University of Cambridge

FEBRUARY 2008

Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA) mission is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. To this end, QAA carries out institutional audits of higher education institutions.

In England and Northern Ireland, QAA conducts institutional audits on behalf of the higher education sector, to provide public information about the maintenance of academic standards and assurance of the quality of learning opportunities provided for students. It also operates under contract to the Higher Education Funding Council in England and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland to provide evidence to meet their statutory obligations to assure the quality and standards of academic programmes for which they disburse public funding. The audit method was developed in partnership with the funding councils and the higher education representative bodies and agreed following consultation with higher education institutions and other interested organisations. The method was endorsed by the Department for Education and Skills (now the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills). It was revised in 2006 following recommendations from the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group, a representative group established to review the structures and processes of quality assurance in England and Northern Ireland, and evaluate the work of QAA.

Institutional audit is an evidence-based process carried out through peer review. It forms part of the Quality Assurance Framework established in 2002 following revisions to the United Kingdom's (UK) approach to external quality assurance. At the centre of the process is an emphasis on students and their learning.

The aim of the revised institutional audit process is to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges of higher education in England and Northern Ireland have effective means of:

- ensuring that the awards and qualifications in higher education are of an academic standard at least consistent with those referred to in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree-awarding bodies in a proper manner

- providing learning opportunities of a quality that enables students, whether on taught or research programmes, to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications

- enhancing the quality of their educational provision, particularly by building on information gained through monitoring, internal and external reviews, and feedback from stakeholders.

Institutional audit results in judgements about the institutions being reviewed. Judgements are made about:

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

- the confidence that 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.

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes

- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research

- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

If the audit includes the institution's collaborative provision, the judgements and comments also apply unless the audit team considers that any of its judgements or comments in respect of the collaborative provision differ from those in respect of the institution's 'home' provision. Any such differences will be reflected in the form of words used to express a judgement or comment on the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, and about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards.

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

The reports of quality audits have to be useful to several audiences. The revised institutional audit process makes a clear distinction between that part of the reporting process aimed at an external audience and that aimed at the institution. There are three elements to the reporting:

- the **summary** of the findings of the report, including the judgements, is intended for the wider public, especially potential students

- the **report** is an overview of the findings of the audit for both lay and external professional audiences

- a separate **annex** provides the detail and explanations behind the findings of the audit and is intended to be of practical use to the institution.

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary and the report, without the annex, are published in hard copy. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website. The institution will receive the summary, report and annex in hard copy (*Institutional audit handbook: England and Northern Ireland 2006* - Annexes B and C refer).

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Cambridge (the University) from 25 to 29 February 2008 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of its awards and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

To arrive at its conclusions, the audit team spoke to members of staff throughout the University and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the University manages the academic aspects of its provision.

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

Outcomes of the institutional audit

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

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit found that the University is committed to enhancing the learning opportunities of its students through a range of formal and informal processes based on a shared ethos.

Postgraduate research students

The audit concluded that the University has put in place effective procedures for the management of its research programmes, which meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas as being good practice:

- the exemplary manner in which the Senior Tutors' Committee discharges its responsibilities

- the robust approach taken in the periodic learning and teaching review process

- the quality of published information

- the range of admissions-related initiatives, especially those promoting the widening participation agenda.

Recommendations for action

The audit team recommends that the University consider further action in some areas. In particular it would be advisable for the University to ensure that:

- it confirms an early date for the General Board to assume full responsibility for the award-bearing programmes offered by the Institute of Continuing Education

- it implements, without undue delay, the recommendation of the General Board's Education Committee that the award of BA with Honours should necessarily involve the successful completion of Part II of the Tripos

- it develops further the annual quality statements by incorporating within them an analysis of the outcomes of the procedures described therein

- all postgraduate students with supervisory or teaching responsibilities are appropriately trained.

It would be desirable for the University:

- to use student-related data regularly to inform the development and implementation of strategy and policy relating to the management of academic standards

- to introduce a template for external examiners' reports

- to consider the introduction of a University-wide approach to penalties for late-submitted assessed work.

