University of Salford

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 Salford (the University) from 18 to 22 February 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 of Salford offers.

To arrive at its conclusions, the audit team spoke to members of staff throughout the University of Salford and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the University of Salford 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 of Salford is that:

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

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

In addition to the two judgements above, the audit team also produced commentaries on the University's arrangements for quality enhancement, collaborative provision, postgraduate research students and published information.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University expresses, in the briefing paper, its view that it has 'an established and strategic approach' to enhancement which has been systematically taken forward over a number of years. It goes on to explain that it is putting effort into generation of an understanding of enhancement as 'deliberate planned actions' and is exploring how far its current practices meet this definition and how greater awareness of this definition can further improve the effectiveness of what the University does.

The change process that the University is currently engaged in, while as yet not completed, sees a new Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic) taking responsibility for enhancement of the student experience, and chairing a new Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee. At the time of the audit the detailed responsibilities and support for this post were still to be decided when the appointee takes up their post.

The audit team was assured in meetings that the enhancement of the student experience and the new Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee functions had been fully mapped into the new structure but as yet little detail on implementation was available to the team as to where responsibility for enhancement, as previously carried out by two units, would be taken forward in the future.

Postgraduate research students

Research policy and procedures are determined on behalf of Senate by Research Committee and Postgraduate Research Studies Sub-Committee, chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research) and the Director of Graduate Studies respectively.

All research activity, including postgraduate research programmes, is located in the nine Research Institutes. Postgraduate research students are formally based in Research Institutes and all supervisors are full members of Research Institutes. The Research and Graduate College provides central support and administrative functions for research and postgraduate activities; it includes the Postgraduate Office which has responsibility for postgraduate research student records and administration. Quality and progression across the postgraduate research student lifecycle are monitored at local level by Research Institutes and at institutional level through Postgraduate Research Studies Sub-Committee and the Postgraduate Research Award Board, both chaired by the Director of Graduate Studies.

Published information

Overall, the University publishes clear and accessible information for its students in printed form and, increasingly, on its website. Publicity materials from partner colleges that the audit team viewed stated clearly the locus of the University as the appropriate awarding body.

Students whom the audit team met supported the view that the centrally produced pre-entry published and web-based materials were generally comprehensive, helpful and accurate. The team looked at examples of programme specifications for both collaborative and non-collaborative provision and found them to be detailed and useful.

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

Features of good practice

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

- the range and depth of the Academic Audit Committee's investigations into the effectiveness of the University's policies and procedures, its independence in choosing areas for audit, and its authority and status as a committee of Senate

- University's action to ensure that the Academic Quality Assurance continues to be a robust and increasingly accessible foundation of its quality framework

- the establishment of the Academic Quality Standards Unit and its continuing work contribute significantly to the effectiveness of the University's management of standards and quality management and that the practice of reviewing the impact and effectiveness of new or significantly revised quality assurance procedures after the initial year is a feature of good practice

- the robust and thorough processes for the annual review of programmes, their oversight at school, faculty and institutional level, and the commitment to provide institutional level feedback on the issues identified from overview reports

- the identification of good practice in the induction of external examiners in one school leading to its adoption at university level

- the increasing range of student-related data and statistical analyses produced by Academic Quality Standards Unit that are available to the University, faculties and schools to assist in their monitoring, review and planning processes

- the steps the University has taken to improve its overview of interaction with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies at programme, school and faculty level

- the introduction and support of student liaison representatives in extending and increasing the effectiveness of the constructive engagement of students in the quality assurance process and quality enhancement

- the development and use of the summary Guidelines to the affiliation process for partner institutions

- the opportunities available to regional partner staff to access University-led staff development opportunities, particularly where these are encouraged through the appropriate joint board of study

- the regular updates for members of Partnership and Collaboration Sub-Committee on national issues and debates on higher education collaborative matters

- the Graduate Teaching Assistant scheme and its associated training programme

- the easily accessible and well laid out 'Student' and 'Staff' Channels on the University website

- the regular updating of the Procedures and Policies for Academic Quality Assurance: Programmes and Students (AQA) and in particular the current review of the Assurance as part of a wider University staff communications strategy.

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- in developing its new Senate committee structure in the 'Realising our Vision' project, retain its robust arrangements for the management of academic quality, including the current high level of professional support

- ensure that it has in place adequately robust arrangements to assure the quality of all its future collaborative activities.

It is desirable for the University to:

- maintain the independence and thoroughness of its current arrangements for academic audit as carried out by the Academic Audit Committee

- extend the development of appropriate data collection and analysis processes relating to postgraduate taught students in the context of plans to develop postgraduate taught provision

- encourage the continuing improvements in the consistency of use of the virtual learning environment, especially within programmes of study

- develop further its approach to quality enhancement to ensure the dissemination of good and/or effective practice is more systematic and overt

- regularly update students studying in partner institutions on their entitlement to the use of University resources for learning and teaching

- ensure that a University framework is in place for the pedagogical staff development needs of partners teaching at higher education level with whom the University intends to establish strategic relationships

- clarify its entry regulations for postgraduate research doctoral degrees in the light of its current practice regarding entry requirements.

Reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings the audit team investigated the use made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure which provides a means of describing academic standards in UK higher education. It allows for diversity and innovation within academic programmes offered by higher education. QAA worked with the higher education sector to establish the various parts of the Academic Infrastructure which are:

- *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*

- frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland

- subject benchmark statements

- programme specifications.

The audit found that the University took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

Report

1   An institutional audit of the University of Salford (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 18 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 was carried out using a process developed by QAA in partnership with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), GuildHE, and Universities UK, and has been endorsed by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. The scope of the audit included all of the University's provision and collaborative arrangements leading to its awards.

3   The audit team comprised Professor Peter Bush, Dr Michael Edwards, Dr Richard Gadsden and Professor Paddy Maher, auditors and Mrs Susan Gregory, audit secretary. Mr Derek Greenaway, Assistant Director, Reviews Group, coordinated the audit on behalf of QAA.

Section 1: Introduction and background

4   The University traces its origins back to 1896 and the founding of the Royal Technical Institute, Salford. The University was granted its Royal Charter in 1967 since when the University has built upon its previous status as a College of Advanced Technology. As well as establishing itself as a University focusing on technology and engineering, it additionally focuses on the promotion of access to educational opportunities and also preparedness for the world of work.

5   In 1996 the University merged with the Salford College of Technology and the Northern College of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Studies to create a multidisciplinary University with over 18,000 students, shifting the balance of disciplines within the University.

6   At the time of the audit the University had a total of 19,306 students; 15,899 undergraduate; 2,999 following postgraduate taught programmes and 408 postgraduate research students. Academically, the University is organised into four faculties, each containing a number of schools. Research is located within nine Research Institutes, many of which draw members from more than one school and faculty.

7   The University's mission, set out in the Strategic Framework 2005-2015, '…is to be an enterprising University, achieving internationally recognised excellence in Education for capability, Research for the real world and Partnership with business and the community.'

8   The Strategic Framework 2005-2015 identifies strategic priorities designed to steer the medium term development (three to five years) and to outline the performance indicators to measure progress and effectiveness.

9   At the time of the previous audit in March 2004, a project 'Re-thinking the University' was coming to its conclusion and this was then taken forward as 'Deciding the Future'. The Deciding the Future report proposed the modernisation of governance, management and service delivery. A new change programme, 'Realising our Vision' identified four major areas for change, governance, strategic leadership, academic management and the professional services.

