

Bath Spa University

March 2008

Annex to the report

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Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Bath Spa University from 3 to 7 March 2008 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

Outcomes of the institutional audit

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

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Overall, the audit team found that the University's institutional approach to quality enhancement was informed by clear strategic direction and was leading to systematic improvements in learning opportunities.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

Overall, the audit team found that the arrangements for postgraduate research students were appropriate and satisfactory and met the precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the use of external members on school boards contributing to the enhancement of the student experience (paragraph 58)
- the way in which the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning has been integrated into the institution's strategies to enhance learning opportunities (paragraph 124)
- the robust review mechanisms for collaborative provision (paragraph 138)
- the quality of information provided by the Graduate School for postgraduate research students and supervisors (paragraph 174).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- articulate the institution's strategy for the operation and development of assessment practice (paragraph 50)

- ensure effective and consistent analysis of module evaluations and student data in annual subject reports (paragraph 74)
- make explicit reference to student representation in the memorandum of cooperation with partner institutions and ensure that partner institutions are represented on the new Student Representatives Steering Committee (paragraphs 84 and 134)
- consider more formal and consistent arrangements to ensure student engagement in quality assurance at subject level (paragraph 85)
- ensure that public information for applicants to collaborative provision published on the websites of its partner colleges makes clear the relationship between the University and the partner, the location of study and the progression and transfer requirements from Foundation Degrees to honours-level study (paragraph 177).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 The University's mission is 'to be an outstanding and distinctive university institution that provides degree courses of the highest quality, informed by a culture of scholarship, expertise and teaching excellence'. Bath Spa University College was granted degree awarding powers in 1992 and university title in 2005. The University awards both undergraduate and taught postgraduate degrees and has an arrangement with the University of the West of England, Bristol for the award of research degrees. The University is located on two main campuses: Newton Park and Sion Hill.

2 In 2007-08, the University had a total student population of 5,510 full-time equivalents. The majority of these students are on full-time courses, of which about 15 per cent are postgraduates, mostly studying postgraduate certificate in education courses. The largest proportion of students are on programmes in the creative and performing arts or on teacher training courses, reflecting the institution's historic origins. More recently, programmes have been introduced in the humanities, social science and science disciplines. The University has a postgraduate research student population of about 70, and of these 80 per cent are part-time. There are about 270 academic and 270 support full-time equivalent staff with a significant number of part-time academic teaching staff, particularly on the creative courses.

3 Undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes fall within the remit of seven subject-based schools: Bath School of Art and Design; Education; English and Creative Studies; Historical and Cultural Studies; Music and Performing Arts; Science and the Environment; and Social Sciences. In addition, the Graduate School is responsible for the management of the University's research programmes and the School for Development and Participation is responsible for the day-to-day management and operational aspects of the University's collaborative provision.

4 In 2007-08 the University had 710 (584 full-time equivalents) students studying for its awards at nine partner further education colleges, all within close geographical proximity. This provision is referred to as the Wessex Partnership. The majority of its collaborative programmes are Foundation Degrees in a wide range of subject areas. In some cases, year one of the Foundation Degree is at the partner college and year two is at the University. There is no overseas collaborative provision.

5 The Briefing Paper described the University as a 'teaching-led institution' and 10 characteristics of such an institution are defined in the current Strategic Plan, including its approach to teaching quality, academic staff development, student-centred learning across the whole teaching spectrum, employability and the curriculum, delivery through partnership with further education colleges, working with business, and the way the relationship between teaching

and research is managed. The Briefing Paper also referred to the University as a 'generalist' institution offering a diverse subject base.

The information base for the audit

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

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

8 In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of a special review of research degree programmes, conducted by QAA, July 2006
- the report of a Foundation Degree review of Design for Digital Technologies, Bath Spa University and City of Bath College, conducted by QAA, July 2005
- the report of a Foundation Degree review of Fashion Design Skills, conducted by QAA, May 2005
- the University's one year follow-up report to QAA in response to the institutional audit report, January 2005
- the report of the institutional audit, May 2003.

Developments since the last audit

9 The last audit in 2003 found that broad confidence could be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards. A number of features of good practice were identified.

10 The present audit team found that the institution had addressed all of the recommendations from the audit. The recommendations and the University's response are detailed below.

11 Recommendations for action considered in the last audit to be advisable were to:

- review the mechanisms for allocating resources to areas of the learning and teaching infrastructure that have been identified as problematic
- consider further whether Bath Spa University College has been sufficiently responsive, at institutional level, to the long-standing concerns of some library users.

12 In its follow-up report, the University suggested that these matters were more related to improved investment in resources rather than improving the mechanisms for investment themselves. In the case of library provision, the reference was specifically to the Newton Park library and particularly to problems of space. This has been resolved by moving the Students' Union and thus creating space for extension and improvement of the library. According to the student written submission, this has led to a considerable increase in the level of student satisfaction. A new theatre has also been built on the Newton Park site.

13 The University has also invested in measures to improve the reliability of its information technology systems. As a result, the Briefing Paper stated that the University has made 'much

more extensive use of the virtual learning environment and on-line registration'. The student written submission acknowledged significant improvement in information technology provision for both home and collaborative provision students: 'The level of satisfaction improved considerably over the past few years due to considerable expenditure on increased resources and the expansion of the Newton Park computer facilities'.

14 Matters from the last audit where the institute might benefit from taking further action were to:

- keep under review the revised system for annual monitoring, to ensure that it provides sufficient information to enable the centre to keep an overview of provision at subject level.

15 As a result of this recommendation the 'unit of (annual) review' was changed from school to subject level which removed the inevitable filtering that took place in producing a school report. Annual monitoring is discussed in detail in paragraphs 63 to 67 below.