Report

Preface

1   An institutional audit of the University of Cambridge (the University) was undertaken in the week commencing 25 February 2008. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of its awards and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2   The audit team comprised Dr PC Garnsworthy, Professor TJ Kemp, Mr P Lloyd and Mrs J Lyttle, auditors, and Ms C Smith, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Professor R Harris, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3   The University of Cambridge has a global reputation for academic excellence and a progressive social mission. Over the 800 years of its existence it has grown to 31 colleges supporting almost 18,000 students, of whom two-thirds are undergraduates; of the current postgraduate population almost three-quarters are pursuing research degrees, though this balance is shifting in consequence of an expansion in taught (including part-time) postgraduate numbers.

4   The colleges are autonomous chartered bodies, with distinctive characteristics engendering loyalty and friendly rivalry among their members, to whom they offer a wide range of teaching, learning and pastoral support. Postgraduate as well as undergraduate students, all academic and many senior administrative staff are members of a college; for many, such membership is likely to be as central to their Cambridge identity as their membership of the University.

5   The fact that the University-college relationship necessitates a governance system based in part on a separation of powers is critical to understanding the prevailing participatory and consensual culture, and hence the University's approach to quality assurance. Where possible, this approach involves delegation to, and consultation with, those directly responsible for course delivery and assessment, albeit within a University-wide strategic framework. Though sometimes complex, policies and procedures are effectively communicated in internal guides and handbooks as well as through the weekly 'Reporter', the official publication through which members of the University are consulted about, and advised of, changes to teaching provision.

6   The Senior Tutors' Committee, a college body chaired by or on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor, and containing, ex officiis, senior University officers, was found to be an effective mediator of the University-college relationship, and critical to managing and enhancing student learning opportunities. The Committee's remit involves coordinating the educational policy of the colleges and the University; initiating discussion on matters of common concern to both; discussing all matters of educational policy affecting colleges and all matters affecting student welfare; gathering and disseminating good practice in colleges; and responding to requests for views and decisions on matters referred to it.

7   The University's principal policy-making body is the Council; the General Board, which is accountable to Council, has overall responsibility for educational policies and provision. It discharges its responsibilities for undergraduate provision through its Education Committee, and for postgraduate education through the Board of Graduate Studies. Undergraduate teaching, management of which is a University responsibility, is organised around 27 Triposes (two-part programmes of study, usually taken over three years). Academically, the University is divided into six schools. These, in turn, are subdivided into faculties and sometimes also into departments, both having deliberative structures. These, though their nomenclature and terms of reference may vary, have responsibility for the oversight of formal teaching and for summative assessment. The Institute of Continuing Education manages the majority of the University's few collaborative arrangements, some of which lead to awards certified by the Institute not the University; this arrangement is discussed more fully later (see paragraph 41).

8   In 2003, the University's institutional audit resulted in a judgement of broad confidence in the University's current and likely future capacity to manage the quality of its academic programmes and the standards of its awards. The University has subsequently taken significant strategic initiatives including the establishment of a senior academic management team of five Pro-Vice-Chancellors with functional responsibilities: the present audit found encouraging early evidence of the effectiveness of this structure. The audit also explored the University's response to the five advisable and one desirable recommendations of the previous audit. In most cases this was satisfactory, though two recommendations where the response was incomplete involved rationalising the MPhil (where significant progress had been made, with full implementation anticipated at an early date) and ensuring that the quality and standards of all programmes (including locally certificated provision) met the University's requirements for the award of its qualifications. This is the subject of a further recommendation in the present report.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

9   The General Board's Education Committee is responsible for programme approval, modification, monitoring and review; monitoring external examiners' reports; engaging with external points of reference; assessment policies and guidelines (including appeals); and management information. In its discharge of these responsibilities the Committee benefits administratively from the very sound work of the Education Section; its policies are disseminated and supported at school, faculty and departmental levels by designated quality contacts, who may be senior administrators or members of academic staff.

10   External examiners are central to the assurance of academic standards. The audit examined in detail the University's procedures for appointing, inducting, supporting and responding to the views of such examiners. It found, in an overall satisfactory context, that the procedure would be enhanced by the introduction of a report template designed to ensure that the University receives consistent evidence as to the standards of all its awards, and to facilitate the identification of issues and good practice. Accordingly, it is considered desirable for the University to introduce a template for external examiners' reports.