10   The University responded positively to the recommendations contained in its previous institutional audit report, published some four years ago.

11   The judgements and comments made in this report also apply to the University's arrangements for the management of its collaborative provision which was included in the present audit.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

12   The University describes its overall framework for quality assurance and enhancement as comprising 'a set of principles, organisational structures, a policy framework and set of documentation'. The principles of responsibility, equity, externality and enhancement are unchanged since the previous 2004 audit. The Senate is responsible for maintaining the University's academic quality and standards and discharges this through three key central committees: the Teaching and Learning Committee; Research Committee; and Academic Audit Committee. The Teaching and Learning Committee has the major responsibility for all taught programmes and has three sub-committees with quality assurance and standards roles: Teaching and Learning Standards SubCommittee; Admissions Subcommittee; and Partnerships and Collaboration Subcommittee. The Research Committee is responsible for all research awards and the research environment. The Academic Audit Committee independently checks the effectiveness of policies and procedures. The committee structure, which is currently viewed as overburdened and unable to concentrate enough on enhancement, was in the process of reorganisation during the audit.

13   The Strategic Framework 2005-2015 sets out the University's policy framework for quality assurance and enhancement. Operational responsibility for the quality and standards of academic programmes is devolved to the schools with each faculty overseeing the operation of its constituent schools. The Associate Deans (Teaching) and Associate Heads (Teaching) have day-to-day responsibility for managing quality assurance in their faculties and schools, and led by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) have formed increasingly effective networks for sharing experience and reducing variability. The audit team looked at the respective roles of faculties and schools and while recognising the rigorous and comprehensive approach to quality management considered that there may be elements of duplication, for example in the production of overview reports.

14   The Academic Audit Committee was noted as a good practice feature in the 2004 audit. Since then it has carried out 16 authoritative academic audits for Senate in a wide range of areas and has helped significantly to change practice. The Strategic Leadership Team now receives the Committee's reports directly allowing a management response to be formulated for Senate and the possibility of faster action on recommendations. The audit team considered that the Academic Audit Committee's activity had been a strong feature of the University's developing approach to quality management. In particular, the team considered that the range and depth of the Committee's investigations into the effectiveness of the University's policies and procedures, its independence in choosing areas for audit, and its authority and status as a committee of Senate all amounted to a continuing feature of good practice.

15   The University's structures, policies and procedures and academic regulations are brought together in an annually updated handbook, Procedures and Policies for Academic Quality Assurance: Programmes and Students (AQA). In recognition of the need to make its procedures as understandable and accessible as possible the University was undertaking a project, 'Rethinking the AQA' which was gauging staff perceptions and use of the handbook and website with a view to developing and implementing a new approach to communicating information to staff about quality and standards, action which the audit team identified as good practice. Notwithstanding the extended timescale of the project, the team recognised the importance of the AQA in underpinning the University's approach to quality assurance and for the future security of arrangements for quality management during the proposed structural changes in which understanding and operation of those arrangements among staff at school and programme level would be key components. The team therefore considered that the University's action to ensure that the AQA continues to be a robust and increasingly accessible foundation of its quality framework was an example of good practice.

16   The Academic Division and the Academic Quality and Standards Unit play an important role in developing the quality assurance processes and procedures, organising review and overseeing engagement with the Academic Infrastructure, producing overview reports, analysing and disseminating student data, and administering the Student Experience Survey. Academic Division edits revisions to the AQA. In the view of the audit team, the establishment of the Academic Quality and Standards Unit and its continuing work contribute significantly to the effectiveness of the University's management of standards and quality management (see also paragraph 17 below).

17   Procedures for programme approval and monitoring, and periodic review and re-approval were revised in 2005-06 as part of the University's routine process of regular review. Programme approval is a two-stage process: stage 1 is outline institutional approval by the Teaching and Learning Committee, following prior approval at school and faculty level; stage 2 involves a detailed approval process at faculty level on behalf of Senate by a faculty Programme Approval and Review Sub-Committee. The programme approval and review subcommittees also conduct periodic reviews of programmes and play an effective and important institutional role. Each includes at least one external adviser, who comments on engagement with subject benchmark statements and *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The operation of the programme approval and review subcommittees was reviewed after their first year of operation, an example of the University's good practice of reviewing major changes to its procedures after the initial year. The review reported that the new procedures were operating well but there was a need for continued centralised support for the coordinated operation of the committees. The audit team noted some uncertainty about the future location of such support as a side-effect of 'Realising our Vision'. Given the key roles of the programme approval and review subcommittees in the management of academic standards, the University will wish to clarify the location and nature of their support. The team concluded that the establishment of the Academic Quality and Standards Unit and its continuing work contribute significantly to the effectiveness of the University's management of standards and quality management and that the practice of reviewing the impact and effectiveness of new or significantly revised quality assurance procedures after the initial year is a feature of good practice.

18   In periodic programme review and re-approval the relevant school is responsible for producing a reflective analysis and updated programme specifications for the faculty programme approval and review sub-committees, which, with external subject specialist input, conducts the re-approval process and produces a report of its findings. The Academic Quality and Standards Unit has recently produced a useful draft overview report of periodic programme review and re-approval in 2006-07 for the Teaching and Learning Committee. From the sample of periodic programme review and re-approvals available to it, the audit team was able to confirm the thoroughness of the process and the rigour of the reflective analyses undertaken by programme teams. There are also fully documented procedures for the periodic review of research institutes, schools and faculties. The team had access to several school review reports and was able to confirm that the process, which involves external advisors and is akin to a subject review process, was both comprehensive and rigorous.

19   Annual programme review is seen as a cornerstone of the University's quality assurance processes and one which has improved in quality and consistency in recent years. The audit team saw evidence of a comprehensive system of annual programme review reporting, scrutiny and feedback. Schools produce summary reports, which are reviewed in each faculty by the Associate Dean (Teaching), who also reviews all annual programme review reports and produces a summary report for the Teaching and Learning Committee. In addition, overviews of annual programme reviews from collaborative provision and postgraduate taught programmes, which are also reviewed in their home schools and faculties, are produced for the Teaching and Learning Committee by the chair of the Partnerships and Collaborations Subcommittee and the

Director of Graduate Studies respectively to consider generic issues. The Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) produces an institutional overview of issues arising and of the operation of the annual programme review process. Each of the central services produces a response to relevant issues raised by the annual programme review overviews. The team was able to confirm a well-documented process of comprehensive programme reports, supported for undergraduate programmes by informative, centrally produced statistical data (see paragraph 26 below). Reports are progressively overviewed and considered at different levels in the committee structure and a range of institutional responses results.

20   The audit team noted a record of the University's strong action in response to previously identified deficiencies in the standard of reports and the quality of data available to programme teams. However, there were concerns among staff that issues of student dissatisfaction with variations in their learning experience as evidenced by the results of the National Student Survey and highlighted in the student written submission had not been picked up more effectively through the annual programme review process. The annual programme review was being reviewed at the time of the audit with a view to its refocusing as 'monitoring and enhancement'. The team noted once again the University's careful, inclusive and comprehensive approach to reviewing its key mechanisms for quality assurance. The team considered that the University's thorough processes for the annual review of its programmes, their management at school, faculty and institutional level and the commitment to provide institutional level feedback on the issues identified from overview reports, amounted to a feature of good practice (see also paragraph 35 below).