- extend existing good practice in staffing procedures and staff development to hourly-paid staff.

16 The follow-up report stated that 'we have ensured that hourly-paid staff are given the same access to staff development (relative to their contribution) as full-time staff'. Staff development is considered in more detail in paragraphs 113 to 118 below.

- clarify the responsibilities of personal tutors.

17 A new, more formalised system of personal tutoring has been introduced. This is discussed in paragraph 101 below.

- ensure that the information provided for students states clearly and consistently the implications of failing to observe attendance requirements.

18 The follow-up report stated that the penalties, which were levied against those students who failed to attend, have now been removed and replaced by increased support for following up students who fail to attend, thus encouraging attendance rather than penalising absence.

19 The University underwent two successful reviews of its Foundation Degrees in 2005, in Fashion Design Skills and in Design for Digital Technologies. In addition, the Special review of research degree programmes in 2006 concluded that 'the institution's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree provision was appropriate and satisfactory'.

20 A failed Ofsted secondary inspection in 2004-05 led to 'changes of management and procedure', which were of sufficient effect for recovery to be achieved in the following academic year. In contrast, the University considers the Ofsted primary inspection of 2006-07 to have been an 'outstanding success'.

21 The Briefing Paper reported that the staffing and systems capability of the Registry have been increased in order to provide management information which can support quality and standards. In the year of the last audit, a Dean of Academic Development was appointed with responsibility for 'linking quality assurance with strategic planning and for enhancement'. A new the Head of Quality Management's post has also been created and an appointment was made in January 2008. The audit team was informed that one of the first responsibilities of this post would be to consider the University's systems with the objectivity of newness and to make proposals.

22 Another significant development has been a successful bid for a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in the creative arts subjects. The £5 million Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning has enabled major purchases of equipment and related facilities in digital technologies for the arts (see paragraph 92 below).

Institutional framework for the management of academic standards and learning opportunities

23 The University is governed by an Instrument and Articles of Government. Executive decisions are taken by the Vice Chancellor's Group. The Academic Board advises the Vice Chancellor and the Board of Governors on academic activities. The framework for managing academic quality and standards is the responsibility of the Academic Board, supported by a series of subcommittees with defined membership and terms of reference.

24 The key subcommittees with responsibility for quality assurance and the quality of learning opportunities are: the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, Learning and Teaching Committee, school boards and examination boards. University committees, including school boards, include student representation and members external to the University. Schools are permitted to develop their own committee structure below the level of school board.

25 Collaborative provision falls within the remit of the School for Development and Participation and is overseen by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee at University level through its Subcommittee for Collaborative Provision. The Subcommittee is chaired by the Head of the School for Development and Participation and has representation from each school involved, from library and information services, the partner institutions and at least one external member.

26 The Graduate School has responsibility for postgraduate taught and research students; the key postgraduate committees are Higher Degrees (Taught) and Higher Degrees (Research), both of which report directly to the Academic Board.

27 Key personnel involved in the management of academic quality and standards are the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic); Dean of Academic Development; Head of Quality Management; Head of Graduate School; Head of School for Development and Participation; and Registrar.

28 There is a clear and comprehensive regulatory framework with academic regulations for undergraduate modular and non-modular awards and postgraduate taught and research degrees. These are readily available to staff and students. Policies and procedures for managing quality and standards are provided on the Academic Office's website.

29 The minutes of the Academic Board and its subcommittees' meetings, together with other documentation, provided the audit team with considerable evidence of the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of the University's framework for the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

30 The University's systems for the management of curricula and assessment are the primary means by which it assures the academic standards of its awards. At University level, the Vice Chancellor's Group, Academic Office, Registry and Academic Quality and Standards Committee have key roles in approval, monitoring and review of standards, as do school boards at school level. Approval, monitoring and review of award standards are conducted within broader processes, which also evaluate the learning opportunities associated with the programmes to provide a basis for quality enhancement. Those aspects of the processes most closely associated with academic standards are considered here, the remainder are considered in paragraphs 59 to 69 below.

Development and approval of programmes

31 Clear guidance is provided on the requirements for the development and approval of programmes. Programme development is expected to be aligned with the University and school

strategic plans. Independent external subject specialists are appropriately involved in the process as are other identified internal stakeholders, each of which are asked to consider the provision's alignment with external reference points, including *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), subject benchmarks and professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements.

32 From its reading of a range of documentation relating to programme approval, the audit team found that the procedures were comprehensive and robust, with evidence of engagement with external members, outline planning approval by the Vice Chancellor's Group, the checking of documentation by the Academic Office and final approval at the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. A draft student handbook containing the programme specification is a key requisite of programme approval.

Annual monitoring

33 Following the last institutional audit in 2003, the University amended its annual monitoring arrangements. The University reviewed the procedure again in 2007 with the aim of reducing the burden of information on the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. As a result, school boards are the focus for consideration of subject-level reports. Heads of school are now required to present an overview report to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. The audit team read a number of annual reports at both subject and school levels. The team noted some variability in the level of reflective analysis and commentary in the reports' consideration of, for example, student evaluations, external examiner comments and student performance data. The team was satisfied, however, that the process was well defined and embedded both at undergraduate and postgraduate level. There is an explicit role for external examiners' reports in the process and student evaluations of modules inform module/unit reports which feed into the subject annual reports. Students are represented on school boards where annual monitoring reports are considered. From meetings with students, the team was assured that students were engaging with the process. Actions from annual monitoring are considered by school boards and reported to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee.