11   Reports of external examiners of locally certificated higher education provision are subject to a lighter touch review procedure. This would have led to critical comment were the University not currently moving to ensure that such reports will in future be integrated into the normal annual review process. In the event, the effectiveness with which the University has addressed this issue can be left to future audit teams to judge.

12   Overall, the audit found that serious consideration is given to external examiners' reports; that instances exist of such reports successfully encouraging the University to modify requirements and marking schemes; that external examiners are central to the maintenance of academic standards; and, with the one qualification concerning locally certificated provision, that external examining procedures are effective.

13   It is the responsibility of the Education Section to support faculties in the course of visits from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (18 faculties or departments are subject to some form of external accreditation) and for ensuring that the reports of such bodies are properly scrutinised and addressed. The audit found that detailed and appropriate attention is given to such reports.

14   The Education Section is also responsible for ensuring that the University is engaged with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points, and that any consequential regulatory or procedural changes are effectively disseminated and implemented. The audit examined the procedures followed, finding them appropriate in respect of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA, and subject benchmark statements, and increasingly so in respect of programme specifications, which are significantly more consistent and useful than hitherto.

15   At the time of the audit the University was also addressing the implications of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) for its Tripos System. This was occurring in the wake of a review which had highlighted several relevant issues, notably the possibility (involving less than one per cent of undergraduates) that an honours degree can be awarded on the basis of successful completion of three Part I examinations and no Part II. In November 2007, the General Board, taking the view that the argument that such an examination profile met the expectations of an honours degree was no longer defensible, endorsed the recommendation of its Education Committee that this should no longer be permitted. The matter was, however, still under discussion at the time of the audit visit. The audit team supports the Board's position, and advises the University to implement without undue delay the recommendation of the General Board's Education Committee that the award of BA with Honours should necessarily involve the successful completion of Part II of the Tripos.

16   Notwithstanding this final point, the audit found that the University is, for the most part, engaging fully with all aspects of the Academic Infrastructure.

17   The audit explored the formation, implementation and dissemination of assessment policies, including progression requirements, mitigation, the composition of boards of examiners, the procedures for the formal approval and return of marks, and complaints and appeals (which the University is currently in the process of harmonising for undergraduates and postgraduates). Regulations and modifications are properly established and effectively disseminated, both formally (in published format) and orally by colleges. Nevertheless, the practice of devolving procedures for penalising late submission of assessed work has led to inequities, and it would accordingly be desirable for consideration to be given to the introduction of a University-wide approach to penalties for late-submitted assessed work.

18   Most undergraduate formative assessment is delivered by colleges; summative assessment is a University responsibility, devolved to faculties on the basis of a clear framework of requirements and expectations. While the audit confirmed the student view that some inter-faculty variability exists in the level of detail provided, discussions aiming to achieve greater consistency were taking place at the time, and the audit found no examples of unsatisfactory, and some of outstanding, practice. Overall, the audit found arrangements for the assessment of students rigorous and effective in maintaining academic standards.

19   The University was, at the time of the audit, working to improve the functionality of its management information systems, and had yet to attain its goal of having a single system capable of handling student administration from initial enquiries to graduation. The General Board's Education Committee does not routinely analyse student data as a whole, but was, at the time of the audit, reviewing the available data with a view to making them more useful. Graduate admissions data are published and reviewed by the Board of Graduate Studies: completion rates are monitored by the Board and low completion rates discussed with the faculties concerned. At present, therefore, the University's use of management information is in the process of transition, and the audit found it would be desirable for the University to use student-related data regularly to inform the development and implementation of strategy and policy relating to the management of academic standards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

20   Each school, faculty and department has the equivalent of a teaching committee (the nomenclature varies), to oversee all aspects of undergraduate teaching and learning. While the audit found evidence that such committees give proper attention to student feedback, examination performance, resources and staff availability, considerable variation was found in the committees' interpretation of requirements for routine annual monitoring. Each faculty also has a degree committee responsible for overseeing graduate education, which keeps abreast of relevant external developments and internal policy changes, normally advised by the designated quality contact.

21   The required local quality assurance framework includes an annual quality statement, which describes the local structures for managing teaching and quality assurance, and the documentation (such as programme specifications and student feedback and consultation arrangements) designed to achieve transparency. In the large majority of cases, the contents of these statements, which are presented in summary form to the General Board's Education Committee, address all issues asked of them, albeit that these issues are predominantly descriptive, seldom extending into analysis or evaluation.