21   Following recommendations about external examining in the 2004 QAA audit report, the University has gained greater institutional oversight by central scrutiny and overview of external examiners' reports and instituting university-level induction events for new external examiners (see paragraph 22 below). It has also attempted to strengthen external examining processes in collaborative provision. However, although external examiners are responsible to Senate, their selection against institutional criteria and appointment remains the responsibility of faculties. It was not clear to the audit team how the University would monitor the balance of appointments across all faculties, for example from particular institutions or types of institutions, a factor that the University may wish to consider in developing its new structures through 'Realising our Vision'. The University has its own Code of Practice on the External Examiner System for all taught programmes, which was aligned with the relevant section of the *Code of practice*. External examiners' reports are considered at programme, school and faculty levels, and centrally, and are summarised in annual programme review and overview reports.

22   Within schools, Associate Heads (Teaching) are responsible for ensuring identification of actions with programme teams. The Associate Deans (Teaching) have a similar faculty role vis-à-vis schools. A useful overview report is produced centrally for the Teaching and Learning Committee for all taught programmes, supplemented by separate overviews of postgraduate taught and collaborative programmes to draw out generic issues in those areas. The 2006-07 overview pointed out a continuing problem of obtaining timely reports from external examiners although continuing contact with non-reporting examiners over the autumn had led to some improvement over the previous year. This problem of late reports had also affected the annual programme review process and a more systematic means of receiving and internally distributing of external examiners' reports in electronic format had been recommended by the annual programme review Working Group. Following statements in the student written submission about disparity of practice across the institution, the audit team checked with undergraduate students, whom it met during the audit visit, whether they had seen external examiners' reports or knew if they were available to their representatives, and received generally affirmative responses. Based on its examination of the University's own Code of Practice on the External Examiner System for all taught programmes and samples of external examiners' reports and of the overview reports produced at school, faculty and institutional level, the team was able to confirm the University's view that its use of external examiners and their reports is 'thorough and robust' and that the University makes strong and scrupulous use of independent external

examiners. The team agreed that the identification of good practice in the induction of external examiners in one school leading to its adoption at university level is a feature of good practice.

23   The University claims to have a 'systematic approach to the development and revision of the academic infrastructure', with lead responsibility for oversight lying with the Academic Quality and Standards Unit. The audit team found that the Academic Quality and Standards Unit had played an important role in supporting the appropriate use and incorporation of all elements of the Academic Infrastructure. The FHEQ and relevant benchmarks are specifically addressed during taught programme approval and re-approval processes. There is proactive engagement with the *Code of practice* and a well-documented process of mapping precepts against practice and noting any actions required with named responsible persons and committees. Programme (and module) specifications are embedded, but are used primarily as tools in programme approval and re-approval rather than for student use, an issue which the University recognises and is taking steps to change. The University has recently reviewed interactions with professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies, one of the results of which is an annual review of their reports by the Academic Quality Standards Unit, available in draft form during the audit visit, and providing helpful summaries of accreditation visits, their findings, and recurring themes of good practice and issues for attention. The team took the view that the University was proactive, systematic and effective in its engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points.

24   University-wide assessment policies and procedures are embodied in the regulations for taught and research awards and the university's Code of Practice: Assessment Policies and Procedures, which was benchmarked against the *Code of practice*, published by QAA. Particular areas of concern and/or interest have been addressed through Academic Audit Committee scrutiny (for example, an audit of local implementation of modification and verification) and working groups, such as the Degree Classification Scheme Review Group. Some years ago, the University adopted a common marking scheme using the full scale of marks from 1 to 100 with defined levels of performance and class marking bands, although it was recognised that there may be a legacy of different marking traditions, for which some discretion had been built into the brief for boards of examiners. The University has acted on the recommendation in the previous audit report to make the links between learning outcomes and assessment explicit for students and the audit team was able to confirm that the linkage and its expression in programme specifications was now a particular point of the programme approval and review subcommittees' attention during programme approval. The 2004 audit report also noted variability in feedback to students on their assessed work which a concern which still persists according to the student written submission and the team's meeting with student representatives. An Academic Audit Committee audit in September 2006, had found 'limited confidence in the compliance with or the effectiveness of the documentation and procedures relating to feedback on student assessments at the School level' and 'inappropriately wide variation in practice in the time taken to provide feedback on assessment' had been acknowledged in the Briefing Paper, which according to the Academic Audit Committee report had led to improved practice. The team noted steps that the University was taking to improve matters and its concern to focus more on quality enhancement and the student experience. It will therefore wish to ensure that it continues to improve the consistency and promptness of feedback to students on assessment.

25   A 2004 audit recommendation that the University should continue to improve its management information systems had resulted primarily from the University's difficulties in providing programme teams with accurate and reliable data for analysis of, for example, progression and completion. The audit team was able to confirm the University's view that these problems had been largely overcome and that for undergraduate programmes there is an increasing range of data and statistical analyses produced by the Academic Quality Standards Unit, available to faculties and schools to assist in their monitoring, review and planning processes, and generally welcomed by academic managers. However, the data sets provided to undergraduate programmes were not yet available to postgraduate taught programmes. In view

of the University's plan to develop its postgraduate provision the team considered it desirable that it extends the development of appropriate data collection and analysis processes relating to taught postgraduate students.

26   The audit team took the view that the production, analysis and use of statistical management information are strengths especially in the drive for consistency and explanation of justified inconsistency. Schools and programmes have reliable and accessible data and accompanying analyses to support their planning and their annual monitoring and periodic review processes. The tracking of different groups and types of students has been improved and there is intelligent use of benchmarking as a management tool. At the institutional level, management information is enabling the University to monitor its strategic intentions through its key performance indicators although the Briefing Paper acknowledges that the development of these indicators has been relatively slow. The team took the view that the increasing range of student-related data and statistical analyses produced by the Academic Quality Standards Unit that are available to the University, faculties and schools to assist in their monitoring, review and planning processes was a feature of good practice.

27   The University's management of academic standards was likely to be affected by the 'Realising our Vision' project (see section 1 above) which involves changes in committee structure, senior academic management roles and the professional support services. The current structure of Senate committees and subcommittees would be replaced by a flatter structure of four major committees with the minimum of subgroups. The considerable current workload of the Teaching and Learning Committee and its subcommittees would be divided between two of the new committees: Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee, concentrating on pedagogy and learning, will be chaired by a new post of Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic) while the Academic Portfolio and Partnerships Committee, concerned with curricular development, partnerships and collaborative arrangements, would probably be chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Enterprise and Regional Affairs. Research governance would be the responsibility of the Research Committee, chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor Research and Innovation. A new Academic Governance Committee, to be chaired by an independent elected member of Senate and 'charged with monitoring and reviewing and enhancing the processes of academic governance' would take on the audit function of the Academic Audit Committee. Alongside this proposed restructuring of committees, Realising our Vision includes a reorganisation of support services, which, among other things, is intended to rationalise professional support for quality assurance and enhancement. One of the effects of these proposals will be to redistribute the functions of the existing Academic Quality Standards Unit and Academic Division probably between areas headed by the Registrar and Secretary, and proposed private offices of the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic) and Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation).

28   The audit team concurred with the University's view that it currently had robust quality assurance procedures in place but also needed to investigate whether the extensive changes proposed in 'Realising our Vision' represented a significant degree of risk to their future operation. The team's concern centred on how the heavy quality assurance workload of the current committees and subcommittees would be accommodated (or reduced) within a more streamlined structure, and how the work of areas of current strength, such as the Academic Audit Committee and Academic Quality Standards Unit, both due to be disestablished in the Realising our Vision proposals, would be affected by the proposed changes. In particular, given its positive view of the work and position of the Academic Audit Committee described above, the team considered it desirable that the University should maintain the independence and thoroughness of its current arrangements for internal academic audit.