34 The audit team noted that, with some exceptions such as Art and Design, the University monitors subjects/units rather than whole programmes (see also paragraph 70 below). The team accepted the view given by the University's senior staff that, under a predominantly modular scheme, programmes are 'artificial constructs', although noted a discrepancy between this view and the statements and responsibilities pertaining to quality and standards on the Academic Office website which make frequent reference to programmes and programme teams. The team considered that the University may wish to review how it captures an overarching view of the student experience on individual programmes rather than units/modules in order to assure further the currency, validity and coherence of students' programmes of study.

Periodic review

35 The University operates a six-year cycle of periodic review, although this is more frequent for its collaborative provision (see paragraph 136 below). There is clear guidance on the periodic review process, which is modelled on QAA subject review. Review teams comprise both internal members of the University and externals. Meetings with staff and students form a significant part of the review process. Review leads to the production of a written report detailing strengths and commenting on developments and enhancement for the future. Any conditions are to be implemented within a specified time frame. Six months after the review, subject teams are expected to submit a progress report detailing any action taken to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee.

36 The review undertakes an evaluation of all the subjects within a department and forms part of the subject reapproval process. The focus is on the health of the subject, and requires the

writing of a self-evaluation document, reflection on student module evaluations, subject reports, a sample of student work, external examiner reports and subject and module handbooks. The programme specification is a requisite for engagement with the relevance and currency of curricula and assessment, and the maintenance of academic standards.

37 The audit team was informed that as a result of periodic review there have been exceptional cases where programmes had been withdrawn. The team audited internal review documentation, including post review documentation which responded to conditions and recommendations, and was satisfied that the process was rigorous and embedded.

External examiners

38 The University places significant emphasis on the role of the external examiner in assuring academic standards. The role and responsibilities of external examiners are clearly set out in the External Examiners' Handbook. The University stated that the external examiner system is the major formal mechanism by which the University seeks to ensure that the standards of programmes match its intentions. The Handbook takes due regard of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*. External examiners are appointed subject to strict criteria by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee for a period of four years. In exceptional circumstances, and subject to the approval of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, tenure may be extended for a further year. There is a standard application form and school boards consider and recommend applications to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee for approval. Where the University's awards are delivered by partner colleges within the Wessex Partnership, the external examiner is normally the same as that appointed and approved by the University. The audit team was satisfied that the procedures for the appointment of external examiners were clear and comprehensive.

39 External examiners are required to attend examination boards which consider student performance as a whole across programmes, and sub-boards which consider marks in units and modules. Examination boards for collaborative provision are held at the University. Minutes of examination boards demonstrated the engagement of external examiners in the process, including comments made at the end of each board as well as external examiners signing off the minutes of the boards. External examiners are generally not required to attend first-year progression boards, except in the case of Foundation Degrees.

40 External examiners must submit an annual report by a specified deadline and reminders are sent before this. An electronic report template is available on the University's website. Completed reports are received by the Quality Management Officer and copied to all relevant staff. External examiners are invited to comment on student performance, standards and assessment, the programme specification, teaching, learning and curricula, strengths and weaknesses including areas of good practice, conduct of the boards and any other issues. They are also encouraged to meet with the students and the audit team saw evidence that external examiners avail themselves of this opportunity wherever possible.

41 Subject leaders respond directly to the external examiner noting any action taken on issues raised. The audit team found considerable evidence that such responses were timely and informed. Copies of the response are filed in the Academic Office with the external examiner's report. The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) reads all the reports and identifies University wide issues. This informs a paper which is presented for discussion at the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. This paper highlights generic issues and good practice. The team was informed that this paper is sent to each external examiner. The team considered that this systematic institutional level consideration and overview demonstrated an embedded approach to assuring academic standards. External examiner reports also inform annual subject and school reports. The team was satisfied that the University was responding appropriately and effectively to matters arising from external examiners' reports.

42 External examiners are not required to approve minor modifications but must be consulted on proposed changes, for example, changes to learning outcomes or the method of assessment.

43 The audit team found that the University makes a strong and scrupulous use of independent external examiners in its summative assessment procedures.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

44 The University, through the programme approval process ensures appropriate engagement with subject benchmark statements and the FHEQ. Guidance is provided to staff on the contents of the student handbook which is the main validation handbook. The Academic Office on behalf of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee is responsible for checking adherence with the student handbook guidance as part of the approval process as well as disseminating information on revised subject benchmark statements. The audit team saw a number of student handbooks from a range of subjects and levels which provided evidence that the University has a consistent and effective approach for ensuring engagement with external reference points in assuring standards. The handbooks also demonstrated effective engagement with subject benchmark statements.

45 Programme specifications are included in the student handbook as part of the approval process. The audit team noted that there was guidance for staff on the form and content of programme specifications, they were expected to incorporate the following information: aims; learning outcomes; general intellectual, practical, interpersonal attributes fostered by the programme, and criteria for assessment and relationship with learning outcomes. An example of good practice was available for staff on the University website. In reading a number of programme specifications, the team noted variability in the level of detail and consistency of approach, as acknowledged in the Briefing Paper, and the University may wish to consider the use of a standard template.

46 The University's engagement with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies is considered in Section 3 below. The University acknowledged that it has yet to commence detailed consideration of the European Standards and Guidelines.

47 The audit team found that the University was making effective use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points.

Assessment policies and regulations

48 The University provides comprehensive guidance for students on assessment in the Undergraduate Modular Scheme Handbook: A Guide for Students 2007-2008 and The Taught Postgraduate Framework (Regulations). Both documents set out the assessment framework including criterion referencing, assessment regulations, guidance on plagiarism, academic dishonesty and examination conduct. The audit team found that students were generally aware of these handbooks and used them to support their studies. The team also noted that the information for both undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students could be accessed easily on the website.

49 In its meetings with students, the team heard that feedback was generally both informative and timely and met the requirements laid down in the modular scheme. Staff who met with the team were also well informed about what was required of them.