22   In addition, since the General Board's Education Committee does not maintain a central oversight of the outcomes of annual monitoring, the only formal means of ensuring the implementation of requirements deriving from the process is through the six-yearly oversight of routine monitoring provided by learning and teaching reviews; the audit found that central monitoring of annual quality statements would benefit from greater formalisation.

23   The management of learning opportunities is evaluated through learning and teaching reviews, which in all cases have appropriate external representation, and which review teaching and assessment methods, learning resources and student support, drawing on student feedback and external examiners' reports for additional evidence. The audit found such reviews, which are meticulously followed through to a pre-planned timetable, comprehensive in scope and fit for purpose. The approach taken in the periodic learning and teaching review process is considered a feature of good practice.

24   In addition, in exceptional circumstances a system of full reviews exists, involving an in-depth study of a school, faculty or department's entire activities. The audit found the one review it explored in detail thorough and valuable.

25   Overall, the University's arrangements for programme approval are effective, and its arrangements for periodic learning and teaching review extremely thorough. Nevertheless, the frequency of such reviews appears insufficient to provide opportunities for timely intervention to address challenges as they arise. Whereas the monitoring of external examiners' reports is effective at local and University levels, the descriptive nature of annual quality procedures and the absence of University reflection on their outcomes is a limitation. Accordingly, the University is advised to develop further the annual quality statements by incorporating within them an analysis of the outcomes of the procedures described therein.

26   Faculties and departments are required to have student members throughout their deliberative structures and, together with the Education Section, to support junior members of faculty boards in their representational duties: students expressed satisfaction with these arrangements. In addition to the work of representatives and the deployment of questionnaires, some faculties operate focus groups to discuss course-specific issues, and students have many formal and informal opportunities, in faculties, departments and particularly colleges (where feedback on supervision is gathered by directors of studies, and communicated to supervisors if concerns are noted) to express their views in the reasonable expectation of being heard. Postgraduate students told the audit team that from their point of view the most effective feedback is through personal contact with members of academic staff; students of the Institute of Continuing Education, while also saying that feedback procedures are fit for purpose, stressed the value of the support of committed and approachable staff.

27   The audit team found that at a local level the arrangements for gathering and responding to student feedback are effective, but that the limited extent of central oversight of such arrangements restricts the University's capacity to identify and address generic issues. Once again, therefore, the University is advised to develop further the annual quality statements by incorporating within them an analysis of the outcomes of the procedures described therein.

28   The University regards its commitment to a close relationship between teaching and research as fundamental to its culture and activities, and consistent with its strategic aims. The

commitment is, however, based more on a general expectation that research and scholarship will underpin the curricula than on an explicit requirement for this to be done or the development of different methods of doing it; and some, although not all, of the documentation studied in the audit implied that, because students are taught by leading researchers, and because reflection on course content takes place continually, the integration of teaching and research ipso facto occurs. Overall, however, there is no doubt that the integration of teaching and research is culturally embedded throughout the University (and structurally so in the college system) even if the widespread commitment to such integration is not always formalised, monitored or evaluated.

29   The University requires all full-time students to spend a residential period in Cambridge and part-time postgraduates to attend supervisions and other specified training events on a regular basis; it does not, therefore, deliver programmes wholly by distance learning. Its pedagogy does, however, permit a range of technological innovations, and the audit team found ample evidence of engagement in activities designed to enhance the profile of teaching and ensure that the University, while remaining true to its tradition of face-to-face college-based individual and small-group teaching, also remains abreast of sector-wide pedagogic developments. In particular, it provides a range of supports for teaching, learning and research through the Centre for Applied Research in Educational Technologies, including a bespoke virtual learning environment, which, however, is currently used by less than half of triposes. It may therefore be that, in the interests of equity, the University will wish to consider specifying the minimum sufficient learning support material to be provided by electronic means.

30   Following a lengthy period of consultation, the University has reconfigured and consolidated its library and information technology provisions. Students who met the audit team were overwhelmingly positive about information technology support, and, while acknowledging undoubted variations in college library resources, stressed that unavailable books are obtained and that they can see stock availability at other libraries in the online catalogue. They were content with the informal feedback procedures, commenting positively on the responsiveness of staff when issues or concerns are raised. Overall, the team found the University's arrangements for the provision, allocation and management of the outstanding learning resources at its disposal effective and appreciated.

