

University of Lincoln

March 2008

Annex to the report

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Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Lincoln (the University) from 3 to 7 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 delivers
- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University has framed its approach to quality enhancement firmly within its Teaching and Learning Strategy, underpinned by its systematic approach to gathering and addressing student feedback, including the National Student Survey. The Centre for Educational Research and Development takes a key role in encouraging and coordinating the overall enhancement process and there is evidence of a wide range of initiatives across the University. The University has established a series of effective mechanisms to provide a structured framework for its enhancement activity, including the Annual Conversation, which demonstrate that the University takes 'deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities'.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The University's arrangements for its postgraduate research students meet the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, Section 1: *Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA, and are operating as intended.

Published information

Overall, reliance can 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 'Annual Conversation' with faculties and service departments, as part of the annual planning cycle, which has the potential to contribute to the effective management of programmes (paragraphs 16, 155)
- the role of the External Examiners Committee in supporting the external examiner system (paragraph 67)
- the systematic response to the outcomes of the National Student Survey (paragraphs 111, 135)
- the pervasive and integrated approach to the management of the quality of learning opportunities which has engaged all areas of the institution and contributed to the ongoing and dynamic development of the University (paragraphs 86, 111, 118, 121 to 123, 132, 144, 149 to 151, 155, 157).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- to consider producing supplementary operational guidance for the key quality assurance processes to support the consistent implementation of the Quality Assurance Manual (paragraphs 48, 57, 85, 105, 108)
- to review the reporting mechanisms of validation to reduce the current variability in the coverage and detail provided (paragraphs 94, 168).

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- to fulfil the commitment outlined in the Quality Assurance Manual that programme specifications be made available 'as a source of information for students and prospective students seeking an understanding of a programme' at the earliest opportunity and reflect on the effectiveness of the process by which programme specifications are kept current (paragraphs 41, 42)
- to review the procedures by which the adequacy of learning resources for proposed programmes are recorded centrally (paragraphs 93, 131)
- to reflect on the support for and preparation of postgraduate research students engaged in teaching (paragraphs 206, 215).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 The University of Lincoln (the University) evolved from the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside and its predecessor the University of Humberside which was given its Royal Charter in 1992. After the change in title to the University of Lincoln in October 2001, the University moved its main campus from Hull to a new purpose-built campus in Lincoln in 2002. In addition, there are three further campuses at Riseholme, Holbeach and Hull.

2 At the time of the audit, the University had 8,855 undergraduates, of whom 8,050 were full-time and 805 part-time students. There were also 454 postgraduate taught students, of which 226 were full-time and 228 were part-time. In addition, 169 students were enrolled for postgraduate research awards, 54 in the full-time mode and 93 in the part-time mode, with 22 in the writing-up phase. There are a further 1,011 students on collaborative programmes.

3 The University has a wide portfolio of some 300 undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes and a growing range of research degree awards. The portfolio includes both a range of traditional university programmes such as business, law and history and more contemporary subjects such as forensic science and multimedia.

4 The academic structure of the University is organised into four faculties: Art, Architecture and Design; Business and Law; Health, Life and Social Sciences; and Media, Humanities and Technology: each is led by a Dean all of whom report to a Pro Vice Chancellor.

5 The University mission statement is: 'To be recognised as a university of quality and distinction' where it interprets 'quality' to mean a commitment to quality enhancement and continuous improvement and 'distinction' to its location within a wide geographical area. From its discussions with staff and students the audit team was able to confirm the University's commitment to Lincoln and its environs and the strong links which continue to develop between the institution and the City.

6 The University developed a new Strategic Plan in 2007. Within this document, the mission is articulated in a set of strategic objectives:

'to be recognised for teaching and learning that is informed by research and that is relevant to practice as well as for students and peers; produce independent and enquiring graduates who enjoy learning, are enterprising, employable and able to make a positive contribution to society; attract, develop and retain the best staff; maintain financial stability and sustainability; engage with and contribute to the development of our partners and communities, locally and further afield and enhance the reputation and external profile of the University'.

7 The Strategic Plan also contains an objective to grow the undergraduate student numbers to 8,500 full-time equivalents, with at least 700 full-time equivalent postgraduate taught students by 2012. Confirmation was provided for the audit team during the visit that the undergraduate numbers have already met the goal of 8,500 full-time equivalents. It is the University's intention to maintain the number of undergraduate students and to continue to increase the taught postgraduate numbers to more than 1,300 by 2016.

8 The University's collaborative arrangements fall within the scope of this audit. Within the Briefing Paper, the University makes clear that it has withdrawn from all of its international partnerships and focuses primarily on collaborations with institutions in its locality (see paragraph 160).

The information base for the audit

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

10 The Students' Union produced a written submission covering the accuracy of the information provided for students, the experience of students as learners, and students' involvement in quality processes. The written submission was informed by a survey conducted by the University of Lincoln Students' Union in 2007, a series of focus groups, the National Student Survey 2007 and contributions from sabbatical officers, student representatives and members of Student Council.

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

12 In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the previous institutional audit (May 2003)
- reports of reviews by QAA at the subject level since the previous institutional audit
- reports produced by other relevant bodies (for example Ofsted, and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies)
- the institution's internal documents
- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.

Developments since the last audit

13 The Institutional audit report for the University (2003) found that broad confidence could be placed in the University's management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards. It identified good practice in the use being made of programme specifications to specify learning outcomes and criteria of assessment; the University's constructive relationship with its local partner colleges; and the academic and personal support available to students.

14 The report contained a number of recommendations in relation to roles and responsibilities in academic approval; the development of a management information system to support student progression and achievement; and the use of staff development and appraisal to support institutional priorities. It also suggested that the University ensure that actions identified to strengthen the management of academic quality and standards are completed within a specified time; identify an acceptable level of variation in the content and analysis contained in reports that contribute to annual monitoring; use the information available from internal and external review more systematically at institutional level to support quality enhancement; build on existing good practice for the timely feedback on academic performance to students seen on some programmes.

15 The University has responded to these recommendations in a number of ways: it replaced the Quality Unit with the Office of Quality, Standards and Partnerships which according to the Briefing Paper 'oversees the development, simplification and enhancement of the institution's quality assurance processes and, as part of the Academic Registry, advises on the regulatory framework, risk management and professional recognition'; revised and updated the Quality Assurance Manual; and adopted new principles governing the management of academic standards and quality, including collegiality, peer-based assessment, externality, stakeholder satisfaction, transparency, accountability and the devolution of decision-making to faculties and departments. The Briefing Paper explained that this decision was taken because of 'the need to foster greater diversification of the university's provision, consistent with its strategic ambitions' and that it allows for subject-specific practice. However, in order to ensure consistent practices across faculties, local decisions and actions have to be consistent with University policy, procedures and regulations.

16 Devolution to faculties is also monitored by the Annual Conversation introduced in 2007-08. This process involves the faculties presenting an annual performance review and forward plan to the Core Executive. In addition to budgetary issues, the reviews plans cover delivery of the Faculty Teaching and Learning Strategy, progress on research-informed teaching, responses to National Student Survey scores, student progression, outcomes and employability, and staff development. A similar process applies to service departments. The team considered that the design of the Annual Conversation provides an effective oversight of the devolution to faculties and that the process had the potential to contribute to the effective management of programmes.

17 The University's academic, executive, and faculty committee structures have been revised to provide a clearer separation of powers and responsibilities (see paragraph 26 below). The Briefing Paper judged that this has resulted in increased effectiveness of the committees and enables smooth central oversight and timely loop closure. The University also undertook a restructuring of its academic administration and services in order to integrate the organisation and management of student affairs; bring the administrative processes and procedures within a universal structure of accountability with reporting lines to the Academic Registry; and align more closely the administration of quality and standards and academic governance with the general University administration. The restructuring resulted in the creation of four areas of academic and student administration, namely the Academic Registry, Secretariat, Student Services and faculty administrative support through the Deans' executive offices. The effectiveness of the restructuring is to be reviewed in 2008. The audit team, following discussions with academic and service staff and with students, confirmed that the changes to the academic and services improved the efficacy of the quality assurance processes, engendered an ethos of collegiality across the faculties and has led to an improvement in the student experience.

18 The University has undertaken a number of specific actions in the areas of curricular development, programme monitoring, assessment and progression regulations, structure of the academic year, faculty and programme structure, student academic support, feedback to students, student support services, learning and information services, internal auditing,

management of information systems, educational partnerships, staff development and appraisal and estate development.

19 A review of the academic portfolio led to a significant reduction of joint honours provision. A curriculum review resulted, inter alia, in the harmonisation of teaching, learning and assessment strategies for programmes with identical titles delivered at different sites. Programme monitoring was streamlined through the introduction of a revised annual programme monitoring template with faculties having responsibility for reports' fitness for purpose and monitoring of report actions.

20 The University also undertook a review and revision of the Assessment and Undergraduate Progression Regulations and Postgraduate Regulations. In its response to the institutional audit report the University stated that the new undergraduate regulations 'enhance the quality of the student learning experience by providing better opportunity for students to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes and make good deficiencies...', whilst, at the same time, maintaining the standards of the awards'. With regard to postgraduate regulations, revisions were made for taught master's programmes and new regulations introduced covering master's by research, professional doctorates and master's by learning contracts. A revised format of the academic year was adopted in 2004-05. The University has also addressed the issue of ethics from an institution-wide and research perspective through the Ethics Committee and the Research Ethics Committee. The University also reviewed its appraisal process for academic staff and introduced an appraisal process for service staff.

21 Since the last audit, the faculty structure has been revised in line with subject and discipline development, with the number of faculties being reduced from six to four and a Graduate School established to address postgraduate matters at institutional level (see paragraph 188). The Centre for Educational Research and Development leads the enhancement of the quality of the student and staff teaching and learning experience. In 2004 a new Directorate of Learning and Information Services was established bringing together learning resources and teaching and learning development.

22 To ensure a fair and equitable academic support system for all students within the new structures, the model of academic support was revised with support now being delivered by those close to students' programmes of study (see paragraph 141). The University also revised its guidelines on providing feedback to students on submitted work in a timely and efficient manner and a policy of providing feedback on examination scripts was adopted. Student pastoral support services were strengthened through the creation of a Student Health and Student Services Centre as a central base for all support needs which is capable of delivering services according to student need and provides equality of access.

23 Since the last audit a new management information system has been introduced in 2006-07 following the successful introduction of a new admissions system in 2005-06. Information systems were also updated through the introduction of an intranet portal and a change in role for the 'Virtual Campus' to that of a platform solely dedicated to the dissemination of learning materials (see paragraph 134).

24 The University has also undertaken a variety of steps to further enhance its engagement with students such as establishing the Student Support Centre in 2006 (see paragraph 144). Opportunities for students to provide direct feedback have also been extended through specific student committees, groups and surveys (see paragraphs 109, 116, 181, 207). There is also regular liaison between members of the Senior Management Team and the President and Officers of the Students' Union (see paragraph 117).

25 Overall, the audit team considered that the University of Lincoln has addressed fully and effectively the recommendations of the 2003 institutional audit report.

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

26 The University makes a clear distinction between its executive and committee functions. The Senior Management Team comprises the Vice Chancellor, the Pro Vice Chancellor (Research and Academic Affairs), the Pro Vice Chancellor (Academic Development), the Pro Vice Chancellor (Strategy and Business Development), the Director of Corporate Affairs, the Finance Director, the Director of Human Resources, the University Registrar and an Interim Director of Resources. Since the audit, the senior management team has been expanded to include a new post of Pro Vice Chancellor (Student Experience, Participation and Partnerships). There have also been some minor amendments to the titles and portfolios of the other Pro Vice Chancellors.

27 The Core Executive, chaired by the Vice Chancellor, is the principal executive management group of the University and is responsible for the strategic direction of the University; portfolio and partnership planning; risk management, and faculty and directorate performance. At the time of the audit its membership included the Senior Management Team plus the University Registrar, Faculty Deans, Directors of Services, the Principal of Riseholme College, the Dean of Research, the Dean of Teaching and Learning and the Interim Director of Resources. The Core Executive is supported in its role by eight subcommittees: the Equality and Diversity Committee; Finance and Resources Committee; Hull Campus Committee; Lincoln Performing Arts Centre Board of Management; Operations Committee; Portfolio Committee; Student Target, Admissions and Recruitment Committee; and the Research and Commercial Partnerships Committee. The University, in its Briefing Paper, argued that this approach to corporate management is integrative and ensures a balance between the executive and the committees. The audit team, through a review of minutes of these committees and discussions with staff, supports this view.