29   An Academic Governance Working Group, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, was testing the practicability and security of these proposals. However, at the time of the audit, the proposals that the Group would submit to Senate had not been completed. In his foreword to the Briefing Paper, the Vice-Chancellor stated that the initial aim of the group was 'to ensure that the integrity

of our current policies and procedures will be fully safeguarded by the new arrangements for their organisation and management'. The University will therefore wish to ensure that the robustness of its internal framework for assuring quality and standards and the elements of good practice displayed by its existing structures are protected by the new arrangements. The audit team therefore concluded that in developing its new Senate committee structure in the Realising our Vision project, the University is strongly advised to retain its robust arrangements for the management of academic quality and continue the currently high level of professional service support.

30   Notwithstanding remaining uncertainty about the Realising our Vision proposals, the audit team noted the University's positive response to the recommendations of the 2004 audit, its efforts in the intervening period to develop its current rigorous arrangements for securing academic standards and the measured approach being taken by the academic governance working group to assess the feasibility of an autumn 2008 target for the transition to the new Realising our Vision arrangements. Accordingly, the audit found that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

31   The framework of management of learning opportunities is closely allied to that for the management of academic standards. It consists of the external examiners, who are asked to comment on learning opportunities, as well as the processes for programme approval, monitoring and review. All of this is subordinate to the Learning and Teaching Strategy, which describes the overall aims of the curriculum.

32   External examiners are expected to report on the provision of learning opportunities. The audit team saw examples in overview reports of comments about physical resources as well as staff resources. They have commented also on the quality of feedback given by staff to students. Examination by the team of staff-student committee minutes and annual programme review reports shows that the reports of external examiners into topics such as feedback, physical and staff resources are fully considered.

33   Approval of new programmes leading to University awards takes place in two stages, Outline Approval, the responsibility of the Teaching and Learning Committee, acting on the advice of the faculty Programme Approval and Review Subcommittee and Detailed Approval, the responsibility of faculty Programme Approval and Review Subcommittees. In the Outline stage finance, staffing, information services and estates requirements are considered at University level and must be satisfied before Detailed Approval can be given. In addition the proposed new course must be explicitly aligned with the University's Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes. Detailed Approval by the Programme Approval and Review Subcommittee will involve the consideration of programme content, module specifications, teaching, learning and assessment strategies as well as arrangements for student support and any assessed professional experience.

34   Monitoring and review of programmes is through the processes of annual programme review and periodic programme review and re-approval. In addition to these processes, schools are required to monitor programme operation on an ongoing basis through school and programme staff-student committees.

35   Annual programme reviews are prepared by programme teams and considered by school councils who seek to identify cross-programme common problems and examples of good practice. A sample of annual programme reviews are sent to the Associate Dean (Teaching), although evidence gathered by the audit team showed that Associate Deans (Teaching) considered all annual programme reviews rather than relying on a sample. Annual programme reviews will be considered by school councils and staff-student committees. Issues affecting learning opportunities that cannot be dealt with at programme level are referred to schools.

Matters such as the coordination of learning technologies and cross-school programmes will be faculty matters, while strategic issues will be the concern of the University Strategic Leadership Team. The team saw examples of annual programme reviews and was able to assure itself that these reviews were thorough and that actions arising from them were dealt with by schools, faculties, service providers and at institutional level (see paragraph 20).

36   Periodic programme review and re-approval is carried out at five-yearly intervals, although there is provision for the process to be brought forward if there are plans to modify the course substantially or as a condition from a previous periodic programme review and re-approval. The review is carried out by the faculty Programme Approval and Review Subcommittee which includes an external UK-based academic and an internal independent institutional nominee and may also include an external representative from a professional, statutory and regulatory body, industry or other interested community. The basis is a reflective analysis by the programme team, aided by a series of templates. The audit team saw examples and confirmed the care taken in these. On the basis of the reflective analysis and a series of questions in a detailed template the review panel is asked to re-approve a programme. This may be subject to conditions, which must be implemented before the next academic session, or recommendations, which are advisory to schools and programme teams. In all cases, the actions following a setting of conditions have to be approved by the Programme Approval and Review Subcommittee chair, who may consult the external adviser and other panel members, before re-approval of the programme is confirmed. Following a decision to propose recommendations, the response from programme teams and schools are reported to faculties. The team saw examples of the periodic programme review and re-approval process and was able to confirm that this process was thorough and capable of assuring the current and future quality of learning opportunities.

37   In addition to the review of programmes there are school and faculty reviews take place on a five-yearly basis. These reviews, which have memberships that are completely external to the school or faculty, consider the school or faculty strategic plans, management schemes and its exercise of the duties imposed on it. The audit team examined recent reviews and concluded that the processes were thorough and helped the assurance of quality of the learning opportunities offered. They noted that the time spent on preparation for these reviews and the reviews themselves was substantial and that the burden on senior staff in providing the internal externality, that is a feature of the review scheme, was heavy.

38   All programmes are placed appropriately within the FHEQ, with the programme approval and review procedures making explicit references to the FHEQ. The internal procedures of programme design and review are mapped against the appropriate parts of the Academic Infrastructure, including the use of subject benchmark statements and the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*.

39   The extent of involvement of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies in programmes varies. Some are essential to programmes, while other programmes have no professional, statutory and regulatory bodies' influence. Initially, the relationship between the University and the relevant professional, statutory and regulatory body is at school level but, more recently, there has been a central register of involvement in programmes and an overview report is now produced for the Teaching and Learning Standards Subcommittee. The audit team considered that professional, statutory and regulatory bodies' involvement was an important part of the assurance of the suitability of the learning opportunities and that it played a significant part in the University's assurance of learning opportunities both at school and university level. The team agreed that the steps the University has taken to improve its overview of interaction with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies at programme, school and faculty level is a feature of good practice.

40   The assessment strategy describes how students are informed of the assessment strategy for each module, as well as how the formal assessments, including placements and professional work, contribute to the award. It also describes what students can expect in terms of feedback

explicitly related to the grade descriptors for the level of work and when this should be supplied. Student views in minutes seen by the audit team indicate that the timeliness of feedback is still an issue for many students and that there are occasions where it is not clear to the student what is expected and how the assessment relates to the learning objectives of the programme. This variability was confirmed at student meetings.

41   Examination of University policies, external examiner reports and staff-student committee minutes suggests that the success at enforcing the strategy laid down in the Procedures and Policies for Academic Quality Assurance: Programmes and Students handbook is not yet complete and still requires close monitoring. Some of the local application in practice, outlined in the student written submission, of administrative procedures about handing in work and receiving marked work would appear to be particularly inconvenient to students who are part-time or have commitments such as childcare or employment.

42   There has been increased confidence by staff in the quality, accuracy and relevance of the management information statistics produced for undergraduate students and their progress. In particular, use is made of retention rates, entry qualifications, student achievement and National Student Survey data, while the Salford Student Experience Survey is used with somewhat more caution because of its low response rate. Comparisons are made between schools, with the national results within the relevant JACS codes, and a more detailed comparison between the University and a group of sister institutions, including local universities and some similar types of institution with a wider geographical spread. These data have been used to identify areas where results are exceptionally good or bad and therefore focusing the efforts of the University in those key directions in order to improve the student experience and the status of the University, often measured in the quantitative parlance of league tables. The audit team considered it desirable that the University extends the development of appropriate data collection and analysis processes relating to postgraduate taught students in the context of plans to develop postgraduate taught provision.