31   Responsibility for admitting undergraduates lies with colleges; for postgraduates the primary decisions are taken by the University at faculty level, and confirmed by the Board of Graduate Studies. The University's Undergraduate Admissions Policy is facilitated by the Undergraduate Admissions Committee as the main forum for discussion of strategic issues; consideration was, at the time of the audit, being given to the creation of a postgraduate admissions committee to monitor admissions targets and act as an interface between the University and colleges; a potentially beneficial arrangement given the significant and consistent growth in postgraduate numbers and the strain resulting from current procedures.

32   The Admissions Policy is closely linked to the Widening Participation Strategy, a process involving several substrategies and benefiting from the active involvement of the Students' Union. The audit team, noting the University's frank recognition that some of its several initiatives in this area may take time to achieve their potential, nonetheless considers the range of initiatives in relation to admissions, especially those promoting the widening participation agenda, and their improved coordination, a feature of good practice.

33   The University aims to promote an inclusive culture by, inter alia, supporting and encouraging under-represented groups and offering specialist support to students and staff with disabilities. More generally, the academic and personal support to which all students (including, in different form, the part-time students at Madingley Hall) are entitled is of a high order and contributes significantly to the University's extremely low wastage rate. Because the colleges form the main basis of student support, the Senior Tutors' Committee is responsible for the oversight of a system which was said to vary, to the extent that it does, only between 'very good' and

'excellent'. The role and activities of the Senior Tutors' Committee are critical to the University's ability to assure itself of the quality of student support, and the exemplary manner in which the Committee discharges its responsibilities is a feature of good practice.

34   The audit also explored the nature of support the University provides for its staff. All new University teaching officers are required to attend core elements of its professional development programme; new college teaching officers are encouraged to do so; both the arrangements and the engagement of staff are satisfactory. New members of staff are also provided with a starter pack providing details of probationary arrangements and mentoring; detailed guidelines on mentoring are provided on the Personnel Division website; and some steps have been taken to ensure that the teaching loads and committee duties of probationary lecturers are fair and reasonable.

35   The University recognises excellence in teaching by annual prizes. Details of the appraisal scheme, which may be adapted by faculties to suit their own circumstances, are readily available, as is appropriate training. The uptake of this scheme, though by no means universal, is increasing, such that the rate of return for appraisal information forms now stands at 66 per cent. The University has also developed an extensive programme of staff development courses in response to identified needs; attendance is monitored and the scheme is supported locally by school and faculty staff development coordinators, who also offer feedback on the process and procedures. A peer review of teaching scheme operates in some faculties, but levels of implementation vary widely.

36   The audit found that between them the University and the colleges provide a high level of staff support and appropriate development opportunities for academic staff. Nevertheless, the training and support provided for research students with teaching duties in the form of the Graduate Development Programme are not mandatory. In view of the significance of postgraduate students, particularly but not exclusively in the college supervisory system, the University is advised to ensure that all postgraduate students with supervisory or teaching responsibilities are appropriately trained.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

37   Although the University does not define quality enhancement in its briefing paper, it is systematically promoted by the Education Section, which is responsible for disseminating good practice and has also developed a good practice strategy. While its collegiate structure means that policy development is largely devolved and negotiated, and therefore on occasion protracted, the University is also increasingly taking a strategic overview, recently, for example, pursuing initiatives designed to improve the management and consistent quality of learning provision, an activity to which the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) has made a significant contribution. The audit also found a range of good practice, supported in some cases by such formal structures as the Learning Landscape Project, the Teaching for Learning Network, and the Learning and Teaching Support Initiative. Support exists not only for such schemes but also, and more particularly, for developing informal means of utilising good practice, particularly by building on professional relationships between colleagues and between academic staff and students.