28 The Academic Board has overall responsibility for the management of standards but has delegated specific tasks to six subcommittees and an advisory group, the Academic College, set up in 2006 with the specific intention to give the Heads of Schools the right to be consulted, to advise and to recommend on all matters related to policy and regulation. The six subcommittees are the Academic Affairs Committee, Ethics Committee, Research Policy Committee, Teaching and Learning Development Committee, External Examiners Committee and the Committee of Professors.

29 Three senior managers have specific responsibilities for the management of academic standards and quality. The University Registrar has overall responsibility for quality and standards while the Pro Vice Chancellor (Research and Academic Affairs) has special responsibility for the student experience and the Pro Vice Chancellor (Strategy and Business Development) directs the management of collaborative arrangements.

30 The setting of standards at University level, carried out through the processes of validation, is overseen by the Academic Affairs Committee and its subcommittees: the Programmes and Standards Committee; the Quality Audit Committee and the Partnerships Committee. Assurance and monitoring of standards at University level is carried out through the External Examiner Committee. Management of the quality of learning opportunities is overseen and monitored by the Teaching and Learning Development Committee.

31 Quality and standards of postgraduate research provision are the responsibility of the Research Degrees Committee complemented at faculty level by the Faculty research degree boards.

32 The University's management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities occurs within the framework of its Teaching and Learning Strategic Plan (2007-12). The Plan has seven key objectives: attracting and supporting high quality students from diverse backgrounds; developing curricula that are underpinned by research and reflect leading-edge theory and practice; continuously improving the University's approaches to teaching, learning and assessment; offering students work-related experiences and enhancing their employment and

career development prospects; supporting staff in developing their research-informed and professional practice; promoting collaboration with selected partners inside and outside the institution; and providing an environment in which students and staff have challenging, fulfilling and enjoyable learning and teaching experiences.

33 Each objective is underpinned by performance indicators, against which the University can measure its success, and strategies for course delivery. The Plan is aimed not only at academic staff and students but also at the service departments which support them. The Centre for Educational Research and Development is responsible for facilitating and enabling the implementation of the Plan, but responsibility for overseeing the implementation lies with the University's Teaching and Learning Development Committee and the Faculty Learning and Teaching Committees, each of which has a representative of the Centre as a member.

34 The Quality Assurance Manual brings together University procedures governing the management of academic quality and standards which is largely devolved to faculties. At faculty level, academic standards and quality are managed by Faculty Boards of Studies and their subcommittees, most notably the Teaching and Learning Committee, Subject/Programme Committees, Boards of Examiners and the Faculty Quality Committee. With the exception of the Subject/Programme Committee, all have dual reporting lines and report both to the Faculty Board of Studies and the relevant subcommittee of the Academic Board.

35 Faculty boards of study manage the setting of academic standards through overseeing validation, annual monitoring and period subject review of the programmes and subjects for which the faculty is responsible, including collaborative provision. The main responsibility of faculty quality committees is the monitoring and maintenance of academic standards, while boards of examiners oversee the assurance of academic standards. Although decision-making on setting, assuring and maintaining academic standards is devolved, local decisions and practices have to be consistent with University policy, procedures and regulations. Faculty actions are monitored through University-level committees.

36 The audit team formed the view that the University's framework for managing academic standards was well designed and that the system operated effectively. Faculty level committees broadly mirror University committees. Committees have clearly defined reporting lines, terms of reference and standard membership. The team was told that decision-making in this structure is transparent and progress of business clearly traceable and agree that the closer alignment of University and faculty committees has led to increased efficiency. The team concluded that the University's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities has contributed significantly to the team's judgement that confidence could reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

37 Approval, monitoring and review are processes central to the University's approach to safeguarding the academic standards of its awards. The responsibility for determining and monitoring these procedures and for the termination of taught programmes of study lies with the Quality Audit Committee, reporting to the Academic Affairs Committee. The responsibility for operating these systems is devolved to faculties and it is the responsibility of the Faculty Board of Studies, 'to oversee validation, annual monitoring, and period subject review of the programmes and subjects for which the Faculty is responsible, and ensure University procedures and regulations are upheld'. The University argues that this longitudinal approach allows the programme teams to better reflect upon and integrate the aims and intended learning outcomes with design and delivery.

38 The procedures for the validation, annual monitoring and periodic review of programmes are detailed in the Quality Assurance Manual. The Quality Officer, an officer of the Office of Quality, Standards and Partnerships, plays a key role in ensuring that the University processes are implemented consistently at faculty level.

Validation

39 The academic standards of awards are established at validation. The current system for validation came into operation in 2005-06 and a review will take place under the aegis of Academic Affairs Committee in 2008-09. Validation calibrates the standards of awards against external reference points and institutional goals, to establish the level of risk involved in delivering the programme and the level of resource required. The University normally works within a timescale of 18 months for the development of a programme from 'inception to delivery'. Special permission is required from the Chair of Quality Audit Committee for a development to fall outside this timescale.

40 Since the last institutional audit, the focus of the validation process is the production of a programme specification and unit specifications, which according to the Quality Assurance Manual are 'the definitive publicly available information on the aims, intended outcomes and expected learner achievements of programmes of study'. These become the contract with all stakeholders for the delivery of the programme. The programme specifications are produced to a University template. The audit team considered that these were comprehensive documents, providing a highly detailed level of information, which includes the programme's intended learning outcomes, target knowledge and skills, and teaching, learning and assessment strategies. The template is accompanied by clear guidance on the structure of the programme and its regulatory framework outlined in the Quality Assurance Manual. It is a requirement of validation that all programme specifications contain appendices that provide a summary of the curriculum and of assessments, and a mapping of programme content against external benchmark standards.

41 The Quality Assurance Manual states that programme specifications are used 'as a source of information for students and prospective students seeking an understanding of a programme' and it recognises that 'audit teams will wish to explore their usefulness to students and staff'. The audit team found that, in practice, the programme specification is not routinely made available but students may request one from a number of sources including the Office of Quality, Standards and Partnerships. Information based on programme specification is provided to students in a variety of ways (see paragraph 217). The team considers it desirable that, at the earliest opportunity, the University fulfil its commitment, as stated in the Quality Assurance Manual, and make programme specifications available to all students registered on programmes leading to or contributing to its awards.

42 There is a dual role of the programme specification, as a definitive document at the time of validation and as a working document to support students' understanding of the programme and its delivery. In the view of the audit team, this approach to programme specifications has resulted in potentially confusing detail essential to the validation process, particularly the original rationale for the programme, being retained in the working document. The team considers it desirable that, in order to ensure clarity of advice to students, the University reflect on the effectiveness of the current procedures by which programme specifications are kept current.

43 Unit specifications, also agreed through the process of validation, are detailed documents, completed to a standard template. Through these, students are presented with clear information on the unit, including learning outcomes, an outline syllabus, and the strategy for teaching, learning and assessment within the unit. While the unit specifications contain assessment information about format, weighting, delivery and timing, samples of such specifications reviewed by the audit team did not include the assessment criteria against which student performance would be considered.

44 The specific procedures used in validation are dependent on the level of risk assigned to a proposal. The chair of the relevant Faculty Quality Committee, the relevant Dean (who may be the chair of the Committee) and the Quality Officer establish, against a set of guidelines, whether an approval is considered to be 'high risk' or 'low risk'. The basis for the decision could include whether the proposal relates to new or innovative curricula, if it forms part of an established provision or requires additional resources. The recommendation of the level of risk and the reasoning behind it are recorded by the Quality Officer. This process is overseen by the Quality Audit Committee, which takes the final decision on the level of risk involved (and thus the format of validation).

45 The level of risk, in turn determines the extent of external scrutiny and the exact format of the validation process. 'Low risk' validations are normally conducted by correspondence between the validation panel and the programme team. 'High risk' validations involve a meeting between the validation panel and the programme development team. The Quality Officer acts as a panel member, and produces a record of the meeting, stating the recommendations of the panel, which are approved by the validation panel chair. Validation reports are produced by the panel chair, using a standard generic template, for initial approval by the Quality Audit Committee and then final approval by the Academic Affairs Committee.

46 The Quality Manual makes it clear that, although validation by correspondence is permitted, a meeting of the panel is strongly advocated. The audit team learned that, in practice, such a meeting usually takes place. The team were informed that the University was planning to review the provision for both 'low-risk' and 'high-risk' procedures.

47 There is a requirement for external participation in all validations. In cases where the risk is deemed to be particularly high, additional externality is secured through the appointment of a panel chair from another faculty and of additional members from outside the University. Validations of programmes in partner colleges are always defined as 'high risk'.

48 The procedures for validation, as outlined in the Quality Assurance Manual, may be varied in practice at the discretion of the Deputy Academic Registrar (Quality, Standards and Partnerships). The purpose of this provision is stated as being to enable the University 'to respond to particular circumstances'. While accepting that, at the time of the audit, the provision for variation in practice had not been invoked, the audit team considers it advisable that the University review whether further operational guidance on this discretion should be provided in the Quality Manual to provide a secure and transparent basis for decisions on variations to the University's customary validation procedures.

Annual Monitoring

49 All University programmes including those delivered at partner institutions are monitored annually to evaluate student achievement; the extent to which the curriculum supports student achievement of the intended learning outcomes; and to ensure the continuing currency and academic standards of the programme. An annual monitoring report is produced by each programme leader and these reports are discussed at, and must be approved by, the relevant subject or programme board before being consolidated into a faculty matrix report and considered through the University's deliberative structures (see paragraph 101).

50 Institutional level committees devote one meeting early in each new academic session to consideration of the outcomes arising from annual monitoring, to allow the University to confirm the standard of the student achievement and to have confidence in the robustness of faculty annual monitoring activity. A review of the relevant minutes by the audit team confirmed that all relevant information was provided to each committee.

51 The Academic Affairs Committee has also, for the last three years, identified a theme within institutional quality assurance which the Deans are expected to address within the faculty

reports. This requires not only a strategic level account of how the faculty is addressing the particular area but also an action plan for further development. The University believes that this merging of institutional view and faculty priorities has resulted in further assurance of academic standards, and improved retention and National Student Survey scores.

52 Overall, the audit team concluded that the monitoring procedures represent an effective means for annually reviewing the academic health of each programme, and encouraging planning for enhancement at the level of the programme, the subject and the faculty. The oversight of this process enables the Quality Audit Committee to assure the Academic Affairs Committee that academic standards are maintained and issues around quality are addressed.

53 The audit team formed the view that the annual programme monitoring report allows for concise presentation of information about academic standards at programme level. However, the analysis of statistics takes a one-year view only and does not provide the opportunity for the programme to monitor trends in its own development.

Periodic academic review

54 Periodic academic review normally takes place every five years, though this timing can be varied where the Academic Affairs Committee considers there is a cause for concern or where there are external requirements for information, for example by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. Periodic academic review considers all programmes within a designated area (normally the subject or department) including short courses and collaborative programmes. Review panels reach judgements on four areas: the standard of the awards; the quality of the students' learning experience; the currency of the programmes; and innovation and good practice.

55 A self-evaluation document produced to a standard template is the basis for the reviews. The self-evaluation documents scrutinised by the audit team were highly descriptive in nature, often with little evidence-based analysis in key areas like assessment or student progression and completion. Given the role of this document in defining the structure of the review, the team would encourage the University to continue its work in ensuring that the process of self-evaluation is succinct, analytical and evidence-based.

56 The periodic academic review is considered to provide a horizontal look at academic standards and quality across programmes and a vertical look at the faculty's approach to the maintenance of these. The process involves consideration of student feedback, external examiner reports and issues surrounding teaching and learning, assessment, student support, and resources. The review report and associated faculty action plans are received and monitored by Quality Audit Committee via an initial response from the faculty and a report on any follow-up action one year later.

57 Overall, the systems for the approval, monitoring and review of award standards are effective and well administered, with Quality Officers playing a key role in maintaining parity across a devolved system of four faculties. The Quality Assurance Manual provides a useful source of guidance for key processes in the management of academic standards and quality. Its coverage of these processes is broad and supports the corporate ownership of quality procedures. Nonetheless, there are a number of areas where additional specification would support further consistency of practice (see also paragraphs 105 and 108). These areas include: clarifying the boundaries of the discretion of the Deputy Academic Registrar (Quality, Standards and Partnerships) to vary validation procedures; guidance on the use of statistics in self-evaluation and reporting; and criteria for appointing the chairs of validation panels (see paragraph 95). The audit team recommends as advisable, therefore, that the University should consider producing supplementary operational guidance for its key quality assurance processes to support the consistent implementation of the Quality Assurance Manual.