43   There is a system of module evaluative questionnaires with corresponding evaluations at end of year and end of course. All are essentially qualitative with the only quantitative measures being questions on what level of satisfaction the student had with the module (year, course) and whether it could be recommended to an imaginary colleague. Responses to these questionnaires form an important part of the monitoring of programmes both during the year and at the annual programme review, and periodic programme review and re-approval reviews.

44   The response to the Salford Student Experience Survey was much lower (12 per cent) and was more critical than was expected from the results of the programme evaluation questionnaires. Student comments indicated a level of dissatisfaction with features of the organisation of the courses, as well as the state of some of the teaching accommodation. These views were also expressed in the National Student Survey data.

45   Students are represented at all levels within the University's deliberative committees. In general sabbatical officers will act as representatives at the higher levels (Senate, Council) while elected representatives will sit on staff-student committees at programme level. It was recognised that there was a need for an enhanced student representation system, especially at school and faculty board level and it was agreed to appoint student liaison representatives in all schools. Their function would be to assist in the recruitment of student course representatives and to involve themselves in ad hoc Students' Union and University initiatives and they would receive an honorarium for their work. The audit team concluded that the effectiveness of the scheme at undergraduate level was greater in some schools than in others and that some postgraduate students were unaware of the scheme. However, even with these provisos, the team concludes that the student liaison representatives scheme was a feature of good practice in extending the constructive engagement of students in the quality assurance process.

46   With the increasing importance of the University Strategic Leadership Team it will, be useful for the University to explore how the student experience can be fed into the Team's deliberations outside the formal structures of Senate and Council.

47   The appointment of an increasing number of research-active staff is a principal method of providing links between research and teaching. Research-active staff are expected to teach both undergraduate and postgraduate taught students and the workload balancing system was seen by the audit team to be capable of giving schools information on relative teaching loads within schools so as to ensure contributions by all research-active staff to the school teaching commitments. One school, which has its entire staff research-active, builds its third-year curriculum around the research activities of its staff. However, most research links are through final-year teaching and postgraduate taught projects.

48   Other links appear where the academic staff are involved in pedagogical research, often directly related to their teaching practice.

49   In addition to links with both research and pedagogy the curricula have an emphasis on 'Education for Capability'. This emphasises education for employability, an important factor in the widening participation strategy. The audit team saw evidence that placements were well planned and that the University and the placement provider maintained contact during placements. Students on placement had access to the academic resources of the University and placement provider, these latter resources often being substantial in the case where the placement was in a hospital setting.

50   The number of students attending courses delivered by flexible and distant learning is relatively small. Courses based on flexible and distant learning will have that component of the course specifically examined by the Programme Approval and Review Subcommittee and the procedures mapped against the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, as a guide to sector best practice. Student evaluation of the programme and representation on programme management is expected to be at the same level as for courses taught by conventional methods. Sample materials are expected to be available for examination by the Programme Approval and Review Subcommittee so that their suitability can be assessed.

51   Learning resources are organised with integration of library and computing services in the Information Services Division, which is responsible for 'the delivery of integrated computing, learning and knowledge services'. Students are provided with a series of induction resources, including face-to-face sessions, online tutorials through the virtual learning environment, as well as through a series of printed guides. Partnership arrangements are made through the libraries of other universities and national libraries so that students can have access to resources when on placements or where there is a need for specialist information. The audit team saw evidence of the material available through Information Services Division, both in the library and information and communication technology areas.

52   The Information Services Division is represented on course committees through a series of subject specialists so that learning resources can be discussed in the normal processes of course administration, as well as in the process of course approval. They are also represented on all University committees, faculty and school committees as well as on programme approval and review subcommittees, thus ensuring that learning resources are fully considered.

53   Student comment on the effectiveness of the resources is mixed. The virtual learning environment is seen by some students as an essential part of the teaching and learning of a modern University, while other students see the virtual learning environment and internet as replacing the personal contact between students and academic staff that they see as the essence of higher education. These views were gathered by the audit team from student meetings, confirming the University's observations about the use of the virtual learning environment. Although an extensive range of courses in information and communication technology for educational purposes are run by the Information Services Division, student opinion, confirmed by

the team, suggests that there are staff that are not fully confident in integrating the virtual learning environment into their pedagogical practice. It is desirable that the University encourages the continuing improvements in the consistency of use of the virtual learning environment, especially within programmes of study.

54   In addition to information and communication technology facilities the achievement of the curricula is dependent on the provision of sufficient general spaces (lecture theatres, seminar rooms) and specialist facilities (computer rooms, laboratories, clinics, studios). The modernisation of some parts of the University estate has taken longer than expected and the facilities have, in some cases, become a handicap compared to local competitors in attracting students. It suggests that as the University strategy is to increase the proportion of postgraduate taught students and include more who attend while in professional work, there will be a need to examine what spaces will be required, especially if there is a greater emphasis on the virtual learning environment and blended learning.

55   Induction processes are shared between schools and central services. In addition to activities within schools these also provide an introduction to the library and computing facilities. The audit team saw examples and considered that they made a positive contribution to the student experience. However, it was not so clear how the induction process for postgraduate taught students without prior experience of the UK higher education system worked, considering the short time between entry and the first semester formal assessments.

56   Student support is based on the personal tutor as the first point of contact with the provision of specialised services both within and outside the University. The responsibilities of both tutor and student are laid down. These are based on the University's general policy on equality and diversity, the rights of the student and the need to undertake appropriate professional development in order to carry out the role successfully. It was recognised that the Code may require adaptation to cater for part-time, distance-learning and postgraduate students.

57   New undergraduates are provided with support from the time they confirm their place at the University. This is in the form of both written material and the Student Channel on the University website. For students with specific needs there is a process whereby packages of support can be arranged before arrival. The audit team saw examples of the wide range of material of both an academic and non-academic character on the Student Channel.

58   Central services have been reorganised and have links with, and proximity to, the advice services offered by the Students' Union. Analysis of the business of the Students' Union revealed substantial increases in the number of enquiries on academic matters. From the student meetings, the audit team was assured that the academic regulations, procedures for appeals, complaints and mitigating circumstances were presented to students in programme handbooks and that they were aware of what they had to do in a range of circumstances. Additional support has been given about academic misconduct, including the introduction of the Plato online tutorial package and increased use of purely formative assessment in the induction and early stages of postgraduate taught programmes was described to the team and is welcomed.

59   The extent of personal development planning varies between schools. In some, where it is linked with assessment and integrated into the formation process prior to professional registration, it is an important programme component, although some student liaison representatives were not convinced that students were fully aware of what was included in personal development planning and how it could help them in gaining employment. In other schools, it had an effect in the first year of programmes but did not feature in the assessment for the programme in later years due to the competition for curricula time with other subjects. The audit team came to the conclusion that personal development planning as a separate item was of varying importance but that personal development, often in the form of the carrying out of and preparing for placements, as well as the programme of training and assessment for research students, was an important part of programmes.

60   The University regards the quality of the teaching and learning support staff as central to the quality of the student learning experience and this is confirmed by the students. Thus there is an appointment procedure for all teaching staff which includes, in most cases, a presentation as well as an interview. Staff with less than five years higher education teaching experience are expected to undertake the accredited Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice and Research, with a remission of teaching responsibilities. The audit team confirmed that this initial teacher education was in place and that it was made available to part-time and sessional academic staff.