38   The General Board's Education Committee is a significant driver of systematic enhancement, as are the Senior Tutors' Committee and its standing committees, including its Education Committee; the close working relationship between the two Education Committees is pivotal in coordinating the enhancement of the quality of student learning opportunities. Nevertheless, the University has some way to go before it could be said to take a strategic approach to quality enhancement as a whole: Education Committee's review of annual quality statements is largely descriptive; external examiners' reports do not consistently discuss enhancement; there is no centrally-managed student satisfaction survey; and school and faculty reviews of teaching, learning and assessment do not follow a common format, and their conclusions and outcomes are not centrally monitored or evaluated. Accordingly, the University is

encouraged to develop its use of annual overview reports as a means of ensuring consistency, identifying generic and common issues across institutions and disseminating good practice; it is also advised to ensure that it is able to benefit from faculties' existing monitoring procedures by incorporating within the annual quality statements an analysis of the outcomes of the procedures described therein.

39   Overall, however, the audit found that the University demonstrates a significant and sustained commitment to the improvement of learning and teaching at all levels through an impressive network of formal and informal processes, based on an ethos of collegiality, consensus and dialogue.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

40   The General Board approves all new collaborations, and requires the course and assessment methods of the partner institution to equate to those of a conventional Cambridge award, and the memorandum of agreement to align with the *Code of practice*. The University has, however, only a small number of collaborative programmes, mostly in the form of locally certificated courses at the Institute of Continuing Education, though locally certificated awards are also offered by Divinity, Education, the Language Centre and Cambridge Programme for Industry. The majority of these awards exist on a firm legal footing, are appropriately managed, and, in some cases, have commendable handbooks and student support; nevertheless, the audit team, noting uncertainty within the University as to when and how a planned discontinuation would be effected, assumes that the University will ensure that its plans in this area are both unambiguous and clearly understood by those concerned.

41   The Institute of Continuing Education is a constituent body of the University and works in partnership with a number of faculties, but its awards, which follow a different approval, monitoring and review procedure, are not designated University awards, albeit that the phrase 'University of Cambridge' appears on its certificates. In January 2007 an internal audit identified a range of issues, which at the time of the audit were still under consideration; and the Learning and Teaching Review of the Institute (dated July 2007) also identified severe problems, recommending, inter alia, that all higher education awards made by the Institute should in future become awards of the University. This recommendation was accepted and, while its implementation was initially thought likely to be delayed, the audit team learned that this is no longer the case. Nevertheless, it strongly advises the University to confirm an early date for the General Board to assume full responsibility for the award-bearing programmes offered by the Institute of Continuing Education, in order to put the quality assurance of such programmes on a par with that of the University's other awards.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

42   Research students, who account for approximately one quarter of the University's student population, play an important role as, in effect, apprentice academics. In 2006, QAA's *review of postgraduate research programmes* concluded that the University's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of provision was appropriate and satisfactory.

43   The Board of Graduate Studies oversees and reports to the General Board's Education Committee on arrangements for postgraduate education, although the majority of operational tasks are devolved to faculty degree committees, which, while they vary in size, scope and interpretation of responsibilities, undertake most tasks from admission to final examination on behalf of, and subject, to the agreement of the Board. At intercollegiate level, the Graduate Tutors' Committee (a standing committee of the Senior Tutors' Committee) has a close working relationship with the Board, coordinates the oversight of college-level provision and takes responsibility for the Good Practice Protocol, which stipulates the common core of provision for postgraduates. The University also makes available a comprehensive internal Code of Practice, which addresses the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes,*

and the skills training requirements of the research councils. This document, which is annually revised, is widely and appropriately circulated, and is a powerful tool in ensuring consistency and good practice.

44   In October 2005, the General Board initiated a wide-ranging review of graduate education at a time when existing procedures were acknowledged to be no longer fit for purpose. The review made a number of recommendations, some of them far-reaching in scope, which had the overall effect of rationalising and accelerating procedures, and facilitating communication between the University and the colleges. It also recommended changes to the structure, remit and authority of the Board itself, which it considered insufficiently representative of the schools; working to too large and disparate an agenda; lacking the authority to direct decisions in quality and standards; and preoccupied with operational issues at the expense of strategy. The recommendations were approved by the General Board in July 2007, though the implementation steering group set up by the Board had, at the time of the audit some eight months later, made only limited progress.