External examiners

58 The Briefing Paper stated that 'The University regards external examining as fundamental to the assurance of academic standards'. External examiners are supported by the External Examiner Handbook, which outlines comprehensively the University's expectations in relation to the role and responsibilities of external examiners including approving assessment tasks and examination papers; undertaking dialogue with subject teams; reviewing samples of students' works; attending examination boards; agreeing marks; and agreeing minor modifications to programmes. At subject examination boards, the expectation is that they will advise on the standard of marking, student achievement across units and cohorts, and the appropriate re-assessment of failed students. At departmental boards of examiners they advise on the confirmation of academic credit and awards, the application of consideration for mitigating circumstances, academic malpractice and the academic standards of the awards. An external examiner, drawn from the cadre of external examiners who have served two years of their term, is appointed to each faculty examination board, to advise on the conferment of awards. Two experienced external examiners also attend meetings of the University External Examiner Committee to consider academic offences.

59 The External Examiners Committee is responsible for the appointment of external examiners and the quality assurance of the external examining systems. In the 2004 re-organisation of the University's committee structure, the committee was elevated to become a full committee of the Academic Board. From 2006, its terms of reference were changed to enable the chair (a dean of faculty) to rotate every two years, with a view to extending ownership of the Committee's work.

60 The Briefing Paper stated that the External Examiners Committee's task is to 'create a university-wide view of the soundness of our awards and to give the University confidence in the exercise of our degree awarding powers'. The Committee is charged with ensuring that external examiners are 'independent, of sufficient academic standing and with appropriate expertise' and that they are properly briefed and trained and annually updated. The Committee advises the Academic Board on all procedural issues and monitors the performance of external examiners, including attendance at examination boards and the fullness of reports, terminating appointments where performance is unsatisfactory. Briefing sessions are held for external examiners twice-yearly. All new external examiners are given the opportunity to attend and for some it is made a condition of appointment.

61 The responsibility for ensuring that all external examiners are in place before the beginning of the academic year rests with the head of department (including for partner provision). The External Examiners Committee publishes guidance on the nomination and appointment of external examiners. Departments are advised that it is undesirable for an examiner to be succeeded by another from the same institution and that reciprocal agreements with other institutions should be declared on the nomination form. Since early 2006, the External Examiners Committee has monitored reciprocal agreements, and ensured that external examiners are drawn from a range of institutions, by receiving annually faculty lists of current external examiners.

62 Nominations from departments are considered by the relevant Faculty Quality Assurance Committees and the Faculty Board of Studies and forwarded to the External Examiners Committee for further discussion. From the minutes of the committee reviewed, the audit team concluded that, in practice, this constitutes a robust discussion of the work of the faculties and routinely results in nomination forms being returned to the faculty for further work prior to final approval by the committee.

63 The procedure for nomination and appointment of external examiners for collaborative provision is the same, and, where possible, the collaborative programme will be included in the responsibility of the corresponding external examiner for the relevant on-campus subject. It is

required that external examiners for distance-learning programmes will have some expertise in distance learning and that for Foundation Degrees, external examiners should normally have experience of work-based learning.

64 The external examiner submits a report at the end of each cycle of assessment, using the standard University pro forma. The external examiner is given the opportunity to confirm a threshold judgement on academic standards (including the currency of the curriculum); the assessment process; partner college operation (where relevant); and to add written comments in each of these areas along with a comment on whether or not last year's recommendations have been acted upon. The pro forma provides a separate section to ensure that comment on partner provision is supplied where applicable. Outgoing external examiners are additionally asked to reflect on their experience.

65 The Office of Quality, Standards and Partnerships receives the external examiner reports and confirm whether the annual reports provide the required information. Those that do not are referred back to the external examiner and a follow-up procedure is activated to ensure re-submission. The Secretariat then circulates the reports to the relevant Dean, head of department, partner college and Faculty Quality Committee. The head of department is responsible for ensuring that a response is made to the external examiner in relation to the reports.

66 The Faculty Quality Committee discusses external examiner reports and takes any action required to address issues raised. The subject boards are required to receive external examiner reports and this ensures that students, as well as staff, have sight of them. In addition to these procedures, the Pro Vice Chancellor (Research and Academic Affairs) reads all external examiner reports and the responses to them from the heads of departments. The Pro Vice Chancellor produces a summary of the reports commenting on their helpfulness, the issues raised and the appropriateness of the subject's response. The summary report is submitted to the External Examiners Committee to provide an institutional overview.

67 Overall, the audit team concluded that the procedures for external examining adopted by the University represent a secure system for assuring academic standards and enhancing quality. In particular, the work of the External Examiners' Committee enables the University to focus in great detail on the operation and management of the system and its operation is considered by the team to be a feature of good practice.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

68 The Briefing Paper stated that the Academic Infrastructure 'has been of invaluable assistance to the University in establishing and maintaining its arrangements for the management of academic standards'. The University defines academic standards largely in relation to external reference points, particularly the calibration of awards to the FHEQ; the setting and verification of the academic standards of programmes and an alignment of curriculum content against the subject benchmark statements; the use of an assessment framework that reflects the precepts and guidance in the *Code of practice*; and the measurement of student achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The Academic Registry recently audited the University's policies and practices against key sections of the *Code of practice* on behalf of the Academic Affairs Committee. This demonstrated a close alignment between the guidance in the *Code* and the University's major mechanisms for the management of academic quality and standards, a view which the audit team supports. In areas where alignment had yet to be achieved, evidence of current status was presented, remaining developments outlined and the individual responsible for carrying out these actions identified.

69 Section 2 of the Quality Assurance Manual provides detailed guidance on the use of external reference points in the development of programme specifications and a helpful summary appendix of the various documents that, at the time of the audit, constitute the Academic Infrastructure. Programme development teams are required to calibrate their proposed provision against the relevant components of the Academic Infrastructure and any academic standards

required by relevant professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. This calibration is captured in the 'benchmarking analysis' which reviews alignment with subject benchmark statements produced by QAA and is required as an appendix to the programme specification. The audit team scrutinised a large number of these appendices and found them to be a clear method of calibrating the academic standards of programmes against sector expectations for the subject.

70 The validation process for new programmes, and the revalidation of existing programmes, includes an appropriate consideration of the Academic Infrastructure. The validating panel is required to report on the use of the Academic Infrastructure, and professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements in the definitive programme information. Additional requirements for the validation of Foundation Degrees (relating particularly to employer involvement in the development) feature in the reporting procedure to Quality Audit Committee. This is an appropriate mechanism to ensure that the provisions of the Foundation Degree qualification benchmark are met.

71 Similarly, in annual monitoring, programmes are required to report on the match between academic standards and the requirements of the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements and any relevant professional, statutory and regulatory body standards. This monitoring of the calibration with national standards is also a feature of the matrix reports produced as part of this process (see paragraph 101). External examiner reports are required to confirm whether 'the standards set for the awards respond to the FHEQ and to relevant National Benchmarks, if published, for the subject'.

72 In making their judgements, periodic academic review panels are required to have particular regard for the relevant subject benchmark statements, the FHEQ and the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

73 The University was awarded an Erasmus University Charter in 2006-07 and the audit team can confirm that the University's systems for the management of academic standards quality display a broad compatibility with the European Standards and Guidelines. The University is aware of the requirements for operating in the European Higher Education Area and recently amended its regulations in order to provide integrated master's programmes that are compliant with Bologna requirements. The University also provides students with a Diploma Supplement on request and is working towards meeting the 2010 deadline for providing these as an entitlement.

74 In managing academic standards, the audit team confirmed that the University operates within national benchmarks as established by the Academic Infrastructure and the relevant professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements. It has established secure systems to ensure that the University's practice matches these external reference points, and that this is carried through consistently across the organisation. The Quality Officers play a key role in this respect. Appropriate mechanisms are in place to enable practice to be adjusted where benchmarks change and develop.

Assessment policies and regulations

75 The University sets out its frameworks for the assessment and progression of students and for the regulation of the academic provision in the University Regulations, which are further explained in the Guidance on the University Regulations. These documents are available on the University's website. They are clearly set out, expressed in accessible language and together provide a comprehensive structure for the operation of assessment at the level of the unit, programme, subject, faculty and University.

76 The Briefing Paper stated that the University has framed its regulations to 'reflect the enabling intent of our policy of academic devolution by not being overly prescriptive of curriculum structures and content; rather they assume that these must be provided by discipline conventions and guidance'. While this implies that a high level of variability is possible, the audit team saw that, in practice, the University Regulations form a standard framework across all programmes. The Quality Assurance Manual makes clear the additional documentation needed

where a programme does not conform to the regulations. This includes 'confirmation of Academic Board approval of any variation to regulations'. The Quality Assurance Manual also states that where University regulations are in conflict with the requirements of a relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body, the published requirements of the professional, statutory or regulatory body will 'normally be allowed to take precedence over the University Regulations'. This variation must be approved by the Academic Board.

77 The Academic Board reviews and updates the University Regulations on advice from the Programmes and Standards Committee via the Academic Affairs Committee. These discussions are a regular part of the Board's work and include thorough discussions of the Academic Affairs Committee's recommendations.

78 The Academic Board devolves the responsibility for the assessment of students, the award of credit and the conferment of degrees to the faculty examination boards. Each faculty has a tiered structure of boards of examiners including subject, departmental and faculty boards; the audit team formed the view that these constitute an effective means of managing the operation of the University regulations. Subject boards of examiners ensure moderation has been undertaken appropriately; agree grades; review achievement and academic standards; take advice from external examiners; approve assessments and re-assessments and provide advice to the departmental boards of examiners. Departmental boards recommend awards; confirm credit awarded through accreditation of prior learning, or accreditation of experiential learning; apply decisions relating to extenuating circumstances and academic offences; confirm student progression; establish progress panels; confirm arrangements for assessment and re-assessment; review academic standards, take advice from external examiners and advise the Faculty Board of Examiners. Faculty boards determine student entitlement to awards and their classification, oversee academic standards, take advice from external examiners and provide advice to the chair of the Academic Board, where appropriate. Boards of examiners deal with both on-campus and collaborative programmes.

79 Each programme is required to publish its assessment strategy in the programme specification which must also contain an assessment map as an appendix. Unit descriptors contain detail on the assessment strategy for the unit and the form of assessment.

80 The assessment of students is a significant element of the validation process. The validation report is required to confirm that an appropriate range of assessment is set within the programme, and that the assessment strategy reflects the intended learning outcomes. The standard pro forma for annual monitoring requires a series of 11 judgements to be made on the effective operation of assessment within the programme. These include the external examiners' view of the usefulness of the assessment criteria; the balance of student workloads; the clarity of the assessment briefs; and the helpfulness of the feedback from tutors. At the time of the audit, student assessment was not a mandatory theme in periodic review, but may feature where professional, statutory and regulatory body accreditation is involved.

81 The audit team concluded that the University's assessment policies, procedures and regulations were robust and contributed significantly to the team's judgement that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Management information - statistics

82 The Briefing Paper noted that each faculty, subject and programme committee has responsibility to 'undertake critical review of the subject, including analysis of statistics in relation to: admissions, progression, student transfers and withdrawals, examination results correlated with admissions qualifications, and student employment statistics'. An agenda to support this process taking place at the first meeting of the academic year of the subject and programme committee is included in the Quality Assurance Manual. Progression reports are made available

to subject committees. In addition, subject examination boards routinely review student achievement at unit level.

83 While student progression and achievement are explicit elements in annual monitoring and periodic review, the Quality Assurance Manual does not provide any clear guidance on how these data should be used. In periodic review, the use made of statistics both in self-evaluation and the reporting process is variable and sometimes unsystematic. In annual monitoring, the one-year analysis of statistics does not fully enable a programme team to take a view on trends in the development of the programme (see paragraph 53).

84 The Briefing Paper stated that the University's use of information management has been 'significantly improved' by the introduction of a new management information system at the start of 2006-07. However, the University recognised that the system is not without some difficulties and at the time of the audit was still a work in progress. Nevertheless, the data available at the time of the audit will enable student registration, withdrawals, completions and achievement to be tracked by programme. All programme leaders have access to this information through an online database.