61   There is an extensive staff development scheme covering the needs and interests of academic and learning support staff. Major parts include programmes on management, learning and teaching practice, information and communications technology, quality assurance, the student experience and research supervisory practice. Analysis shows that the programme is allied to the strategic University aims. However, there is evidence that not all staff that could benefit from the programmes have used them, as shown by the varying levels of confidence and fluency in the use of information and communication technology tools, such as the virtual learning environment, as witnessed in the student submission (see paragraph 55). Staff development is backed by a programme of research in pedagogy that publishes a peer-reviewed Learning and Teaching Conference proceedings. This shows the involvement of staff in pedagogical research, which helps to increase the influence of research on the student experience.

62   Accordingly, the audit team found that 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.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

63   The University describes itself as having 'an established and strategic approach' to enhancement, which has been systematically taken forward over a number of years. It goes on to explain that it is exploring how its current practices meet the definition of 'deliberate planned actions' and how greater awareness of this definition can further improve the effectiveness of what the University does. The University believes its quality assurance mechanisms are now robust and it can focus on quality enhancement.

64   The University has identified a number of areas for enhancement activity: the curricula, the broader student experience and the research student experience. The Learning and Teaching Strategy 2006 to 2009 outlines particular priorities. Responsibility for the enhancement of the learning experience, at the time of the audit, rested with the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching and Learning), the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Institutional and Student Services) has led the enhancement of the wider student experience and the Director of Graduate Studies was responsible for the enhancement of the research student experience. The Education Development Unit typically leads curricular development projects and the Academic Quality Standards Unit ensures that practice at the University is informed by external developments.

65   At the time of the audit, the University was engaged in major change. Committee structures and individual role responsibilities had yet to be finalised. In meetings, the audit team were assured that their functions had been fully mapped into the new structure, but little detail on implementation was available to it. Therefore, it was unclear to the team how the proposed Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee would carry out its remit for the enhancement of the student experience, nor how the enhancement roles carried out by some units, would be taken forward in the future (see paragraph 78).

External examiners

66   In their reports, external examiners are asked to identify good practice. An annual external examiners overview report is then produced by the Academic Quality Standards Unit. In the reports seen by the audit team, the identification of good practice was patchy. The University

may wish to encourage its external examiners to make greater use of this part of their report form and may wish to highlight this in its induction of new external examiners.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

67   The University's Internal Review scheme, embracing annual programme review, periodic programme review and the periodic review of schools, Research Institutes and faculties has, as one of its features, the identification of good, interesting or innovative practice. The University highlights annual programme review as a positive mechanism for sharing good practice, especially across schools, but also across faculties and throughout the University. The audit team was able to see examples of good practice drawn out in reports discussed at the Teaching and Learning Committee (and elsewhere). However, the team was unclear how the Committee systematically encouraged enhancement as a result of identified good practice, University-wide.

Academic Infrastructure and other reference points

68   The Academic Quality Standards Unit provides support to working groups by gathering information on sector practice. In reports from working groups seen by the audit team there was evidence that external reference points had informed their deliberations.

Management Information (including feedback and National Student Survey outcomes)

69   The Academic Quality Standards Unit produces statistical analyses based on internal and external data sources. These are circulated to academic units. In developing these reports as a more proactive tool, the Unit has produced exception reports for each school. These contain an institutional commentary that draws out strengths and weaknesses, and identifies targeted actions. The audit team found that much useful information was made available to schools. However, responses by schools to these reports had not been completed by the time of the audit visit and the team was unable to see how areas of good practice are to be disseminated more widely, nor how schools are to respond to identified weaknesses.

Links between research and scholarly activity and the enhancement of learning opportunities

70   The University is committed to appointing research-active academic staff. It detailed how research staff influence the curricula, especially through case-studies at undergraduate degree final year level. The audit team was able to see examples where such activity had influenced the curricula but were unable to find any systematic approach linking research staff and learning opportunities.

Role of students in quality enhancement

71   The University has recently introduced the role of student liaison representatives. They are appointed to act as a bridge and to further develop partnership between programme-level representation, and the University and the Students' Union. The audit team came to the view that the role of student liaison representative had the potential to further contribute to enhancement of the student experience and was an example of good practice.

Dissemination of good practice

72   The University has a number of mechanisms for identifying good practice and seeks to identify good practice through its committee structures and the institutional level overview reports that are commissioned by and brought to these committees, particularly the Teaching and Learning Committee and Academic Audit Committee. The audit team was able to see many examples of individual good practice being identified in these reports. However, the systematic dissemination of good practice was less clear to the team. The team was told of regular meetings between the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) and the Associate Heads (Teaching). It was agreed by the team that these meetings could be developed further as a dissemination point

for enhancement and action on good practice. The audit team considered it desirable that the University should develop further its approach to ensure the dissemination of good and/or effective practice is more systematic and overt.

Staff development and reward

73   The University has put in place a number of schemes to encourage staff development in line with its strategic aims. It has made appropriate use of a long-established Academic Development Fund, of Teaching Quality Enhancement Funding, and has created initiatives that include the Vice Chancellor's Scholarships, Learning Technologies Fellowships and Professorial Fellows. These initiatives were seen by the audit team as examples of deliberate steps to meet specific University strategic aims.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

74   The University is engaged in limited curricular partnership work, a reflection of its largely cautious approach to collaborative activities within both the UK and further afield. The University franchises Foundation Degrees rather than full undergraduate courses, and does not validate programmes it has not itself developed. Some 240 full-time and 307 part-time students are currently enrolled on collaborative courses with approximately an additional 112 full-time and 41 part-time students anticipated on courses, expected to commence in 2007-08. The bulk of these students is drawn from 23 UK institutions, mainly in the Greater Manchester area, with a small number of overseas institutions that contributed some 58 students. The University's involvement in the Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance, and its development into the GMSA Lifelong Learning Network, and the University's major role in their establishment, have emphasised its regional contribution, and commitment to widening participation working with both higher and further education institutions, particularly through Foundation Degrees, to meet both employer and learner needs.

75   The University's quality assurance arrangements for collaborative provision are designed to ensure that the University has 'approved and has oversight of all activities undertaken in its name' and that it has 'overall responsibility' for the academic standards of all courses offered in partnership. The Partnerships and Collaboration Subcommittee, which reports to the Teaching and Learning Committee, and an Affiliation Panel it appoints following its approval in principle to proceed to the panel stage, receive detailed information on the proposed partner. On receipt of a satisfactory report from an Affiliation Panel, the Partnerships and Collaboration Subcommittee recommends to Senate and Council that the Vice Chancellor signs a standard affiliation agreement. Approval in principle to offer both new and existing programmes with a partner must be sought in advance from the faculty and the Teaching and Learning Committee, with formal approval resulting from a successful outcome of the usual Programme Approval and Review Subcommittee arrangements. Approval Programme review/re-approval follows the usual University's Programme Approval and Review Subcommittee processes described above. These arrangements appeared to have been followed extremely carefully, with partner institution staff particularly welcoming the guidelines to the affiliation process for partner institutions. The audit team agreed that the development and use of the summary Guidelines to the affiliation process for partner institutions is a feature of good practice.