50 While the University has no overarching assessment strategy, it is currently undertaking a review of the undergraduate modular scheme. As a result, the audit team was informed that one possible outcome is the development of an institution-wide assessment strategy. The team considered that this has the potential to strengthen further the institution's management of academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities. The team formed the

view that in the light of its future strategic intentions, such as planned growth in student numbers, the University should review its current approach to assessment and student workload and therefore recommends that it would be desirable for the University to articulate the its strategy for the operation and development of assessment practice.

51 The University provides comprehensive guidance on the constitution and remit of assessment and examination boards. The audit team read minutes of examination boards and external examiner reports and was satisfied that University requirements were being implemented effectively and consistently. External examiners are provided with a handbook and can also access student learning materials via the virtual learning environment.

52 Overall, the audit team found that the University's assessment policies and regulations contribute effectively to the institutional management of academic standards.

Management information - statistics

53 The Briefing Paper stated that data are provided centrally to inform procedures such as annual reporting, and the audit team was able to access the information technology infrastructure that centrally provides data. Student characteristics and qualifications by subject are available together with the number of applications and awards. Moreover, there are links to the Unistats website and National Student Survey results. The team's review of a sample of annual school reports and annual subject reports revealed a variation in practice of the use made of management information (see paragraph 33 above). Subject annual reports are required to make more use of management information than school reports, but some examples reviewed by the team did not include, for example, an evaluation of student performance, and others questioned the accuracy of centrally produced data. School reports contain a synthesis of the key subject issues with reference to the appropriate management information.

54 At an institutional level, a regular report is made by the Registry to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee and then to the Academic Board of progression and completion data, plus other, quantitative data with analysis and commentary. Investigation of appropriate minutes and papers of meetings revealed that such reports make an assessment of undergraduate student performance between subjects, schools and modules. There is also commentary on the University's standing against Higher Education Statistics Agency data. Similar reports are made for postgraduate taught students. The undergraduate reports are able to identify and monitor the performance of students who had transferred from programmes at collaborative partners. In this case the data gave no cause for concern. These data are used to facilitate further analysis where discrepancies are felt to occur, for example, a comparison of the performance of BA and BSc students. Here, differences in entry qualifications and age were shown to have some bearing on the outcomes of degree classification for the cohort concerned.

55 The Briefing Paper stated that, in its self-evaluation document for the last institutional audit, the University had indicated that one of its objectives was to make better use of management data in quality assurance. The present audit team found that the University produces and analyses a wide variety of data that enables a detailed level of interrogation of its awards. The team concluded that the University's use of statistical information makes a positive contribution to the management of academic standards. In respect of annual subject reports, the depth of analysis is variable and there is potential for further development in this area to secure a more consistent level of analysis.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

Code of practice

56 The Academic Quality and Standards Committee is responsible for providing an oversight of the University's engagement and alignment with external reference points. The Committee ensures that appropriate departments and services undertake a mapping exercise of the *Code of practice*. When sections of the *Code of practice* are revised the appropriate administrative department undertakes a review to ensure that engagement is current and appropriate. The audit team was provided with examples of recent reviews against the *Code of practice*, which demonstrated a high level of engagement. The team found that appropriate measures were in place for disseminating and reviewing its policies and procedures against the *Code of practice*.

Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies

57 The University's teacher training programmes have regular engagements with Ofsted. The audit team noted that responses by the University to Ofsted reports were both detailed and timely, with evidence of changes to management structures and quality assurance procedures as a result. Alignment with other external reference points is undertaken through programme approval and review.

Externality

58 The Briefing Paper placed significant emphasis on the role of external views and engagement with external stakeholders in the University's quality assurance and enhancement processes. The audit team noted this engagement went beyond programme approval and review where externals were expected to be fully engaged in the process. In addition, external members are appointed to a number of key University committees, such as the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, the Academic Board and school boards. Although the University is not prescriptive in respect of the role or level of engagement with external members and stakeholders, minutes of meetings showed active engagement with external members, with their views and support deliberately being sought. The team found the University's use of external members on school boards contributing to the enhancement of the student experience to be a feature of good practice.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

Development and approval of programmes

59 The University's procedures for course planning and approval are clear. Outline plans must be approved by the Vice Chancellor's Group. The process focuses on the outline and detailed planning requirements for a new programme. There is a requirement for the engagement of an external subject specialist to scrutinise the programme as described in the programme specification. Support and guidance is provided by the Academic Office and the Academic Quality and Standards Committee confirms final approval. In addition the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic), head of school and the external subject specialist must sign off the new provision. Where appropriate, the Head of the Modular Scheme, Head of the Graduate School or Head of the School for Development and Participation are involved. Guidance is provided on what needs to be covered in the outline plan. A 12 month lead-in time prior to students enrolling on the programme for the first time is expected. There is also an approval checklist and timeline.

60 Detailed planning involves the production of a draft student handbook containing a programme specification, which must be approved by the external specialist and any other

stakeholders. There is guidance on the contents required in student handbooks. However, as noted above (paragraph 45), the audit team noted that there is some variation in programme specifications' design and content. The student handbook with a briefing paper is considered by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee who may refuse, grant or grant with conditions the proposal. Examples of good practice in producing outline plans and student handbooks are available to University staff on the website. The team audited a number of programme approvals and was satisfied that the approval procedure was robust and embedded at all levels. The engagement with the external expert at the planning and curriculum design stage provided further evidence of the integrity of the process.

61 A minor modification is defined as a modification which 'does not entail any resource implications'. Such modifications are approved by school board and ratified by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. Initial approval must be sought from the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) or his nominee. The audit team found that new modules could be approved as a minor modification. There was evidence that the approval system for minor modifications was being followed. A checklist and template form for minor modifications are available to staff via the virtual learning environment. External examiners must be consulted on minor modifications.