85 The audit team concluded that the University was making progress with strengthening its management information system. The team would encourage the University to continue its work of integrating the analysis of critical statistics more fully into its key processes for the management of academic quality and standards: the University may wish to include this matter in its consideration of the team's recommendation in respect of operational guidance supplementary to the Quality Assurance Manual.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

86 The central element of the University's approach to managing learning opportunities is what it refers to as the 'learning landscape'. The learning landscape includes academic staff, service staff and students, all with an important role to play in delivering learning and teaching. As part of this the University considers that it is essential to ensure that the Teaching and Learning Strategic Plan should be closely linked to the Plans for human resources, estates, information technology and learning resources. In December 2007 the University held a 'Learning Landscapes' Conference for academic and support staff in the University, led by speakers from across the sector. The aim of the conference was to facilitate discussion and establish ways in which the University could develop its own ethos. From discussions with staff and students the audit team confirmed that the commitment to the Learning Landscape is strong and has energised the University's approach in providing impetus for enhancement of the management of learning opportunities.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

87 The Academic Affairs Committee is responsible for ensuring due cognisance is taken of the Academic Infrastructure in relation to the quality of learning opportunities during validation, monitoring and review.

88 Changes to the FHEQ and to the *Code of practice* are reviewed by the Quality Audit Committee and Academic Affairs Committee. The latter also expects subject specialists to respond to changes to subject benchmarks in a timely manner. A review of the documentation provided for the audit trails demonstrated that subject benchmarks are reviewed throughout the life-cycle of the programmes.

89 The University referred directly to the importance that it places upon its relationship with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and that 28 per cent of undergraduate and 38 per cent of postgraduate students were accredited by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies in 2006-07. The Briefing Paper confirmed that professional, statutory and regulatory body

involvement in the process occurs where it is required. Employer involvement is via external 'practitioner' members of validation panels, where appropriate.

90 The Portfolio Committee is responsible for taking account of the external environment such as government policy, and regional, national and international demand trends in higher education when reviewing the University's portfolio of programmes.

91 The Quality Assurance Manual, in its section on general principles, explicitly states that the development of the processes supporting quality delivery has been informed by the *Code of practice*.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

Initial approval

92 Initial approval for the validation of a new programme is given by University Core and Faculty Executives. At this stage, the Core Executive is advised on the appropriateness of a development by its Portfolio Committee and by the Quality Officer (see paragraph 39). The audit team heard that the business planning behind the development of the programme takes place in a series of dialogues between subject or programme leaders and the Dean of the Faculty. The Portfolio Committee receives a 'proposal to introduce a new programme or subject or make major amendments to an existing programme' through the submission of a two-part pro forma. The Portfolio Committee considers the business case and the academic merit of the proposal, particularly ensuring its 'fit' with the University's Strategic Plan. The Committee will either return the proposal to the faculty for further work or agree that validation procedures can be initiated, reporting the outcome of this discussion to both the Core Executive and the Academic Affairs Committee.

93 The audit team considered that this procedure for initial approval was well constituted to facilitate the full consideration of a faculty proposal at University level and to ensure congruence between developments in the faculty with the strategic direction of the University. However, in practice, the team found that the proposal pro formas contained few details of the learning resources needed for the proposed programme and little indication of the dialogue that had taken place between the faculty and the subject, nor the agreed level of resourcing that the programme could expect, if validated. The team were told that the purpose of the pro forma was to record the Dean's agreement to the proposal rather than record the basis on which that agreement was made. The team was assured that the Portfolio Committee undertakes extensive discussion of matters relating to learning resources, although the team found that this level of detail was not provided by the minutes of the Committee. Given the importance that the Quality Assurance Manual places on appropriate resource planning for the management of academic standards and quality, the team recommends as desirable that the University review the procedures by which it records centrally the adequacy of learning resources for proposed programmes. This is of particular significance, since the team found that validation panels do not, themselves, routinely explore the issue of resources; that these matters are not referred to the scrutiny of external participants in the validation process, nor do learning resources feature in the final validation report submitted to the Quality Audit Committee.

Validation

94 The Briefing Paper described a dual process for the validation process based on the level of risk ascribed to the proposal (see paragraph 44). The audit team reviewed these processes through audit trails of 'low-risk' and 'high-risk' programme validations. The 'low-risk' validation demonstrated a robust process with a very detailed audit trail of email-based discussions and decision-making. The documentation for a 'high-risk' validation demonstrated that the recording of the processes, meetings and decisions within the validation report was not consistent. In two cases, the validation report covered the meeting in great detail and the panel set formal

'conditions and recommendations'. In another, the report consisted simply of a series of 'actions'. The Quality Assurance Manual contains no guidance for the conduct or reporting of these meetings. The team asked the University to clarify the variability of content and nomenclature and was informed that there was no single report template and the format was at the discretion of the Quality Officer. The team considers it advisable that the University review its reporting of validation to reduce the variability in the coverage and detail currently provided in order to improve its effectiveness.

95 The chair of the Faculty Quality Committee and the Quality Officer agree the composition of a panel for each validation. The panel consists of a chair, two further members of academic staff, at least one panel member external to the University, and the Quality Officer. The Quality Assurance Manual gives no indication of who may chair validation panels, although in practice this task is undertaken by senior staff. While the Manual provides some general guidance about the characteristics of the external panel member, for example they must be of 'good standing', can be drawn from a professional, statutory or regulatory body and must have had 'no substantial professional contact with the University or any member of the programme team for the previous five years', it does not provide detailed criteria for the appointment of external panel members. The audit team found that, in practice, the criteria for the appointment of external examiners was normally used to select external members for validation panels. The University might wish to consider whether its good practice in the appointment of external examiners might usefully be applied to the appointment of external panel members for validation.

96 Through the audit trails, the audit team was able to confirm that action plans arising from the validation stated clearly the actions to be taken and identified the loci of responsibility for each one at programme, faculty or University level. The committee minutes for the Academic Affairs Committee and Quality Audit Committee demonstrated close scrutiny of the reports, recommendations and the associated responses and action plans.

Minor modifications

97 The Briefing Paper acknowledged the danger of incremental modifications leading to a marked change to the programme without a formal review. The Quality Assurance Manual includes a section on approval of minor modifications, within which criteria are presented to provide guidance as to what constitutes minor modification. The section also lists changes which automatically trigger a revalidation. The criteria for a full revalidation are a change of programme title; changes to programme level outcomes; major changes to the overall learning, teaching and assessment strategies or mode of delivery; and changes to the content of the definitive documents exceeding 20 per cent within any programme level within one academic year.

98 In this case, the overview role is undertaken by the Faculty Quality Assurance Committees which only approves changes when external examiner approval has been received. Each faculty quality assurance committee is responsible for minor modifications for its own programmes and those of its partner institutions. The Faculty Quality Assurance Committee signs off approval and forwards it to the Academic Registry in order for the University portfolio to be updated.

99 The Quality Audit Committee and faculty quality assurance committees monitor the cumulative effect of such modification to ensure that no substantial changes to programmes take place outside of the normal revalidation schedule. The audit team reviewed a range of faculty quality committee minutes and was able to confirm that faculty quality committees scrutinise all documentation relating to minor modifications and seek amendments, additional evidence or clarification if it is deemed necessary.

Annual monitoring

100 Annual monitoring takes the form of an annual report prepared at programme level using an institutional template, and considers academic standards, curricula, assessment, teaching and

learning, student support, learning resources, student opinion, student progression and equality and diversity. The report requires a 'yes', 'no', or 'not applicable' response against a series of statements and a record of the location of the evidence for the response given. It was noted by the audit team that the latter was not always completed. The supporting evidence must be drawn from external examiner reports and other relevant external sources and the report must conclude with an action plan for the following academic year. Each report is submitted to the appropriate subject committee at the beginning of the next academic session for approval.

101 The Faculty Quality Committee oversees the process at the local level and reports to Quality Audit Committee via a faculty matrix report that summarises the content of the programme reports. It is a requirement that, while preparing the matrix report, the chair of the Faculty Quality Committee should carefully scrutinise each programme report and highlight any issues which are considered to be of high risk and report them to the Committee and the programme team. Again, the template consists of the same statements as used in the programme annual monitoring template. Where the answer is 'no' or 'not applicable', a response is required for each programme together with an assessment of the level of risk, the action required and the person responsible for completing the action and the date for completion. From the matrix report seen by the audit team, it was confirmed that the report clearly responds to any issues raised. At the point that the Quality Audit Committee considers the matrix reports, the relevant dean of faculty is asked to comment on any issues arising in partner colleges. This additional provision was introduced in 2007 to address the need to strengthen institutional oversight of academic standards in off-campus provision. The Quality Audit Committee verifies that the matrix reports are 'fit for purpose' and that any issues are being appropriately addressed in the accompanying action plans. These are then forwarded to the Academic Affairs Committee for approval.

102 The Quality Audit Committee and Academic Affairs Committee have the right to refer plans back to the faculty for additional evidence, clarification of the content or additional actions. A review of the Academic Affairs Committee minutes confirmed that the scrutiny is robust and leads to requests for further clarification and recommendations for enhancements to the University.

103 There is an additional annual monitoring exercise that focuses on programme curricula. This annual confirmation exercise is used to ensure that central and faculty records are consistent and reflect any changes made over the year.

Periodic review

104 University programmes are subject to quinquennial review by periodic academic review that, where appropriate, may be combined with a professional, statutory or regulatory body review. Responsibility for the development of the self-evaluation document lies with the head of department. No review can take place without the self-evaluation document being approved by the Faculty Quality Committee.

105 The Office of Quality, Standards and Partnerships establishes a periodic annual review panel consisting of a chair from another faculty; two members of staff (neither from the department and at least one from another faculty); an external member who is 'independent of the University'; a representative of a professional, statutory or regulatory body, if appropriate; and an officer from the Office of Quality, Standards and Partnerships. While there are no published criteria for the appointment of external panel members, in practice these are appointed on the same basis as external examiners and through liaison between the Quality Officer, the chair of the Faculty Quality Committee and the chair of the Periodic Academic Review Panel. The University should consider clarifying this selection process in the Quality Assurance Manual, to ensure a shared understanding of the role of externality by those involved in periodic review.

106 The process for the periodic academic review is outlined in the Quality Assurance Manual. However, the periodic academic review panel agrees the range of activity to be undertaken to

test the claims made in the self-evaluation document. The Quality Assurance Manual sets few expectations of what the panel should consider during the review process other than normally 'inspecting learning facilities', and 'meeting a cross-section of students'. The audit team, through the audit trails, saw variation in the activities undertaken by review panels including the format of its meetings, and noted that meetings with students were not always recorded, nor any references made to resources required by the programme. Discussions with deans elicited the information that resources for current and new programmes are considered during the business planning process of the faculty. During the same meeting, the staff were clear that meetings with students did normally take place.

107 Given that a periodic academic review report is of a standard format, the audit team considered that the discretion allowed to review panels to establish the range of activities it undertakes has the potential to lead to areas which must be covered in the final report being overlooked.

108 As noted in paragraph 57, the Quality Assurance Manual provides a useful source of guidance for key processes in the management of academic standards and quality. Its coverage of these processes is comprehensive and supports the corporate ownership of quality procedures. However, there are a number of areas where further detail would support further consistency of practice. These areas include providing criteria and procedures for the appointment of external members of validation and periodic academic review panels; guidance on agenda-setting for periodic academic review panel meetings to ensure that panel activities will provide the evidence for the generic reporting process and to facilitate formal feedback to the panel on the outcomes of the individual panel members' activities; and further guidance on the core activities of review panels, particularly with regard to considering learning resources, assessment and consulting students. The audit team recommends as advisable, therefore, that the University should consider producing supplementary operational guidance for its key quality assurance processes to support the consistent implementation of the Quality Assurance Manual.

Management information - feedback from students

109 The Briefing Paper stated that the University has adopted a more systematic approach to the collection and use of student feedback since the previous audit and that this is used to inform management decision-making at faculty and institutional level in the enhancement processes. Student feedback is sought, analysed and discussed at appropriate points in the validation, monitoring and review processes. Previously, faculties have been responsible for the design of the feedback questionnaires and their administration leading to a lack of uniformity. As a result, the University introduced annual, institution-level unit-based student surveys across the institution. The rationale for this step was to provide evidence for the development of departmental and faculty action plans presented to the Academic Affairs Committee. Unit feedback forms are discussed at subject boards of examiners.

110 In 2006-07, the Teaching and Learning Development Committee piloted an online standard unit feedback questionnaire, which was considered to be successful, with a response rate of 50 per cent. Following the pilot study, the University has purchased and, at the time of the audit, was implementing a new online survey system. From 2007-08, the questionnaire will be used across the University and the responses forwarded to unit teams, heads of departments and programme leaders.