76   All collaborative programmes are broadly managed and monitored by arrangements that mirror those in place for Salford-based courses, through the sponsorship of a Joint Board of Study comprising staff drawn from the University and students and staff from partners delivering the course. The Joint Board of Study reports into the school through the usual annual programme review process, and its minutes are additionally sent to the officer of the Partnerships and Collaboration Subcommittee to assist in that subcommittee's preparation of an annual overview of collaborative activity. External examiner reports are considered by the Joint Board of Study, although not all such reports have specifically identified collaborative programmes, an issue that the University is further addressing. The audit team found that in most cases partner staff were

aware of the staff development opportunities available at the University and that a number participated in such events particularly where these were facilitated by the Joint Board of Study. The team concurred that the opportunities available to regional partner staff to access University-led staff development opportunities, particularly where these are encouraged through the appropriate Joint Board of Study, is a feature of good practice.

77   The Partnerships and Collaboration Subcommittee has overall institutional oversight for the quality assurance arrangements for collaboration, advising the Teaching and Learning Committee and Senate either through minutes or the preparation of annual overview reports. In particular, it receives reports on the University's continuing observance of the *Code of practice section 2: Collaborative provision and flexiable and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. The Partnerships and Collaboration Subcommittee appeared to be well informed about collaborative activity across the University and also more generally with the good practice whereby members of the Committee were made aware of collaborative issues by receiving comprehensive reports of conferences attended by University staff on collaborative matters and summaries of QAA reports on collaborative provision, including overseas activities. The audit team agreed that the regular updates for members of the Partnership and Collaboration Subcommittee on national issues and debates on higher education collaborative matters is a feature of good practice.

78   While all students registered on collaborative arrangements leading to Salford awards are recorded on the University system, the University affords full access to all University facilities only to those students for whom it draws down funding directly, with access by other students being governed by the specific details of the Affiliation Agreement. This differentiation of entitlement for UK collaborations arose largely as a result of licensing arrangements governing access to University-based materials. The University ensures that there is equality of access by all students studying at an individual partner by requiring as a condition of affiliation that the partner provide appropriate/additional resources to remove any disparity. However, the University will wish to satisfy itself that students studying in partner institutions are made regularly aware of their entitlement to the use of University resources for learning and teaching. Students at partner institutions related primarily to staff at their local institution, although they were clearly aware of the University as the awarding body and of the progression opportunities available. Partner institution students completed module evaluation questionnaires, although they did not participate in the University's Student Experience Survey. The audit team concurred that it is desirable that the University regularly updates students studying in partner institutions on their entitlement to the use of its resources for learning and teaching.

79   The University sees staff development as being 'an important part of the relationship' between the University and its partners, and partner institution staff have access to a number of University-led staff development opportunities. Partner institution staff in particular welcomed the straightforward guidelines to the affiliation process (see paragraph 75). Of particular value to the strength of the partnership was the role of the University Link Tutor as the first point of contact between the partner team and the University. In most cases, partner staff were aware of the staff development opportunities available at the University and that a number participated in such events particularly where these were facilitated by the Joint Board of Study (see paragraph 76). However, particularly as the scope of partnerships overseas increase and as UK partnerships become increasingly strategic, the audit team concurred that it is desirable that the University ensures that an institution-wide framework is in place for the pedagogical staff development needs of partners teaching at higher education level with whom the University intends to establish strategic relationships.

80   As part of its ongoing strategic review, the University is currently considering the purposes, scale and scope of its collaborative activities with a view to focusing partnership working through the development of a range of partnership models, both in the UK and overseas, and embracing community and business partners as well as education institutions within a new framework. The outcome of this wide ranging review is likely to result in the

development of a smaller number of more strategic partnerships in the UK with an increase in the scale of overseas partnerships. The future developments envisaged suggest both a more strategic approach to partnerships and the development of activities that potentially present the University with higher levels of risk than currently experienced through its current more limited partnership arrangements. The audit team broadly concurs with the University's view that its arrangements for the quality assurance of its current provision is 'robust' and are 'well fitted to the nature and extent' of its current collaborative activities. However, as it develops the focus of its collaborative provision, particularly through increasing the number of partnerships with international institutions and UK employers, and consequently with arrangements that pose a potentially higher risk, and in the light of the emerging outcomes of Realising our Vision, the University will wish to ensure that it has in place adequately robust arrangements to assure the quality of all its future collaborative activities.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

81   Research policy and procedures are determined by the Research Committee and the Postgraduate Research Studies Subcommittee on behalf of Senate. The Research Handbook provides a guide to the University's research structures, policies and procedures. Regulatory matters are to be found in the AQA, with a more accessible version of regulations, policies and procedures being provided by the University's Code of Practice for the Conduct of Research Degrees.

82   All research students are based in one of the nine Research Institutes. There is a Research and Graduate College, which includes the Postgraduate Office and provides central support and administrative functions for research (and postgraduate) activities.

83   Each research student is entitled to a minimum level of facilities and support. A service-level agreement specifies what support materials a postgraduate research will have available to them, ranging from desk space and information technology provision through to photocopying allowances. Agreements differ according to needs, but must satisfy the University's minimum standards of provision for postgraduate research students. The audit team found these arrangements to be comprehensive and appropriate.

QAA Report on the review of research degrees programmes

84   In spring 2006, QAA carried out a review of research degree programmes. The review concluded provision at the University was appropriate and satisfactory. It identified examples of good practice and identified areas for further consideration. An action plan was drawn up by the University to investigate and react to these recommendations. While the University accepted four recommendations and has or is actioning them, it rejected a recommendation concerning entry requirements. The audit team found that the University regulations and its practice in applying these regulations for entrance to Doctoral degrees were at variance and agreed that it is desirable that the University clarifies its entry regulations for postgraduate research doctoral degrees in the light of its current practice regarding entry requirements.

Selection, admission, induction and supervision of research students

85   Research Institutes are responsible for selection and admission of postgraduate research students. Research Institutes may supplement the scrutiny of the application but as a minimum must use the official University form. Offers are issued by the Postgraduate Office. Incoming students are provided with introductory information from the Research and Graduate College before arrival and participate in a programme of induction events both at University and Research Institute level. Research students are supported by a supervisory team and a personal tutor who is

independent of the supervisory team. Supervisors must be research-active and are annually appraised by the Research Institute Director. New supervisors are provided with training by the Research and Graduate College and the Education Development Unit. The audit team was satisfied that these arrangements were appropriate.

Progress and review arrangements

86   Progression of postgraduate research students is monitored locally by Research Institutes and at University level by the Postgraduate Research Award Board. There are a series of formal progression points and completion of all progression points is mandatory for continuation. The focus of scrutiny at progression points is the learning agreement, a document agreed between the student and their Research Institute. Research Institutes check progress against identified targets and research students are able to reflect upon their continuing development. The University is currently developing a personal development plan framework for the postgraduate research student lifecycle, a development the audit team would encourage. The team found progress and review arrangements for research students to be appropriate.

Development of research and other skills

87   Research Institutes are responsible for providing appropriate levels of research methodology and analysis training for their postgraduate research students. This training typically takes the form of modules and stand-alone sessions run as part of doctoral training programmes. In some cases these are externally accredited. A formal record of training is kept and monitored by the Postgraduate Research Award Board. General and transferable skills training is offered by the Salford Postgraduate Research Training programme. As part of career development, postgraduate research students can gain teaching experience in schools and all those new to higher education teaching may attend the introductory learning and teaching programme designed for graduate teaching assistants. The University also runs a Graduate Teaching Assistantship scheme in which students are paid a full stipend in return for undertaking an agreed level of teaching, over and above their studies. The scheme is supported by an institution-wide development programme provided by the Education Development Unit and Salford Postgraduate Research Training programme. The Graduate Teaching Assistantship policy and teaching programme are seen as strengths by the University and the audit team concurs with this view and agreed that the Graduate Teaching Assistant scheme and its associated training programme is a feature of good practice.