62 The audit team found through its reading of documentation that the procedures for the development and approval of programmes operate as intended by the University. The process is rigorous and contributes effectively to the institutional management of learning opportunities.

Annual monitoring

63 As noted above, the process for annual reporting had recently been modified and the audit team was informed that it was now more of a strategic process. Academic Quality and Standards Committee now only receives school reports and action plans. Subject level reports are informed by external examiner reports and a range of data produced by the Registry and the Academic Office. Subjects are expected to provide a commentary on the data; report on progress in relation to the previous year's action plan; report on any action taken in response to periodic internal review, and analyse student module evaluations. The data form the basis of a strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats analysis and risk assessment.

64 Subject reports and action plans are considered by school boards. The school report synthesises the subject reports and highlights areas for improvement and new opportunities. A subgroup of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee considers each school's report and highlights quality assurance issues and resource implications. The subgroup produces two papers for consideration by the Committee; one on quality assurance and the other on resource implications. The quality assurance paper is discussed at the Committee and the resource paper forwarded for consideration by the Academic Board. The timeline for annual reporting commences in October and is completed in April when the resource paper is considered by the Academic Board.

65 Guidance is provided for producing annual reports, including how to undertake a strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats analysis and risk assessment. However the audit team noted some variability in approach (see above paragraph 33). The team felt that the University should continue to monitor the consistency of approach between subjects and schools so that effective comparisons could be made and issues and good practice could be more easily identified.

66 In reviewing the documentation the audit team was able to confirm that the new process is being followed, although the team was not able to track the new process through to completion as the annual reporting cycle had not yet been completed.

67 In addition to annual monitoring reports, the Deputy Registrar produces an analysis of undergraduate student assessment which is considered by the Academic Quality and Standards

Committee. This evaluates degree classifications; withdrawals; modular scheme awards; the performance of Wessex Partnership students; Foundation Degree performance and progression, and Art and Design awards (non-modular). The Head of the Graduate School produces a similar report for taught postgraduate student assessment which is also considered by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee.

Periodic review

68 The University's approach to periodic review, including the involvement of externals, was noted above in paragraphs 35 to 37. The purpose of the periodic review event is to review and revalidate the provision as well as providing a forum for strategic development. The programme specification is a requisite for engagement with the relevance and currency of curricula and the management and enhancement of the quality of students' learning opportunities. The audit team was satisfied that the University's periodic review process for maintaining the quality of students' learning opportunities was comprehensive.

69 The audit team found the University's arrangements for approval, monitoring and review to be effective, and aligned with the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*. These arrangements make a positive contribution to institutional management of learning opportunities.

Management information - feedback from students

70 The Briefing Paper stated that all programmes and modules are subject to annual student evaluation, formally and informally, in the form of questionnaires and/or staff-student meetings. The audit team heard during its meetings with students and staff that the mechanisms to gather such feedback differ between schools. Module evaluations are required across the institution at all levels including undergraduate, postgraduate and in collaborative provision. Within the modular degree scheme whole programme questionnaires are not routinely undertaken, although this does occur within Art and Design, where programmes have a greater level of module homogeneity than those within the modular degree scheme. Module questionnaires do offer an opportunity for students to comment on their programmes. Additionally, within the Artswork Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning a longitudinal study of student perception is currently being undertaken, the results of which will be reported to the Learning and Teaching Committee. The module evaluations made available to the team were comprehensive in their coverage of questions relating to the student experience of the module.

71 The Briefing Paper further stated that information gathered from module evaluations is processed through subject meetings, staff-student meetings and departmental meetings for incorporation into the annual subject report. The audit team found varying practice in this respect. Some subject annual reports made very little comment regarding the nature of student feedback gleaned from module evaluations, while others provided a detailed comparison and commentary on responses to a common set of questions asked across a wide set of modules.

72 The National Student Survey results are considered by the University at the highest level and in detail by the Learning and Teaching Committee. It was clear from the breadth of the paperwork presented to the Committee that the University takes the outcomes of the National Student Survey very seriously, and one of the items for implementation within the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy makes the definition and utilisation of such data central in identifying key areas for improvement.

73 Results from the National Student Survey are complemented in some areas by specific user surveys. For example, the Library and Open Access Survey 2007 identified areas where satisfaction had improved and where challenges remain. Similarly the results of user surveys are considered by the Learning and Teaching Committee where consideration of the University's standing against other higher education institutions is made.

74 The audit team found that the University was making effective use of student feedback information within its institutional management of learning opportunities. However, the varied use made of module evaluation data at the subject level did not lead to a consistently comprehensive approach. The team considers that it would be desirable for the University to ensure effective and consistent analysis of student data in annual subject reports. The team considered that the detailed use of module evaluation data (such as that found in biology and environmental science) could be extended more widely. Moreover, the opportunities afforded by the impressive longitudinal study within the Artswork project provided the basis for an excellent feedback data set for a large proportion of students within three schools.

Role of students in quality assurance

75 The last institutional audit found extensive student representation at all levels within the institution. The Briefing Paper highlighted the institution's policy that there should be student representation on all relevant committees. This view was reinforced in the team's meeting with the Vice Chancellor who stated that he 'welcomes student involvement at all levels'. The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy recognises the contribution made by students to the quality enhancement at institution and school level.

76 The audit team confirmed that students are represented on all the major committees. The student written submission confirmed that the Students' Union is satisfied with the level of representation and students who met the team endorsed this view. It was, however, noted by the team that there is no student representation on the Academic Quality and Standards Committee Subcommittee for Collaborative Provision. The University may wish to review this.