111 The University has a framework for the dissemination of the National Student Survey results, which has been recognised as good practice by the Higher Education Academy National Student Survey Working Group. This includes disaggregating the data down to programme level. The results of the survey, together with other feedback such as external examiners' reports were reviewed in 2006 and resulted in detailed action plans at institutional and faculty level, and included service departments. The plans were discussed by the Pro Vice Chancellor (Research and Academic Affairs) and the Registrar with senior academic and service staff, and non-executive

academic staff. There were also meetings with the Students' Union and the Student Council to discuss the issues raised.

112 The Briefing Paper provided examples of changes made in response to the survey findings such as improved learning resources, timetabling and timeliness and quality of assessment feedback. It also recognised the fact that student placement opportunities continue to be a long-standing issue. Discussions with the Students' Union representatives during the audit confirmed that changes had occurred in these areas and had led to notable improvements.

113 The outcomes of institutional surveys, the National Student Survey and the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey demonstrate, almost without exception, continuous improvement in the student experience for taught and research degree students. Action plans have been drawn up in response to the 2007 national surveys which have been discussed at all levels of the University's deliberative structure. All staff have had the opportunity to engage with the process through open presentations and faculty executive meetings held by the Pro Vice Chancellor (Research and Academic Affairs). The audit concluded that the University's systematic response to the outcomes of the National Student Survey was good practice.

114 The audit team was able to confirm that student feedback is actively sought from all students across the University and collaborative partners. The Students' Union engages with the Senior Management of the University and can access the Vice Chancellor and Pro Vice Chancellor (Research and Academic Affairs) whenever issues arise.

115 Feedback from students is also sought through their membership of committees at subject, departmental, faculty and University level, and the Student Council, the latter being set up in 2006-07 and discussed below.

Role of students in quality assurance

116 At institutional level, the Student Charter describes the respective responsibility of University and students, including those at collaborative partners, in quality assurance. Students are represented at faculty level through subject committees, and faculty boards of study and their committees. The Briefing Paper considered that this provides students with the opportunity to have their voices heard with respect to the way in which University policy is implemented at faculty and programme level. However, the student written submission stated that, while most student representatives believe their voice is heard, many believe that it has little impact. This view was not supported by the Students' Union members or by student representatives that the audit team met. Both groups stated that the representation system is effective at all levels and provided a number of examples where the views of students had been listened to by the University, changes had been implemented and improvements to the student experience achieved.

117 At University level, there is Students' Union representation on the Academic Board, Academic Affairs Committee and the Teaching and Learning Development Committee. Direct communication takes place between the Sabbatical Officers and Vice Chancellor and the Pro Vice Chancellor (Research and Academic Affairs). Discussions with senior staff from the University and the Students' Union confirmed that this level of representation was considered to be very effective by both bodies.

118 The membership of Student Council, which is run by the student body, includes student representatives, a Pro Vice Chancellor, Director of Student Services and the Director of Learning and Information Services. This forum provides students with the opportunity to raise issues with senior University managers and also contribute to resolving them. The support of the University for this body is demonstrated by the request of the Vice Chancellor to attend the second meeting, along with all of the Pro Vice Chancellors, in order to introduce themselves to the students. In addition, the University is also able to raise areas of interest and obtain feedback from the student body at these meetings.

119 The Student Experience Committee was instituted in 2007 as a subcommittee of the Teaching and Learning Development Committee. The chair is the Dean of Teaching and Learning and Director of the Centre for Educational Research and Development. Its purpose is the enhancement of the student experience within the University and its partner colleges and its membership reflects this. The Committee considers a range of matters including the implications of the National Student Survey and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey data and the outcomes of Student Council meetings. The membership of the Committee reflects the fact that service departments as well as academic departments are engaged in supporting the learning experience for students. Thus it is able to review the student experience from various perspectives within the University, using a range of student feedback and analyses of this in a coherent manner and reports to the parent Committee.

120 The Briefing Paper stated that the University and the Students' Union collaborate in providing training for student representatives who receive a copy of the Handbook for Student Representatives. The audit team heard that the Students' Union has augmented the document with a quick reference guide.

121 Student representatives are given formal recognition of their role via a Student Recognition Scheme. This requires student representatives to provide a reflective account of their experiences. Discussions with the Students' Union confirmed that the University had taken up this Students' Union initiative and developed it further to provide three different levels of recognition each with a certificate signed by both the President of the Students' Union and the Vice Chancellor. However, the student representatives with whom the audit team met were not aware of the scheme. The team considered that this was due to it being a relatively recent innovation, but formed the view that if successful the scheme has the potential to enhance student engagement in the management of academic quality and standards. The Briefing Paper made specific reference to the University's ethos that students are partners and this was borne out during the team's discussion with the representatives of the Students' Union, students and staff and through the review of minutes of the Student Council.

122 Overall, the student written submission stated that the student body is happy with the importance that the University gives to the student voice. Innovations such as the Student Council were viewed as demonstrating the partnership between the institution and its student body. Throughout the visit, the audit team was impressed by what it heard of the level of formal and informal dialogue that took place between the University and its students in order to enhance the student experience. The focus of staff, at all meetings with the audit team, was on providing a supportive and positive environment which met the students' expectations and recognised the role that student feedback played in achieving this.

123 The audit team reached the view that the way in which staff across the institutions engage with students was a clear example of the University's good practice of taking a pervasive and integrated approach to the management of the quality of learning opportunities which contributes to its ongoing and dynamic development.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

124 The Briefing Paper noted that the University has a policy that 'all lecturers should and do contribute to the development of their discipline through research'. Developing curricula that are underpinned by research and supporting staff in the development of research-informed teaching are goals of the newly approved Teaching and Learning Strategic Plan (2007-12). However, there is no formal requirement for comment to be made on the links between research and learning opportunities in programme approval, validation, annual monitoring and periodic review, although the audit team saw some evidence of this taking place. The University did, however, require deans to report on the issue as part of the 2006-07 annual monitoring process and the Annual Conversation.

125 Research into teaching was the subject of the fourth Teaching and Learning Symposium in 2007 and an interview based audit of research-informed teaching was conducted to support the event. The outcomes were discussed by the Teaching and Learning Development Committee, which noted that there were differences in the interpretation of what was meant by research and the scope for research input in some programmes was felt to be constrained by professional requirements. The question of 'what is research' in this context has been discussed in the University's newly launched teaching and learning newsletter 'Educate'.

126 The link is also being taken forward by encouraging students to engage in research through the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Scheme, piloted in the summer of 2007. This required faculties to identify research projects which enable students to develop research skills and present outcomes. The results of the pilot were reported to the Teaching and Learning Development Committee and a full scheme was introduced in 2007-08.

127 A further way the University has linked pedagogical research and learning opportunities has been through the work of teaching fellows. For 2007-08, this scheme has been strengthened and more closely integrated with the Teaching and Learning Strategy and the work of Centre for Educational Research and Development, by the appointment of two Principal Teaching Fellows (see paragraph 150).

128 Overall, the audit team considered that the University is taking a number of coordinated and effective steps to strengthen appropriate links between research and learning opportunities.

Other modes of study

129 At the time of the audit, the University had limited distance-learning provision, but a target within the Learning and Teaching Strategy demonstrates its intentions to extend this provision further; for instance, a new distance-learning programme in business management is due to commence in 2008. Part-time students account for only 6 per cent of the total student body; nevertheless, these programmes have significant employer engagement and are delivered at times outside traditional teaching hours to maximise attendance. The University considers this to be an area for expansion. The audit team was satisfied that the University is taking an appropriately cautious and strategic approach to the development of other modes of study.

Resources for learning

130 Responsibility for resources is devolved to the faculties, with the University retaining an overview through the Annual Conversation, which may include comment on learning resources. Faculty strategic plans include learning resource targets and the Quality Assurance Manual provides some guidance on learning resources in relation to programme development. The proposal form for a new programme or subject requires comment on the resources required for learning and teaching along with specialist and technical support. Completed forms seen by the audit team recorded little or no detail under these headings (see paragraph 93), although there was evidence of detailed faculty resource planning for a major new programme. The team was told that although resource issues were devolved to faculty level, the Portfolio Committee, which is responsible for approving the business case for a new programme, would subject the proposal to assiduous scrutiny and did reject proposals. The validation process does not require any discussion of learning resources, but the team were told that, in practice, resources may be discussed. The annual monitoring and periodic academic review processes do require monitoring of resource provision and the audit trails evidenced consideration of resources.

131 The audit team was satisfied that learning resources are adequately considered at the initiation and review stages, but would consider it desirable that the University reviews the procedures by which the adequacy of resources for proposed programmes are recorded centrally (see paragraph 93).

132 At a University level, the provision of learning spaces forms part of the overall Estates Strategy and since the last audit there have been a number of significant developments including

the opening of a new Architecture building; the provision of more teaching space and specialist studio areas; the move of the library to a new facility; the opening of a performing arts centre; and the creation of student support and social space. There has also been considerable investment in audiovisual facilities with 80 per cent of generic teaching spaces being equipped. Improvements have been made to facilities at the campuses in Hull, Riseholme and Holbeach.

133 The library and IT (information technology) committees are responsible for the development and monitoring of the strategic plans for the library and learning resources and computing services departments. Both services have strategic plans for 2007-12 which mirror the framework of the University's Teaching and Learning Strategic Plan. Comprehensive action plans are attached to the strategy documents. Promotion of the Reading Strategy, in consultation with faculties, is intended to improve access to resources and manage student and staff expectations. This strategy formed part of the broader Learning Landscapes agenda. The audit team was told that the annual plans for each of the services were informed by departmental teaching and learning plans and were reported to faculty committees. The team considered that there was a well-integrated approach to the learning resource strategy.

134 The Director of Learning and Information Services has worked closely with the Centre for Educational Research and Development and the faculties to upgrade the virtual learning environment from an in-house system to a more facilitative externally provided framework. A staff development programme has been established and implemented to support this development. The phased implementation of the project has been monitored by the Teaching and Learning Development Committee and is due to be completed in 2008-09. The audit team were told that the project had involved close liaison between technologists and academics from the outset and had been welcomed enthusiastically in many parts of the University. The team formed the view that the University's approach to the introduction of the virtual learning environment is an example of its strategic and integrated approach to learning resources.

135 Students are able to raise resource issues at the Student Council, which is attended by the Director of Learning and Information Services, and at subject committees. Following the 2007 National Student Survey, an initial review of learning resources in the four highest and four lowest scoring subject areas was undertaken to identify factors influencing student satisfaction. The review committed the library and learning resources department to continue to strengthen efforts to understand student requirements through regular user surveys, benchmark against other higher education libraries, and continue to engage with the Student Council and subject committees. Faculty National Student Survey action plans also address learning resources issues and the need for improved liaison with the library. Student satisfaction with the University response to learning resources issues was evident. The student written submission noted the willingness of the library and its staff to listen to the student body and was positive about the progress made in the improvement of learning resources. Student representatives whom the audit team met also commented positively about the responsiveness of the library; the value of the virtual learning environment and broadly, with the online access to the resources. The team considered that the University has addressed fully student views on learning resources at a number of levels and had responded in a systematic way to the National Student Survey.

136 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for the provision, allocation and management of learning resources in relation to maintaining the quality of students' learning opportunities are effective.

Admissions policy

137 The University admissions policy, revised in 2007, sets out the requirements for admission to different levels of programme including research degrees and details the approach to admission on the basis of previous learning, admission with advanced standing and the admission of students with disabilities. The policy states that admissions are governed by two principles: the applicant's ability to benefit from the chosen course, and fair and equal treatment for all applicants.

138 The importance of the widening participation agenda is reflected in the Teaching and Learning Strategic Plan which has, as its first objective, the attraction and support of 'high quality students for diverse educational, social and cultural backgrounds'. The University has exceeded its benchmarks for widening participation recruitment and won the Times Higher Education award for widening participation initiative of the year (2006-07). However, it considers that more planned work is needed and is exploring longer-term more formalised arrangements with a number of associate schools in the region.

139 The implementation of the admissions policy has been mapped against the precepts of the *Code of practice* and is supported by regular admissions workshops for staff and the monitoring of decisions by an admissions panel. The policy is reviewed regularly by programme committees and the Academic Affairs Committee, with final approval given by the Academic Board. The Student Admission and Recruitment Committee also reports to the Academic Board on recruitment issues.