Feedback arrangements

88   Postgraduate research students are required to produce an annual self-evaluation report. Such reports are considered by the Research Institute Director, feed into the Research Institute annual report and the Director of Graduate Studies annual report. Postgraduate research students can also give feedback through their personal tutor. Postgraduate research students state that these arrangements work well, a view shared by the audit team.

The assessment of research students

89   The University's procedures are set out in the Research Award Regulations. These regulations also define the various awards available. Faculty Board is responsible for appointing a Board of Examiners based on proposals from the Research Institute. The Board comprises at least two examiners, one of whom must be external to the University. Any internal examiner cannot be part of the supervisory team. An internal independent chair is also appointed. After examination of the candidate, the examiners provide a Joint Examiners report to the Postgraduate Research Award Board which then determines the award. The audit team considered these arrangements to be satisfactory.

Representations, complaints and appeals arrangements for research students

90   Postgraduate research students are represented at University level on the Postgraduate Research Studies Subcommittee. The Committee of Salford Postgraduate Associations represents postgraduate research (and postgraduate taught) views to the University typically through the Director of Graduate Studies. Students are also represented on Research Institute Boards.

91   The formal University procedures apply also to postgraduate research academic appeals and complaints as defined in the Research Handbook. The audit team shared the view of students that these arrangements were appropriate.

Section 7: Published information

92   The University produces a wide range of published information, which is available to an increasing degree in web-based form to the public, applicants, partners and students, a mode which the University feels to be the 'most important single source of information' for its many audiences. Responsibility for ensuring the accuracy, currency and completeness of these materials is the responsibility of Enterprise and Development, although schools and professional services are required to check the factual accuracy of information originating from their areas. There is a variety of pre-entry information building upon the undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses, all of which appear to be welcomed by the student body. The University retains control of publicity material relating to University awards that is prepared by collaborative partners. The preparation and publication of these various materials is coordinated by a widely representative Applicant Contact Group comprising membership from schools, Marketing, Admissions and the various professional services that develop student-facing publicity materials. Access to the University website is straightforward via either a staff or student channel, with an impressively comprehensive search directory. The audit team agreed that the easily accessible and well laid out 'Student' and 'Staff' Channels on the University website is a feature of good practice.

93   Much of the teaching quality information is available via the relevant course link, although some of the more generic material is less obviously available (via the Academic Division webpage) to the outside enquirer. Students reported that the module and programme descriptors were accurate and helpful, but these are currently not available electronically. The University intends to address this deficiency as part of a forthcoming review designed to make its web-based materials more student-focused. The audit team encourages the University to ensure that the web-based qualitative and quantitative data on teaching quality information, including module and programme specifications, is more directly accessible to the prospective student.

94   The very comprehensive AQA, an annually updated assemblage of documents setting out the University's quality assurance procedures and academic regulations, is appreciated by and accessible to staff and was noted as a feature of good practice. It is undergoing a major review as part of a University-wide staff communication strategy, possibly involving greater use of web access to University documents. The audit team agreed that the regular updating of the AQA and, in particular, the current review of the AQA as part of a wider University staff communications strategy is a feature of good practice.

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

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

● the range and depth of the Academic Audit Committee's investigations into the effectiveness of the University's policies and procedures, its independence in choosing areas for audit, and its authority and status as a committee of Senate (paragraph 14)

● the University's action to ensure that the Academic Quality Assurance handbook continues to be a robust and increasingly accessible foundation of its quality framework (paragraph 15)

- the establishment of the Academic Quality Standards Unit and its continuing work contribute significantly to the effectiveness of the University's management of standards and quality management and that the practice of reviewing the impact and effectiveness of new or significantly revised quality assurance procedures after the initial year is a feature of good practice (paragraph 17)

- the robust and thorough processes for the annual review of programmes; their management at school, faculty and institutional level and the commitment to provide institutional-level feedback on the issues identified from overview reports (paragraph 20)

- the identification of good practice in the induction of external examiners in one school leading to its adoption at University level (paragraph 22)

- the increasing range of student-related data and statistical analyses produced by the Academic Quality Standards Unit that are available to the University, faculties and schools to assist in their monitoring, review and planning processes (paragraph 26)

- the steps the University has taken to improve its overview of interaction with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies at programme, school and faculty level (paragraph 39)

- the introduction and support of student liaison representatives in extending and increasing the effectiveness of the constructive engagement of students in the quality assurance process and quality enhancement (paragraphs 45, 71)

- the development and use of the summary Guidelines to the affiliation process for partner institutions (paragraph 75)

- the opportunities available to regional partner staff to access University led staff development opportunities, particularly where these are encouraged through the appropriate Joint Board of Study (paragraph 76)

- the regular updates for members of Partnership and Collaboration Subcommittee on national issues and debates on higher education collaborative matters (paragraph 77)

- the Graduate Teaching Assistant scheme and its associated training programme (paragraph 87)

- the easily accessible and well laid out 'Student' and 'Staff' Channels on the University website (paragraph 92)

- the regular updating of the Procedures and Policies for Academic Quality Assurance: Programmes and Students (AQA) and in particular the current review of the AQA as part of a wider University staff communications strategy (paragraph 94).

Recommendations for action

96   Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- in developing its new Senate committee structure in the 'Realising our Vision' project, to retain its robust arrangements for the management of academic quality, including the current high level of professional support (paragraph 29)

- to ensure that it has in place adequately robust arrangements to assure the quality of all its future collaborative activities (paragraph 80).

97   Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- to extend the development of appropriate data collection and analysis processes relating to postgraduate taught students in the context of plans to develop postgraduate taught provision (paragraph 25)

- to maintain the independence and thoroughness of its current arrangements for academic audit as carried out by the Academic Audit Committee (paragraph 28)

- to encourage the continuing improvements in the consistency of use of the virtual learning environment, especially within programmes of study (paragraph 53)

- to develop further its approach to quality enhancement to ensure the dissemination of good and/or effective practice is more systematic and overt (paragraph 72)

- to regularly update students studying in partner institutions on their entitlement to the use of University resources for learning and teaching (paragraph 78)

- to ensure that a University framework is in place for the pedagogical staff development needs of partners teaching at higher education level with whom the University intends to establish strategic relationships (paragraph 79)

- to clarify its entry regulations for postgraduate research doctoral degrees in the light of its current practice regarding entry requirements (paragraph 84).

Appendix

The University of Salford's response to the institutional audit report

The University is delighted with the audit team's judgements of confidence in its management of academic standards and the quality of the learning opportunities available to our students. The University is particularly pleased with the number of good practices noted by the auditors.

With reference to the two advisory recommendations, we can confirm that the new Senate and its associated committee structure have now been approved and these arrangements will continue to retain and enhance our robust arrangements for the management of academic quality. The University will also ensure that appropriate arrangements are further developed and regularly monitored to assure the continued quality of all our future collaborative activities.

We also confirm that the recommendations considered to be desirable will be addressed within an action plan as an integral aspect of our commitment to continuous improvement and enhancement. A number of the recommendations are already being addressed across the University; particularly in relation to the dissemination of good practice and continuing improvements in the consistency of the use of the virtual learning environment.

We wish to thank the audit team for a professional and rigorous engagement with staff and students during a period of significant change within the University.