77 The Briefing Paper highlighted the recent introduction of a Student Representatives Steering Committee, a subcommittee of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, which was approved by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee in December 2007. Student representatives informed the audit team that this Committee provides the opportunity for more generic discussion of institutional issues. In addition, the President of the Students' Union has regular discussions with the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic). This is seen as a two-way process; updating on the work of the Students' Union and informing the President of institutional developments.

78 At school and subject level, students' views are communicated by the student academic representatives who are elected by their peers. In most cases there is at least one student academic representative per level per undergraduate course and both taught postgraduate and research student representatives. A list of student representatives appears on the Students' Union website and students who met the audit team knew who represented them. Furthermore, they were satisfied that their comments and concerns were listened to and that appropriate actions were taken. The student written submission suggested that the success of the student academic representatives system depends not only on the student academic representatives themselves, but also on the support provided by staff.

79 The Students' Union recognises the need to develop further the student academic representatives system, which is considered by students to be highly effective in some disciplines but less developed in others, and at partner institutions. A Student Academic Representatives Coordinator has recently been appointed by the University to oversee this development and the training of student representatives. The audit team welcomed the appointment of the Coordinator, whose role includes promotion and implementation of the student academic representatives system across schools and active support for the development of comparable representation and feedback mechanisms at the partner institutions.

80 A Student Academic Representatives Handbook, available on the Students' Union website, describes the system and the roles and responsibilities, which is supported by induction and training from the Students' Union. While training was available for representatives, the evidence

suggests that take-up levels are lower than might be expected. The University will wish to continue to support its Student Academic Representatives Coordinator in addressing this issue. A staff guide to the student academic representatives system is also provided on the Students' Union website. Student representatives can communicate with each other using an online system, which is closed to staff and students.

81 There is at least one student representative, nominated by the Students' Union, on all school boards. Because schools are permitted to develop their own committee structures below school board level, there are several different models for student representation. Whereas some schools have a dedicated staff-student liaison committee, others incorporate student issues within the school or subject boards. In these cases, the meetings are formal and minutes produced. Students receive feedback from these meetings in a number of ways, including a verbal report by the representative or member of teaching staff, or by minutes being posted on notice boards or the website. Other schools have less formal arrangements where the student representatives meet with staff informally or in focus groups (see paragraph 83 below) to discuss and resolve specific issues. The audit team formed the view that this lack of formality has the potential to make student engagement in quality assurance at subject level less effective.

82 Students are not directly involved in the process of producing the annual reports, although the audit team was told that subject and school annual reports are approved at school boards, in the presence of the student representative(s) who can make appropriate comments. There is, however, indirect representation since modular feedback informs module and subject review, which contributes to the annual report. Alternatively, students do have direct input to periodic review since meetings with students form part of the review process.

83 The audit team learnt that student focus groups are used in some schools to discuss student issues and have proved to be a suitable mechanism for change. In one example provided to the team, students requested that the assessment strategy for a particular module be changed to include an element not previously assessed. This was discussed at a focus group and changes were subsequently made. Students' Union officers who met with the team also confirmed that students have previously been involved in the appointment of new teaching staff.

84 Student representation within the University's collaborative provision is more challenging. The student written submission identified a need for more student representation at partner institutions. The appointment of student representatives is delegated to the partners and the partners' own representation procedures are adopted for collaborative provision. The audit team was unable to verify directly the specific arrangements for student representation at partners, although they did see evidence of student representation on the annual reviews of collaborative provision. Students with experience of collaborative provision confirmed to the team that student representatives were appointed. The Students' Union is aware of the situation and the Student Academic Representatives Coordinator's remit extends to collaborative provision, where some progress has already been made in identifying and contacting the student representatives. The team considers that it would be desirable for the University to make explicit reference to student representation in the memorandum of cooperation with partner institutions and that partner institutions should be represented on the new Student Representatives Steering Committee.

85 The audit team concluded that adequate student representation mechanisms are in place at institutional and school level to ensure that all students have a role to play in quality assurance. However, the team considered that it would be desirable for the University to consider more formal and consistent arrangements to ensure student engagement in quality assurance at subject level.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

86 The Briefing Paper stated that the link between research and scholarly activity and learning opportunities has been central to the way in which the University has defined itself

as a teaching-led university. Such discussion has been widespread across the institution and the Academic Board has on several occasions discussed how the University goes about trying explicitly to link research and scholarly activity and teaching.

87 In meetings and in reviewing staff profiles, it became clear to the audit team that a wide variety of research and scholarly activities were being undertaken. Staff who met with the team reported that in applying for funding for research projects and conference attendance they were required to make explicit reference to how the proposed activity would benefit teaching. Staff viewed this requirement positively, and senior staff indicated that their decision to support such activities required an explicit link between the research activity and teaching and learning opportunities to be made.

88 The Research, Consultancy and Scholarship Committee advises on issues of research strategy and is accountable to the Academic Board for such matters. In their review of the papers and minutes of the Committee, it was clear to the audit team that a wide interpretation of research and scholarship was apparent. A common theme throughout these papers was the requirement for research and scholarship activities to underpin teaching and the curricula. The Committee undertakes an annual audit of research and scholarly activity occurring within each school, and schools are required to explicitly relate such activities to teaching provision.

89 The audit team found that research and scholarly activity were directly linked to the enhancement of students' learning opportunities and contributed positively to the management of the quality of learning opportunities.

Other modes of study

90 The University currently has no programmes delivered wholly or mainly by flexible and distributed learning. The University-wide virtual learning environment provides a supplement to the student learning environment, but no modules are wholly reliant on it for assessment purposes.