140 The University has a policy on the accreditation of prior learning which details the credit points available for different levels of award and allows for admission on the basis of previous learning gained through experience. The policy is applied by Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme assessors with decisions being confirmed by departmental boards of examiners. A member of the Office of Quality, Standards and Partnerships sits on the boards to oversee consistency. The University intends to establish an accreditation of prior and experiential learning board to further ensure consistency. The audit team was satisfied by the University's approach and would encourage it to establish the board. Overall, the team formed the view that there was fair, effective and consistent implementation of the admissions policy.

Student support

141 The Briefing Paper stated that the University had reorganised its system of academic support for students by replacing the 'academic advocacy' system with an academic tutor scheme more closely tied to the programme of study. The responsibilities of academic tutors are defined in a Handbook for Academic Tutors published by the Centre for Educational Research and Development. This details the role of tutors as the first line of contact on academic matters and includes a framework for first semester meetings with students, including one to discuss and review personal development planning. The section on personal development planning noted that tutors are responsible for its promotion but students that met the audit team gave the impression that it was not much used. The Handbook also details the central support systems to which tutors should introduce students where relevant.

142 The Handbook notes that the academic tutor scheme allows for local faculty variation in implementation and requires each faculty to have an approved scheme applied at departmental level. This variability was evidenced in a Faculty Student Handbook which stated that ' Faculties had Academic Tutors or Year Tutors depending on the ways in which support was structured ' and in programme handbooks, which variously referred to academic tutors, year tutors, year coordinators and academic advocates. Student representatives who met with the team commented that the variability of title had led to some confusion; a view echoed in the student written submission, particularly in relation to joint honours students. However, there was general satisfaction with the system at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

143 The audit team heard that the University was aware of the variable use of nomenclature and confirmed that the principles of the system applied to all students. The Student Experience Committee would be reviewing the use of terminology in programme handbooks to ensure consistency in due course, and the University acknowledged there was a case for regularising the process to ensure that student expectations were being managed. While the team were satisfied that the academic support system is working satisfactorily, it would encourage the University to ensure that the support system is applied consistently and appropriately at local level.

144 The University provides a comprehensive range of student services which are detailed in staff and student handbooks. The Student Services Directorate is responsible for advice on careers, finance, welfare, disability, and international student issues, along with personal counselling and a general information service provided by the Student Support Centre. The audit team heard that there was an effective communication system between the Student Support Centre and academic departments, which enabled it to provide effective support for disabled students and extensive induction support for international students. The quality of service provided by the Student Support Centre is monitored by annual surveys in each area. Waiting times at branch campuses are monitored to ensure the provision of a comparable service. Both careers and disability service provision has been fully mapped against the relevant sections of the *Code of practice* and the service as a whole has been commended in an external accreditation exercise.

145 The student written submission reported that student services were highly rated and, in meetings with the audit team, students praised the level of support, giving examples in relation to disabled and international students. The audit trails provided similar evidence of student satisfaction. Students also noted that, while there had previously been a lack of visibility for the careers service, their daily presence in the Student Opportunities, Activities and Participation Centre was assisting. This Centre was a joint development of the University and the Students' Union and enables students to engage, in one place, with a range of clubs, societies and central services. The students also reported that they had been involved in the University's 'Enterprise@Lincoln' scheme launched in 2008. This scheme, developed by careers and commercial partnerships staff, promotes student engagement with employers and facilitates building a portfolio of relevant experience.

146 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University has an effective approach to providing student support at departmental and institutional levels.

Staff support (including staff development)

147 The University Staff Development Policy stated that the primary responsibility for ensuring that staff development needs are identified and met, lies with those responsible for managing staff. The policy provides for scaled support depending upon whether the activity is essential, such as induction, encouraged, or one of personal preference. Staff development objectives are reviewed annually, included in the appropriate sections of the Corporate Plan and then communicated and interpreted within faculties and service departments. Individual department plans are then prepared. The first all-staff survey has been completed and its outcomes will be considered by the Senior Management Team and will enable the University to respond to and enhance staff development and support.

148 A new achievement development appraisal scheme has recently been introduced. The audit team were told that there is an expectation that all staff will participate in the scheme, but that it had not been made compulsory to allow flexibility in addressing specific staff circumstances. The team saw evidence that all but a small minority of staff participate. The University also runs a voluntary peer observation scheme for teaching by academic staff, which is organised by heads of department as part of the workload allocation. Again, participation in the scheme is said to be widespread and the role of the scheme is to be reviewed. The Achievement Development Appraisal scheme is coordinated by the Human Resources department who produce comprehensive documentation detailing the conduct of the appraisal meeting, the requirement for confidentiality, and the responsibility of the appraisers. Unlike the previous peer appraisal scheme, the new scheme gives heads of department an overview of training needs and common themes. Heads prepare a departmental Achievement Development Appraisal plan on the basis of the individual appraisal forms. The plan identifies generic training needs and provides for feedback to staff which may include funding to meet individual's objectives. The departmental plans are summarised in a faculty report which is considered at a University level. The faculty report for the purposes of the Annual Conversation also covers staff development and retention.

From its meetings with staff it was clear to the team that there is an integrated approach to staff appraisal; that its outcomes have an impact at individual, departmental and central service levels, and that it is related to the enhancement agenda.

149 Human Resources organises some 80 staff development events during the academic year, some of which are in response to faculty or University requirements. Staff at partner colleges are also invited to staff development events. The audit team was told that the Centre for Educational Research and Development and the Human Resources department are developing a continuing professional development programme which will focus on professional competencies and be applicable to both academic and support service staff. Almost 50 staff are taking relevant University postgraduate qualifications, and over the last four years a similar number of academic staff, both full and part-time and including staff from partner colleges, have taken the Postgraduate Certificate in Education in Post Compulsory Learning and Teaching.

150 The University ran a teaching fellowship scheme from 2003 to 2007, which offered six fellowships a year, each with a bursary. The projects pursued by fellows covered issues ranging from development of the virtual learning environment to assessment strategies and independent learning. Although this work was disseminated through twice-yearly meetings of fellows, it was felt by the University that there was a need to strengthen the scheme and maximise its impact by focusing on better dissemination of outcomes, more support during the fellowship and proper reward mechanisms. Building on this experience, the University has instituted two new schemes to recognise and reward staff development in teaching and learning specifically. It has introduced the new position of Principal Teaching Fellow, giving staff the opportunity to apply for promotion to a status equivalent to Reader, based on their teaching and learning activities. The Fellowship position is renewable and the Human Resources Department, working with the Centre for Educational Research and Development, wishes to develop the scheme to provide a career path to chair level. Two Principal Teaching Fellows have been appointed and their work, in conjunction with the Centre, is focused on the key University projects relating to the Learning Landscapes agenda, enhancement of learning through use of the virtual learning environment and the development of research-based learning in the undergraduate curricula. The new Principal Teaching Fellows see their role as that of ambassadors for the Centre and champions of teaching and learning.

151 The University has also established a Fund for Educational Development to give all staff, including those in support departments, the opportunity to apply for project funding. The scheme is coordinated through the Centre for Educational Research and Development. The selection criteria include compatibility with the University Teaching and Learning Strategy and having appropriate plans for dissemination and embedding of outcomes. Over 50 staff applied for funding in 2007-08 and the 15 successful applications ranged across academic and service departments. The two schemes provide an expanded and integrated approach to staff development in the teaching and learning area with a key role being played by the Centre for Educational Research and Development.

152 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for staff support and development were effective and well integrated with its enhancement agenda.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Management information - quality enhancement

153 The University stated that its enhancement of teaching and learning is underpinned by a systematic approach to gathering student data and feedback. As noted above, the University has developed both its internal provision for student feedback and its framework for responding to the National Student Survey (see paragraphs 111, 113, 116). The audit team considered that the University has made effective use of student data to enhance the student experience and this is

evidenced by the significant improvement in the National Student Survey response. The team also considered that information provided through the programme monitoring process contributed to planning for enhancement at the programme, subject and faculty levels (see paragraphs 49, 100).

154 A central role in the enhancement process has been played by the development and implementation of the Teaching and Learning Strategy, which has the aim of involving staff in creating an exciting teaching and learning environment. The development process commenced in 2005-06 with a decision of the Academic Board followed by staff conferences chaired by the Vice Chancellor, followed by a Green Paper and further consultation and ending with a White Paper that was adopted as the Teaching and Learning Strategic Plan in 2007. The team was told at a number of meetings that this development was both top-down and bottom-up, with a combination of senior leadership and grass roots discussion. The strategy encompasses the enhancement of the learning environment, the development of curricula underpinned by research, the development of work-related experience, the use of teaching technology, and staff development. Each objective of the strategy has a number of performance indicators. The strategy is supported by linked strategies for library and computer services.

155 The audit team was also told that faculties are developing their own linked operational plans which will be reviewed by the Centre for Educational Research and Development with a view to developing key performance indicators and a more detailed narrative for implementing the plan. Faculty and support department action plans for implementing the Teaching and Learning Strategic Plan are monitored and reviewed by the Teaching Learning and Development Committee with a view to joining up agendas, identifying key objectives and considering if these can be facilitated by the creation of specific working groups. These action plans are supplemented by reports on enhancement by faculty deans, which are submitted to the Academic Affairs Committee as part of the annual monitoring process. The recently introduced Annual Conversation also requires faculties to report on teaching and learning, student performance and satisfaction, and staff development. The University considered this to be a parallel supportive process and the team endorsed this view.

156 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University has an effective and integrated approach to planning and implementing its key internal policies in relation to quality enhancement.

Good practice

157 The University stated that the importance of systematic approach to enhancement was highlighted by the fact that the newly created Dean of Teaching and Learning was a member of the Core Executive and the Academic Board, and was Director of the Centre for Educational Research and Development. The team was told that the Centre does not have a monitoring or managerial function in relation to teaching and learning, rather it provides a framework, encourages, invigorates and brings together teaching and research expertise. It coordinates the work of the Principal Teaching Fellows and that of staff engaged on educational development projects. Through its staff being members of University and Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees, the ambassadorial role of its Principal Teaching Fellows, and its new publication, 'Educate', it plays a key role in disseminating good practice.

Staff development and reward

158 The University stated that 'key to the enhancement strategy is the desire to ensure that the strategic plan is holistically owned by staff' and that initiatives to facilitate staff involvement in the enhancement process included the creation of Principal Teaching Fellowships, the Fund for Educational Development and the use of staff conferences and symposia. As noted above, (paragraphs 127, 150), the development of the teaching fellowship programme and the approach to staff development generally has made an effective contribution to the enhancement

agenda. The promoted status of the new Principal Teaching Fellows with the prospect of further career advancement, along with the funding support for 15 staff projects and the Achievement Development Appraisal scheme, demonstrates that the University is rewarding good practice in relation to teaching and learning. The teaching and learning symposium focused on Research-informed Teaching and Innovative Practices in 2007 and included presentations by staff and external experts. The Learning Landscapes conference, held in December 2007 and attended by over 200 academics, support staff, students and external speakers, focused on the links between the built environment, academic infrastructure and supporting services. The role of this conference in providing an impetus for enhancement of learning opportunities has been noted above (paragraph 86).

159 The University referred to its implementation of a new virtual learning environment as an example of a strategic development in teaching and learning. This process has involved both piloting to identify best practice and an extensive staff development programme. The audit team considered that it demonstrated a strategic and integrated approach to enhancement.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

Strategic approach to collaborative provision

160 The University identifies two types of partnership arrangements: collaborative partnerships and cooperative arrangements. The latter do not lead to awards of the University but include progression and articulation agreements, student and staff exchanges and shared research projects. In the light of a review of its approach to collaborative arrangements in 2003, the University imposed a strict moratorium on overseas collaboration. Accordingly, it no longer engages in franchised activity overseas and all overseas collaboration falls into the cooperative arrangements category. The overall number of collaborative and cooperative partners is small. At the time of the audit some 1,011 students were studying at collaborative partners.

161 The University's strategic approach to collaborative arrangements primarily focuses on the establishment of long-term relationships with local partners. This has resulted in a consolidation of its links with further education colleges in the UK to seven regional colleges. This is seen by the University as a constructive strategy for encouraging progression of students from local colleges to the University and for engaging with students who are less likely to go into higher education, thus encouraging increased participation levels and supporting the University's widening participation agenda. To further these developments, discussions are being held with partner colleges on the development of a more structured approach to future course development with a view to operating a three-year curriculum and academic development planning cycle from 2008-09. The University also has partnerships with two further education colleges outside the region. These were established in response to a specific Higher Education Funding Council for England request. In 2004-05 the University also entered into partnership with Lincoln Cathedral, the Diocese of Lincoln and Bishop Grosseteste University College and established a School of Theology and Ministry Studies.