45   Procedures for the admission, supervision, training, progress monitoring, and examining of research students were considered in the course of the audit, as were the complaints and appeals procedures; these were found to be satisfactory and well-understood. The University's Code describes the roles and responsibilities of research students and all members of supervisory teams; provides guidance on monitoring and reviewing student performance and the action to be taken when unsatisfactory progress is identified or special circumstances arise; and stipulates that each faculty and department must have a staff-student committee at which relevant issues can be raised. Research students confirmed that proper systems are in place and operate generally effectively.

46   The audit confirms that, overall, the University's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree provision is appropriate and satisfactory, and that the University has put in place effective procedures for the management of its research programmes, which meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Section 7: Published information

47   The main vehicle for potential applicants to gain information about the University and its programmes is the Undergraduate or Postgraduate Prospectus, both of which are available as hard copy and electronically. The University has well-tried procedures for collecting information from colleges, schools, faculties and departments; and a Prospectus Editor signs off the material. The University also makes use of a biennial publicity and information questionnaire, which is sent to all undergraduate applicants and is considered a considerable strength. The prospectuses and websites are informative and well produced, and the imaginative attempts of some colleges to demystify the interview process were particularly noted. Students confirmed that information for applicants is accurate, comprehensive and inclusive.

48   The University provides data for the Unistats website, but believes its own site is more informative for undergraduate applicants in particular, including as it does a wide range of relevant information. The usefulness of this site is confirmed.

49   The Reporter, the official University publication, routinely covers a wide range of topics, while special issues dealing with particular topics are also published from time to time. Students stated that the Reporter is an invaluable source of information about matters of immediate and practical importance, a view shared by the members of academic staff whom the team met.

50   Taken as a whole, the quality of a range of published information was considered very high, a view exemplified by the Code of Practice for Graduate Research Degrees and Certificates of Postgraduate Studies; the Guide to Quality Assurance and Enhancement of Teaching, Learning

and Assessment; the post-interview questionnaire for applicants; the material published for applicants on their websites by colleges and the University; and the Reporter's coverage of discussions about proposed changes in University policy and many other matters. The quality of published information is considered a feature of good practice.

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

51   The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

●   the robust approach taken in the periodic learning and teaching review process (paragraph 23)

●   the range of admissions-related initiatives, especially those promoting the widening participation agenda (paragraph 32)

●   the exemplary manner in which the Senior Tutors' Committee discharges its responsibilities (paragraph 33)

●   the quality of published information (paragraph 50).

Recommendations for action

52   The audit team recommends that the University consider further action in some areas. In particular it would be advisable for the University to ensure that:

●   it implements, without undue delay, the recommendation of the General Board's Education Committee that the award of BA with Honours should necessarily involve the successful completion of Part II of the Tripos (paragraph 15)

●   it develops further the annual quality statements by incorporating within them an analysis of the outcomes of the procedures described therein (paragraphs 25, 27, 38)

●   all postgraduate students with supervisory or teaching responsibilities are appropriately trained (paragraph 36)

●   it confirms an early date for the General Board to assume full responsibility for the award-bearing programmes offered by the Institute of Continuing Education (paragraph 41).

53   It would be desirable for the University:

●   to introduce a template for external examiners' reports (paragraph 10)

●   to consider the introduction of a University-wide approach to penalties for late-submitted assessed work (paragraph 17)

●   to use student-related data regularly to inform the development and implementation of strategy and policy relating to the management of academic standards (paragraph 19).

Appendix

University of Cambridge's response to the institutional audit report

The University of Cambridge is reassured by QAA's judgement that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards and the management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. We are encouraged that QAA has recognised a number of areas as being good practice.

The report makes a number of recommendations for action. Work is progressing well towards converting the credit-bearing certificates and diplomas currently awarded locally by the Institute of Continuing Education into University awards. The intention is to report to the Regent House in the Michaelmas Term 2008, with a view to making these awards University awards for the 2009-10 cohort. This review will encompass not only awards offered by the Institute of Continuing Education, but also those offered by other institutions within the University. The General Board will seek approval from the Regent House to amend the regulations for the BA Honours Degree to introduce a requirement for a Part II for the 2009 intake. The Education Committee will be looking at ways to develop quality statements to gather evidence and good practice from local reviews of courses, and the University will require training of all postgraduates who teach.

The Education Committee will give further thought to QAA's 'desirable' recommendations.