Resources for learning

91 The Vice-Chancellor is responsible for resource matters and seeks advice from resource managers who have delegated responsibility for specific areas. A baseline level of resources for year-on-year budgeting has been created on historical practice. This baseline is then modified in the light of various factors, such as student numbers. Resource requirements for new programmes are identified and signed-off prior to the approval stage. New developments may attract additional funding, such as the improvements to teaching spaces undertaken via additional funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

92 The Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Artswork, has also led to improvements in resources for learning. The University's six Artswork learning laboratories and the upgrading and adaptation of existing buildings was undertaken via the capital funding afforded by the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. In addition, this funding source also enabled the provision of new equipment to support learning.

93 Funding for the library and information technology is, in part, determined by historical need, but is influenced by such factors as changes in technology, the development of the curricula and student numbers. In addition to user surveys, the allocations of resources are also influenced by external benchmarks. A recent example was the comparison of the University's library funding compared against other higher education institutions. This evaluation identified where the spending on students at the University compared with other similar institutions and the Briefing Paper reported that this comparison led to an increase in the library budget in 2007-08.

94 The resource implications that result from annual monitoring are discussed by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, which then makes an annual report to the

Academic Board identifying priorities. The most recent report available to the audit team identified that the main theme running through the annual reports was the shortage of space 'mentioned in nearly every report'. The student written submission identified, and students who met with the team, confirmed this theme. It was clear that staff were aware of such shortcomings but felt that there remained scope for the more efficient allocation of teaching spaces. Moreover, the student written submission acknowledged improvements in the quality of learning resources which led to an increased level of satisfaction. Such findings accord with the Library and Information Services user survey. Postgraduate research students reported satisfaction with their accommodation and facilities.

95 Minutes of the Learning and Teaching Committee and Academic Quality and Standards Committee, together with the appointment of, for example, virtual learning environment champions illustrate the establishment and growing importance of the University's virtual learning environment. The student written submission reports general satisfaction with the virtual learning environment and notes how it has improved. The extent to which students at the University's collaborative partners had seen an improvement was less clear. The student written submission suggested difficulties for collaborative provision students in accessing online learning resources.

96 The audit team concluded that the University's approach to the oversight and development of its learning resources made a positive contribution to the institutional management of learning opportunities for students. Shortcomings in provision were acknowledged and evidence suggested that both currently, and in the recent past, the University was actively seeking ways to overcome space difficulties.

Admissions policy

97 The University has a clear and documented institutional undergraduate admissions policy, which sets out its approach to matters such as equal opportunities, disability and access for students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, as well as standard entry requirements for each undergraduate degree course. Entry requirements are set out clearly in the undergraduate prospectus. All undergraduate admissions, including admissions to courses delivered at the partner colleges, are handled centrally by Registry. The University has well-defined admissions procedures and consistency of decision-making is ensured through close working across admissions staff and through staff training.

98 Admissions to modular scheme programmes to which the basic entry requirements alone apply are dealt with entirely by the Registry. For undergraduate programmes where further selection criteria are applied, typically in the Performing Arts and Art and Design, there is an initial consideration by the Registry against the basic entry requirements, followed by interviews and/or auditions conducted by academic staff at school level. The operation of the relevant processes is monitored by the Registry. Applications from candidates who do not meet the basic entry criteria are referred for consideration up the hierarchy of decision-making in the Registry and, if necessary to heads of schools. The Registry also deals with admission to postgraduate taught programmes, to which clearly specified standard entry requirements apply. Admission to postgraduate research degree programmes is covered in paragraphs 156 to 160 below.

99 From its review of the evidence available, the audit team concluded that the University's admissions policies and procedures are clear, explicit and implemented consistently.

Student support

100 The last institutional audit considered the level and quality of support for students to be a feature of good practice, although recommended that it was desirable to clarify the responsibilities of the personal tutors. The Briefing Paper reported that 'student support is closely integrated with academic support'. At institutional level, the management of student support is through the Head of Student Support Services, who attends the Learning and Teaching Committee and is also a member of the Senior Management Team. The audit team noted that

one of the key themes of the current strategic plan is 'a continued high level of student support' and an intention 'to increase the level of support services for disadvantaged and disabled students, thereby widening participation'. This theme is also reflected in the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy.

101 As a result of the last institutional audit, and with a view to improving the student retention rate through a more formalised approach, a new personal tutor system, which incorporates personal development planning, was approved by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee in May 2004 and implemented for the 2004-05 academic year. The audit team found that, under the new scheme, students meet their personal tutors during induction week and are then offered two to three, one-to-one tutorial sessions per year throughout their course, with discussions on personal development planning being a feature of each session. A personal and academic record provides the platform for personal development planning and each school has been required to appoint a coordinator to oversee the design and production of the personal and academic record folders within their school.

102 The audit team heard from staff that the personal tutoring system is still somewhat reactive and consequently the take-up is disappointing with a similar effect being observed for personal and academic records. This was confirmed by the students who met the team. The student written submission also raised concerns with respect to the time available for personal and academic tutorial support in the final year where it was reported that some students felt that a reduction in formal contact hours has not been compensated for by additional support. Other students, however, were happy with the current format and contact time in their programmes. Although the students who met the team were aware of the personal tutorial arrangements, they tended to get support and guidance directly from the course tutors, rather than their personal tutors. The team was told that there is a widespread view amongst students that the staff are very approachable and that issues can very often be resolved by informal contact with the member of staff concerned. In an attempt to encourage more extensive use of the personal and academic records, an electronic version has been introduced for the current year with the aim of 'providing more compelling, integrative and meaningful materials in support of personal development'.

103 Although there is no central requirement or mechanism to monitor the quality of the support services, subject annual reporting and a range of surveys are used to inform management reviews of student support. The Vice Chancellor's Group has discussed the implementation of a periodic service review to provide a more formal approach.