162 The recently adopted policy on UK and International Academic Partnerships articulates the University's general principles with regard to collaborative and cooperative partnerships. Partnerships must promote the University's mission; be sustainable; be in line with its strategic objectives; and be consistent with internal and external quality assurance principles and procedures.

163 Management of all collaborative partnerships is carried out by the newly established Partnerships Committee, a subcommittee of the Academic Affairs Committee, which has partner representation. At the time of the audit it was chaired by the Pro Vice Chancellor (Strategy and Business Development) and supported by the Partnerships Officer, with a senior member of staff overseeing day-to-day relationships with partners. The Committee is also responsible for the

development and monitoring of the University's Partnerships Strategy. At the time of the audit, the Committee had yet to meet.

164 The procedures for the management of academic standards and quality of collaborative provision are set out in the Quality Assurance Manual and follow closely those for on-campus provision.

Approval, monitoring and review

165 A three-stage process takes place for the approval of collaborative arrangements: centre approval, centre validation and approval to deliver. Centre approval is the process by which a new collaborative partner is approved to offer and deliver University programmes. This process confirms that the partner is able to deliver higher education programmes to an appropriate academic standard and can provide a quality student experience. Separate approval is required for each teaching site. Centre approval is carried out by a panel consisting of senior academic staff, a learning resources representative and a Quality Officer from the University. Approval decisions are made on the basis of advance documentation submitted by the partner, discussions with partner staff and a tour of facilities during an approval visit. Any conditions of approval have to be met before recruitment of students can begin. Approval decisions are ratified by the Quality Audit Committee.

166 Approval to deliver gives permission to an existing partner to offer and deliver an already validated programme. This process confirms that physical and staff resources are, and will remain, appropriate for the delivery of the programme. For new partnerships, centre approval is usually combined with approval to deliver. The delivery of any subsequently validated programmes is, however, subject to another approval to deliver event. The panel has the same composition as for centre approval and the partner provides documentation similar to that required for centre approval but focused on the specific provision under consideration.

167 Centre validation involves the validation of a programme to be offered by a partner institution. This process follows the normal University procedures for validation and revalidation (see paragraphs 39, 94). All collaborative programmes are classified as 'high risk' and therefore follow the process for 'high-risk' validations (see paragraph 45). Major changes to validated programmes require a revalidation, and minor modifications are dealt with by faculty quality committees using the University's standard procedures.

168 The audit team reviewed documentation relating to partner and programme approval and found that approval to deliver and revalidation events closely followed the relevant University procedures and covered all required areas. However, for centre approval it was difficult to ascertain, from the evidence available, if quality assurance arrangements at the partner institution had been covered as required by the University's procedures. In addressing the recommendation in paragraph 94, the team recommends that the University also review the reporting mechanisms for validation and approval of collaborative provision.

169 Where cooperative partnerships involve articulation arrangements, the curriculum for the partner programme is mapped against that of the on-campus programme and the audit team saw evidence that such mapping had been carried out following the University processes. The outcomes of the mapping exercise are presented to the Faculty Quality Committee as part of the partnership approval process and considered regularly at programme/subject committees.

170 Since the previous institutional audit, the University has introduced due diligence requirements for the establishment of collaborative and cooperative partnerships. The Office of Quality, Standards and Partnerships undertakes due diligence inquiries on behalf of the Academic Board. The audit team was provided with the checklists for each type of partnership and found that different sets of criteria apply. For cooperative partnerships the standing of the institution, its legal status and comparability of qualifications, levels and credits and match of programme learning outcomes is established. For collaborative partnerships due diligence is confined to

establishing that all relevant approval events have taken place. The team formed the view, however, that in the context of cooperative overseas partnerships and the University's long-standing collaborative partnerships with further education partners, its due diligence processes were satisfactory. The team viewed an example of due diligence for a cooperative partnership and found that the University's procedures had been applied rigorously.

171 All partnerships have written agreements approved by the Vice Chancellor following advice from Registry and Academic Board. All partnerships are recorded in a partnership register which is approved by the Academic Board on an annual basis. The audit team viewed the current partnership register and found it to be an authoritative record of the University's partnerships. The team also viewed examples of agreements for academic cooperation and collaboration partnerships and found them to set out rights and obligations of each party clearly and to be signed by the appropriate persons.

172 The University's Academic Partnerships Policy stipulates that all partnerships must be approved with a specified date to either renew or end the agreement. Renewal of partnerships is dependent on the continued validity of the terms and conditions of the agreement and the findings of the initial due diligence inquiries. The audit team saw evidence of appropriate termination procedures which took due cognisance of the student. Any proposed termination must be agreed by the Faculty Executive, approved by the Portfolio Committee and ratified by the Academic Affairs Committee.

173 The University has sole responsibility for the academic quality and standards of its awards delivered under collaborative arrangements. Monitoring and review by the University takes place at two levels: the programme and the partnership as a whole. Once operational, collaborative provision is subject to the same monitoring and review processes and procedures as on-campus provision (see paragraphs 49, 54, 100, 104) and the audit team saw clear evidence of this through the audit trails. The Board of Studies at the partner institution has the responsibility of ensuring that the quality assurance processes delegated to the partner by the University are properly discharged. Its membership includes staff from the University and it reports to the faculty boards of study at the University.

174 The Briefing Paper acknowledged that in the past there have been some delays in annual reporting from partners due to communication issues between central University bodies and partners. To address this, a new system has been introduced whereby partner monitoring reports are channelled via the faculty quality committees and the audit team was told that this has led to an improvement in the reporting process.

175 Partnerships are monitored through annual visits by the Pro Vice Chancellor (Strategy and Enterprise), together with a representative from the Office of Quality, Standards and Partnerships; in the case of cooperative partnership this takes place through visits by faculty staff. The outcomes of these discussions are formally recorded, and the audit team saw evidence that this process had been carried out appropriately. Cross-representation on committees also enables the University to monitor its collaborative partners.

176 The audit team was told that partnership agreements are reviewed annually. In cases where concerns about academic quality and standards have come to light, for example from external examiner reports, annual monitoring reports, subject committees or student evaluations, an initial investigation would be carried out by the Office of Quality, Standards and Partnerships. If this raised a cause for concern a full centre review following the format of a periodic academic review may be carried out. To date, no partner has had to be reviewed using this process.

Assessment

177 Assessment of collaborative provision is devolved to partners and is carried out by partner staff. The Agreement specifies that collaborative partners are responsible for marking assessed work, examinations, and for ensuring that all marked work is subjected to internal and external

moderation. An assessment schedule for each programme is developed by the University in consultation with the partner prior to commencement of the programme. The University assures itself that staff engaged in the delivery and assessment of collaborative programme are appropriately qualified at the point of partner and programme approval through the consideration of staff curricula vitae. The audit team found evidence that the University's procedures had been duly applied.

178 The Briefing Paper explained that the external examining arrangements for collaborative provision are the same as those for on-campus provision (see paragraphs 63-66). Usually the same subject external examiners are used to oversee both on-campus and collaborative provision programmes. The audit team reviewed examples of external examiner reports on collaborative provision and found them to conform to the University's reporting requirements. In reports covering the programmes delivered both on-campus and at collaborative partners, external examiners explicitly confirmed the comparability of student performance, the appropriateness of the assessment process and the standard of marking in a separate section. Programme teams at partner institutions are also expected to respond to the external examiner reports.

179 The Briefing Paper stated that in 2006-07, all examiners were able to confirm that the assessment processes and marking standards were comparable to, and effectively integrated with, academic standards for on-campus provision and that student performance was comparable with their University counterparts. This represented an improvement from the previous year.

Student transcripts

180 The authority for issuing student transcripts for collaborative provision rests with the University. The audit team viewed a sample transcript and found it to be in line with precept 24 of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* recording the name and location of the partner organisation involved in the delivery of the programme.

Role of students in quality assurance

181 Collaborative partners are expected to have appropriate student feedback and representation mechanisms in place. The agreement specifies that partners must obtain formal and comprehensive written feedback from students at least once a year and must ensure that the results of such feedback are discussed and acted upon through the formal committee structure. The audit team was told that collaborative students are invited to comment on their experience using the University's unit feedback forms for on-campus provision. However, it formed the view that not all part-time students have had this opportunity and there had been no update on any actions taken as a result of student feedback.

182 The audit team concluded that the University's oversight of student feedback and representation mechanisms for collaborative provision is adequate. The team would encourage the University to work with partners to ensure that all collaborative students have the opportunity to provide written feedback and that students are reliably informed of actions taken as a result of their feedback.

Learning resources and student support

183 Primary responsibility for the provision of appropriate learning resources lies with collaborative partners as outlined in the agreement. The University assures itself of the appropriateness of resources as part of the partner approval and approval to deliver processes. In addition, the agreement sets out to which University resources collaborative students have access. This usually includes access to the library, the computing network, including the virtual learning environment, electronic resources, and media facilities. In addition, students have access to University's central support services. University resources are used to varying degrees by

collaborative students and although students have access to online resources there have been technical difficulties at times. The students who met the audit team confirmed that those who had used the University pastoral services had been well supported. The team was informed that there is also direct liaison between University and partner learning resources/support staff.

184 The partnership agreement explicitly sets out the arrangements and responsibilities for dealing with complaints. It requires partner institutions to make available to students complaints procedures comparable to those of the University. Collaborative students have the right to pursue a complaint with the University once the partner's procedures have been exhausted. The University recently undertook a review of the student complaints procedures of its collaborative partners resulting in recommendations to provide a clear and consistent framework for dealing with complaints after the partner's procedures have been exhausted. If complaints are about an academic related matter, partners are encouraged to involve the dean of the link University faculty in the final stage of the partner's complaints procedure. The audit team found that collaborative students were generally aware of the procedures for complaints. The team saw evidence that the number of complaints received by partners has been very small and all have been resolved locally. Student complaints involving partners are monitored by the University via faculty deans.

185 Decisions about the outcomes of assessment, student progression and award classification are made by boards of examiners at the University. Accordingly, formal academic appeals against such decisions involving collaborative students are dealt with by the University.

186 The partnership agreement states that the University agrees a publicity and marketing strategy with its collaborative partners for programmes, and the University's marketing protocol is followed at all times. While it was less clear how the University maintained oversight of information produced by collaborative partners in their printed publicity and marketing material, the audit team was told that the University's Corporate Affairs Unit monitors partner websites.

187 Overall, the audit team found that the University's arrangements for the management of academic standards and the quality of academic provision were appropriate and satisfactory and generally in alignment with the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* and were operating as intended.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

188 Ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of research degree provision rests with the Academic Board. The Board approves the regulations governing research degree programmes and has delegated responsibility for various aspects to subcommittees. Academic standards and the quality of postgraduate research programmes are managed through committees at University and faculty level, supported by key documents outlining the processes and procedures governing research degrees. These include the Research Degree Regulations, the University Admissions Policy, and the Research Degrees Handbook. In 2002-03, a Graduate School was founded which, inter alia, provides research skills training and works closely with the faculties providing dedicated space for research students.

189 At institutional level, research degree provision is overseen by the Research Policy Committee which operates through two subcommittees: the Research Degrees Committee and the Graduate School Committee. Whereas the Research Policy Committee is more concerned with strategic issues, the Research Degrees Committee is responsible for the maintenance of academic standards of postgraduate research awards and the quality of postgraduate research provision. It consists of representatives from faculties and the Academic Registry. The Graduate School Committee's remit includes postgraduate research training and infrastructural support. The Graduate Committee has representatives from all faculties, Student Services, Learning and Information Services and students. At faculty level, structures and lines of responsibilities are

mirrored by faculty research committees and faculty research degree boards with the latter having specific responsibility for the implementation of University regulations governing assessment and research awards.

190 The Research Degree Regulations set a common framework for MPhils, PhDs, Professional Doctorates and Masters of Research, with appropriate devolution to faculties and departments. Such activities are monitored by the Research Degree Committee, which receives annual reports and minutes of the faculty-level committees.

191 A comprehensive Research Degrees Handbook is published by the Graduate School and provided to students. It contains information on a full range of academic and administrative matters from application to completion.

192 The QAA Review of research degree programmes in 2006 considered the ability of the University to secure and enhance academic quality and standards of its research degree provision to be appropriate and satisfactory. The audit team saw evidence that the University had addressed the two points for further consideration raised in the review report. To ensure that supervisory teams have at least one member who has supervised students to completion, the University formalised this requirement in its regulations and procedures. MPhil to PhD transfer arrangements have also been harmonised. The University has kept this process under review and intends to introduce further minor modifications to the process to enhance its effectiveness.

