council in July 2005. The 2005 Corporate Plan states: 'driven by demand and made more powerful and attractive by their larger size and multi-disciplinary memberships, these Research Schools will have the potential to generate significant growth in research publications and grant income and will provide a vehicle for multi-disciplinary working across departmental and faculty boundaries'. As yet, these relatively new developments have not significantly impacted upon the postgraduate research experience.

Student feedback and representation

182   The feedback arrangements that apply to taught courses do not cover postgraduate research students, but during 2003 to 2006 exit surveys were conducted by the Research Student Office and the outcomes considered by the Research Committee. The analysis of the data from 2005 and 2006 does not indicate any consistent significant issues. In 2007, the University decided to abandon this system in favour of the use of the postgraduate research experience survey conducted by the Higher Education Academy to enable more extensive feedback and sector benchmarking. Postgraduate research students now have representation on faculty boards.

183   Overall, the audit team concludes that the University's processes and procedures for postgraduate research programmes make an effective contribution to its management of the quality and standards of those programmes.

Section 7: Published information

184   The University publishes a wide range of information both in hardcopy and on its website. The University's Marketing and Communications Office is responsible for producing prospectuses and other marketing material aimed at prospective students.

185   New students are routinely sent a registration pack prior to their arrival at the University. The University's student handbook is available to all students via the University website. Departmental material that is routinely provided at the beginning of each year of study includes a departmental handbook and a programme handbook, in some cases published as a single document.

Methods used to ensure the accuracy of published information

186   The Marketing and Communications Office has in place a wide range of policies and procedures, incorporated in the Academic Quality Procedures Handbook, for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the information they are responsible for. It also produces good practice guidelines for the production of departmental information.

187   The policy of the Marketing and Communications Office is only to publish material, both printed and electronic, following approval and confirmation of accuracy by those originating the material. In the case of prospectuses, the Office produces a checklist of correspondents whose approval is sought for each section. Final proofs are sent from the Marketing and Communications Office to correspondents for signature. Information about changes in the University's portfolio of programmes is supplied directly to those responsible for the prospectuses by the secretary to the Curriculum Sub-Committee in order to alert them to new developments and as a check on the accuracy of information provided by departments.

188   Recommendations are provided to departments concerning the more specific information that departmental handbooks should include beyond that provided by the student handbook. Programme handbooks contain, among other information, a statement of the programme's aims and intended learning outcomes, the programme regulations, as well as module specifications and an assessment matrix. Good Practice Guidelines provided by the Marketing and Communications Office for the production of departmental publications are given in the Academic Quality Procedures Handbook.

189   Concerning information on University websites, the Code of Practice for Online Publications advises that there should be one person responsible for the content, structure and maintenance of the information. It is also stated by the Briefing Paper that heads of department are responsible for the accuracy of departmental web-based information. There are plans to introduce a
Content Management System for the University's website with the intention of improving the management of individual web pages and the overall effectiveness of the site as a source of information.

190   The ready access afforded to these various procedures and codes provided clear evidence that the University has responded effectively to the previous audit report's comment concerning the desirability of clarifying their procedures with respect to checking the accuracy of published information.

191   The Briefing Paper noted the University review of the availability of information since the removal of qualitative information from the Teaching Quality Information site and described its response to the publication of HEFCE 2006/45. The audit team found that the University website provided ready access to the latest Strategic Plan and the Academic Quality Procedures Handbook, and to information about the quality and standards of programmes. Programme specifications can be accessed directly from the student home page as well as from the Academic Registry pages. Details of professional, statutory and regulatory body accreditation and links with employers are included in departmental and programme information in the prospectus, as well as in the programme specifications that were examined by the audit team. This demonstrated that there had been an implementation of a considered reflection of the suggestions prompted by Annex F of the HEFCE review document. On the basis of this and other measures the University has recently adopted, such as the sharing of external examiners' reports with student representatives, the team was satisfied that the University had given a full and considered response to the actions required by HEFCE 2006/45.

192   The audit team could, however, find no evidence of any systematic approach to reviewing relevant material published at or by partner organisations. As described earlier, there is some direct evidence from the team's review of partners' websites that some inaccuracies were present. In addition, the websites of some collaborative partners did not consistently inform prospective students of the involvement of the University. On this issue, the team recommends that the University refer specifically to precepts A26, A27 and A28 of *Section 2* of the *Code of practice* as it addresses the recommendation in paragraph 170.

Students' experience of published information

193   In meetings with the audit team, undergraduate students confirmed that the publicity material and prospectuses, both printed and on the University website, gave an accurate account of the institution that reflected their experience since arrival as students. More detailed course literature distributed during open days was also mentioned as being very helpful in determining their choice of degree programme.

194   The student written submission included an account of an online survey of a small number of students conducted during the late part of 2007. The results of this survey indicated the same general opinion that prospectus information gave an accurate picture of the institution. The survey's results concerning the information contained in module descriptions were less overwhelmingly positive but still reflected an overall view that the information was generally accurate.

195   In their meeting with the audit team the students further reported that they had been helped and guided through the large amount of information presented to them during their induction period. International students in particular confirmed that the structured introduction to the information pack specifically designed for them was particularly helpful.

196   The audit 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.

197   Course handbooks represent a vital source of information for students about their courses. Academic Affairs issues detailed guidance to course teams about the information which these handbooks should contain. However, the audit team found that some handbooks did not contain all the information specified by the University. In particular, some handbooks did not describe arrangements for work placements where placements were an integral part of the course; while some others did not include the full course specification. The team therefore concluded that it would be desirable for the University to ensure consistency across all colleges in the application of its policy for the development of course handbooks, paying particular attention to information about placement learning.