193 The audit team considered the institutional arrangements for the assurance of academic standards and the management of the academic quality of research degree provision to be appropriate and satisfactory.

Research environment

194 In its Briefing Paper the University outlined the growth in research activities over the past five years which has resulted in the recruitment of new professors, a rising number of research-active staff, the establishment of research centres, increased research income and a growing number of research students. Research students are linked to, and supported by, faculties and departments. Facilities to carry out research are primarily provided through faculties and supplemented by those in the Graduate School.

Selection, admission and induction of students

195 Selection of research students is a devolved activity, although all applications are logged on the central management information system. The selection process is managed by departments and research centres adhering to the University Admissions Policy and the Procedures for Research Degree Students. Minimum entry requirements are set, including English language requirements for non-native speakers. Ultimate responsibility for selection and admission rests with heads of departments or directors of research centres. Applicants who meet the appropriate entry requirements are interviewed by at least two members of academic staff exploring the research theme and verifying the suitability of the candidate, and that the work can be properly supported by the department or Research Centre. All applications must be supported by references. Interview decisions are recorded and passed to the head of department or director of research centre for consideration and confirmation.

196 All research degree students must go through an induction programme at University and faculty level. At University level, the Graduate School conducts a one-day programme for all new students. The audit team was provided with an outline for the event and found this to be comprehensive and wide-ranging. The team also viewed an induction pack provided to students containing important and useful information such as the University Research Degree Regulations, a personal development file, a copy of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, a student services pack and an appropriate textbook about how to achieve a PhD. Faculties, departments or

research groups supplement institutional-level induction with their own tailored programmes. There is no fixed format for such induction and it may be delivered through a formal course or by informal briefings from supervisors or other faculty staff. Students who met the audit team commented that the induction events generally fulfil their purpose. The team concluded that the arrangements for selection and admission were appropriate and satisfactory and the induction arrangements for research students were effective.

Supervision

197 Supervisory arrangements are clearly outlined in the Research Degree Handbook and Research Degree Regulations and are communicated to students at induction. All research students are supervised by a team of at least two supervisors led by the Director of Studies. Heads of department or directors of research centres assign supervisors when an applicant is accepted and their appointment is ratified by the Faculty Research Degrees Board when the student's programme of study is confirmed. At least one member of the supervisory team must have experience in the field of research, and at least one must be experienced in having supervised at least one research student to successful completion at the appropriate level. Faculty research degrees boards confirm whether the arrangements for supervision are adequate. The boards must also be notified of any proposals to change the supervisory arrangements and have to approve such changes.

198 The duties and responsibilities of supervisors are detailed in the Research Degrees Handbook. The audit team saw evidence of regular formal meetings between students and supervisors; that students can initiate additional supervisory meetings, if required; and that meaningful feedback is received from supervisors.

199 Supervisors are required to undertake relevant professional training; new supervisors must attend an induction training programme; and experienced supervisors are required to undertake an updating course at least once every three years. All courses are provided by the Graduate School and the Research Office, with the Graduate School maintaining a record of all trained and approved supervisors. The audit team was provided with an outline of the training programme for new supervisors and found it to be comprehensive and appropriate. The team was told that apart from the mandatory training there is also an optional forum where supervisors can share practices. From the discussions held with supervisory staff, the team formed the view that their training needs are being met and that supervisors feel well supported by the University for their role.

200 Although, at the time of the audit, there was no formal system of monitoring supervisor performance with regard to completion rates, student progress is monitored annually by faculty research boards, the minutes of which are received by the University Research Committee, and any supervisory issues can be identified through this process. To maintain good-quality supervision, the University is working on guidelines with regard to supervisor workloads and the number of students a supervisor is allowed to take on.

201 Overall, the audit team found the University's arrangements for supervision to be appropriate and satisfactory.

Progress and review arrangements

202 Formal monitoring of student progress is an annual process conducted by faculty research degrees boards. These boards consider a progress record form completed by the student and the Director of Studies, the updated Training Needs Analysis and a record of training undertaken by the student. The board determines whether the student's progress is satisfactory and, if not, it may set remedial activities. Transfers from MPhil to PhD are also determined at faculty level. Students wishing to transfer must complete a research report detailing progress to date and their research plans. The transfer request must be supported by the Director of Studies and is considered by a sub-panel appointed by the Faculty Research Degrees Board. The minutes of the

Faculty Research Degrees Boards are received by the University Research Degrees Committee thereby overseeing the faculty monitoring process. In addition, each faculty research degrees board has the chair of another board as a member. The audit team supports the University's view that these arrangements ensure cross-faculty consistency in the implementation of the student monitoring procedures. The team considered the progress review and monitoring arrangements to be appropriate and satisfactory.

203 The audit team also found evidence of a variety of means by which research students can be monitored informally, including research seminars and bi-annual research student conferences.

Development of research and other skills

204 Research and professional skills acquisition is compulsory for all research students and is monitored. Students in conjunction with their supervisors are initially required to complete a training needs analysis and to submit this for approval by the Faculty Research Degrees Board as part of the programme of study confirmation exercise. The Training Needs Analysis identifies skills to be acquired from which a training plan is produced, which is updated on an ongoing basis and considered as part of annual progress monitoring. In 2005-06, a personal development file and a training log were also introduced. The audit team was provided with an example of these documents and considered them to be useful tools for determining skills needs and for monitoring students' skills development. The team noted that, while the personal development file was not mandatory, it was deemed to work well for those students who use it.

205 In the Briefing Paper, the University explained that it had reviewed its approach to skills training and that as a result additional training courses have been introduced. The Graduate School now provides a range of generic skills training programmes specific to research students and administered by a dedicated research training and development coordinator. The programmes were developed in consultation with supervisors and students. The Graduate School also maps its courses against the relevant precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, as well as a number of self-study packages for students. Details of all courses are publicised on the portal. The audit team was provided with a copy of the Graduate School's skills training programme for the last three years. From this, it was evident that the range of courses available to students had increased year on year and provided a comprehensive programme. The Graduate School also seeks students' and supervisors' feedback on the programme in order to enhance its offering. In addition, faculties provide more targeted training courses to meet specialist needs. The team formed the view that skills training had improved since the QAA Review of research degree programmes with more training opportunities being available that meet students' needs.

206 A small number of research students are also engaged in teaching. The audit team was told that support for them is organised at faculty level. From discussions with students, the team learnt that, at the time of the audit, there was no specific formal training to prepare and support research degree students in their teaching. The team came across evidence, however, that these students can access general training courses offered by the human resources department, which includes events for new teaching staff, and can consult a mentor. Nevertheless, the team formed the view that support for this group of 'teachers' is less robust and systematic compared to that provided for academic staff. The team, therefore, considers it desirable for the University to reflect on the support for, and preparation of, postgraduate research students engaged in teaching.

Feedback mechanisms and student representation

207 The University uses a number of feedback mechanisms both formal and informal. There is a student representation system and research students are represented on major committees concerned with research at faculty and institutional levels. Although it was evident that student issues are addressed at faculty and University level, the election process for representatives to the Graduate School Committee had not worked as efficiently as hoped; not all students were aware

of the student representation system and attendance of representatives at faculty committee meetings was variable. Issues can, however, be addressed outside the formal structures and students whom the team met confirmed that they are generally satisfied that their voice is heard and acted upon. The University recognises that student representation needs to be strengthened and has taken steps to improve its effectiveness. For example, the election process for student representatives has been reviewed and work with the Students' Union continues to encourage better student engagement at faculty level.

208 In 2006-07, the University took part in the national Postgraduate Research Student Experience Survey. The results were analysed and action plans developed to address issues raised. More informally, research students' views are also sought during Graduate School skills-training sessions and the Postgraduate Student Conference.

209 Feedback on processes and procedures is also invited from external members of Faculty Research Degrees Boards. The boards have representatives from other faculties and external examiners as members who are asked to comment on the effectiveness of processes and procedures. The Briefing Paper explained that this approach has enhanced the University's quality processes.

210 Overall, the audit team considered the University's arrangements for obtaining and acting upon feedback from research students to be appropriate and satisfactory.

Assessment

211 The criteria for assessment are specified in the Research Degree Regulations and stipulate annual progression requirements and the criteria for judgement of the thesis and management and conduct of the viva. The audit team found them to be clear and comprehensive.

212 Examiners and a viva chair are appointed on the recommendation of the faculty. Proposals are ratified by the University's External Examiners Committee. The viva is conducted under the auspices of an independent viva chair. A training programme for chairs and examiners is run by the Graduate School, which also maintains a register of trained and approved chairs. The chair is responsible for overseeing the arrangement of the viva, ensuring its proper conduct, and that appropriate feedback on the outcome is provided to the student. Chairs report to the Faculty Research Degrees Board on the conduct of the viva. The Regulations require at least two examiners, at least one of whom must be external to the University and must have previously examined appropriate research degree awards on at least three occasions. Examiners submit their recommendation to the Faculty Research Degree Board, together with the chair's report. The Board then formally recommends the outcome to the Faculty Board of Examiners. The final award is confirmed by this Board and communicated in writing to the student by the Registrar.

213 The audit team found evidence that students are familiar with the regulations and assessment requirements, which form part of the Research Degrees Handbook. Overall, the team considered the University's arrangements for the assessment of research students to be appropriate and satisfactory.

Complaints and appeals

214 The University's student complaints and appeals procedures apply to all students, including research students. The procedures encourage informal resolution at a local level before cases progress to the formal procedures outlined in the University Regulations. These operate at two levels, with the complaint or appeal heard at the faculty level in the first instance. If resolution cannot be found, the case is considered at the institutional level. The University also subscribes to the rules and procedures of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, which provides for independent review of complaints by students when all internal procedures have been exhausted. All complaints from students, including research students are monitored centrally through a standing advisory panel. In addition, complaints from research students are reported from faculties to the research degrees committee in their annual reports.

The audit team noted that the number of complaints and appeals received from research students since the last institutional audit was very small and all cases were resolved at the local level. The team also found evidence that students were familiar with the complaints and appeals process and brief information about the process is provided in the Research Degree Handbook. The team concluded the University's arrangements for dealing with complaints and appeals by research students to be appropriate and satisfactory.

215 Overall, the audit team found that the University's arrangements for postgraduate research students were in alignment with the section of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, and were generally operating as intended. However, the team considered it desirable for the University to reflect on the support for, and preparation of, postgraduate research students engaged in teaching.

Section 7: Published information

216 Responsibility for the academic content of prospectuses lies with faculties, coordinated by the central marketing department liaising with the Academic Registry. The Student Target, Admissions and Recruitment Committee has general oversight of both the prospectus and the website and considers issues such as the presentation of joint degree programmes. Prospectus information about bursaries, scholarships and accommodation is reviewed annually through the Enrolment and Induction Working Group chaired by the Academic Registrar and assisted by student focus groups. The content of the University website is controlled by a web team based in Corporate Affairs. Heads of department check the detail of the departmental entry on the website and that the core information is derived from programme specifications.

217 Students also receive a Faculty Handbook upon enrolment. These are prepared to a standard template incorporating detailed information about the University structure, systems and services, some faculty specific material and guidance as to the calculation of degree classifications. Students also receive a programme handbook which has to meet minimum content requirements but is otherwise the responsibility of the relevant department. From the examples seen, the audit team formed the view that programme handbooks are informative. Partner colleges also issue handbooks which are similarly informative. The team was told that University quality and marketing officers are involved in the preparation of college material and that the monitoring process would identify any problems with it. Partner college websites acknowledge the role of the University in relation to collaborative programmes.

218 The student written submission indicated general satisfaction with the accuracy of the prospectus with some concerns about the portrayal of joint honours programmes. The University's website was rated highly as an accurate source of information. The student representatives who met the team, considered that the University delivered what the prospectus offered and praised the standard of student handbooks. Unit-level handbooks were said to vary but overall, students believed they were given sufficient information. Students from partner colleges confirmed that they received both University and college handbooks and the provision of specific information for international students was confirmed.

219 Information on entry qualifications, progression, degree classification and the National Student Survey responses is available on the Unistats website. The Briefing Paper stated, and the audit team confirmed, that summary information by faculty, for the last three years, is now available on the University website and that the Planning Department is in the process of making student summary information by faculty available on the University portal.

220 From its examination of a range of published material and what it heard from students, the team was satisfied that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the academic standards of its awards.

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