104 The University produces a range of prospectuses, guides for prospective and new students, institutional, modular and subject handbooks. The student written submission reported that all of these documents are informative, easy to use and accurate sources of reference, although there is an issue with the accuracy of the 'employability' information (see paragraph 109).

105 The undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses are comprehensive and describe the institutional level support provided, including welfare, money matters, counselling, support for disabled students, medical facilities, faith, nursery, Students' Union facilities and activities, entry requirements and how to apply. Specific information for international and mature students is also provided.

106 Students who met the audit team were satisfied with the quality and comprehensiveness of the institutional and subject-level handbooks. The subject handbooks were considered to be particularly useful references and provided all the necessary detail on assessment, progression, and other matters.

107 In addition to providing individual and course-related information, timetables and modular results for individual students, the online student portal also contains a wealth of information on student support services, financial matters, health and welfare, useful contacts, and has links to the careers and other support services and the modular handbook. A pre-course

questionnaire and a 2008 'job shop' student satisfaction survey can both be accessed from the portal. A selection of 'frequently asked questions' is particularly useful. The views of the students, expressed in meetings and in the student written submission, are complimentary about the student website in general, and the audit team concurred with this view. Around 85 per cent of new students found it to be a 'straightforward, easy to use point of reference'.

108 Support for international students is provided by the International Activities Office, with a dedicated website and separate brochure, which includes additional information and advice on living and studying in the United Kingdom. English language support is also available. The student written submission suggested that more support could be provided to international students to ensure that they understood what is expected of them, particularly in relation to marking criteria. The international students who met the audit team were satisfied with the support being provided by the International Activities Office. The Briefing Paper clearly stated that arrangements for disabled students are mapped against the *Code of practice, Section 3: Students with disabilities*. The institution's policy for disability and equality is comprehensive and the team found the information on the website to be extensive. The student written submission did not refer directly to students with disabilities other than the view that 'support is of a satisfactory standard across all provision'. Specific support for postgraduate research students is discussed below.

109 Although the Briefing Paper considered the careers advice and guidance to be 'sound', a recurring concern within the student written submission is that of employability, the support provided by the careers service and the accuracy of the published information on careers opportunities. The student written submission indicated that a national newspaper's University Guide had recently suggested that students graduating from Bath Spa University had poor graduate employment prospects. The audit team was told that the University is aware of this concern and is developing an employability strategy and has focused on addressing this issue by including employability as one of the performance indicators within the current strategic plan. Furthermore, the current Learning and Teaching Strategy and Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy refer to employability being embedded within the curricula. As part of the enhancement strategy, 'employability champions' have been appointed within schools. The team was informed that these existing members of staff have been identified as part of the appraisal process, based on their interest and expertise. The operating plan defines the role of the employability champion 'to promote and disseminate good practice' and one of 'embedding employability within the curriculum'. Students who met with the team were aware of these initiatives and did not consider employability to be an issue.

110 The student written submission also expressed concern about the compulsory professional and academic development module, which students found to be too generic and not particularly relevant to their own disciplines. The audit team learnt from meetings with students that the most useful element of the module was the work experience aspect, but the workshops and lectures were considered to be less helpful. Staff reported that, in response to student feedback, the professional and academic development module was being revised and that subject-based professional and academic development modules would be introduced for the 2008-09 academic year.

111 The audit team was also made aware of a number of initiatives that have been introduced to support the students' learning process. For example, the Students' Union has produced a Guide to Study in response to an external examiner's comments on the poor standard of some written assignments. Also, the University's study-skills centre was launched at the start of the current academic year to assist students who request additional study support.

112 The audit team concluded that the level and quality of support for all students was appropriate as were the steps being taken to address the employability issues and the generic nature of the current professional and academic development module.

Staff support (including staff development)

113 The University's human resource policies and procedures are clearly described and communicated to staff via the Human Resources website. The website contains a variety of information including staff contracts and conditions of service, pension schemes and related policies and procedures. The web-based materials are comprehensive in their coverage and guide staff to relevant postholders for further support. The Equal Opportunities Policy is also clearly expressed within the Human Resource website.

114 Policy on staff development is set and monitored by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee and the Learning and Teaching and Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategies highlight the importance of targeted staff development. In addition, a Staff Development Policy is made available to staff on the website. The Policy sets out how staff development is made operational via the Vice Chancellor's Group, Academic Board (and relevant committees), and also identifies the responsibilities of schools and departments.

115 Central provision for staff development is organised by several agencies within the University. The School for Development and Participation organises a variety of events and provides the in-house qualification for new and inexperienced teachers (a requirement for such staff). The Graduate School provides an annual programme of support for supervisors of research students, which is monitored by the Higher Degrees (Research) Committee. The Library and Information Services supports a technician dedicated to staff support in information and communications technology use, who runs training sessions for staff and provides self-help guides via the website. The School for Development and Participation additionally runs events for partner college staff who teach on the University's awards, and ensures that the University's own staff development activities are made available to partner staff.

116 In addition to these centrally provided development activities, schools and departments organise events for staff related to their own specific strategies, which must be congruent with the staff development strategy for the University. Many of these are related to improvement projects initiated by the Learning and Teaching Committee. All staff are required to undertake an annual appraisal with their line manager, where development needs are central to the discussion. The Human Resources website provides detailed materials for appraiser and appraisee, and training for both parties is available to ensure maximum benefit from the exercise. Staff confirmed their satisfaction with the appraisal process and cited examples of development needs being identified and provided as an outcome of the process.

117 Since 2002, the Learning and Teaching Committee has required all schools to have in place a scheme for the observation of teaching and the Academic Office via the website sets out the principles and procedures of the scheme and provides online forms. In meetings with staff there was confirmation of the scheme and an expression of satisfaction with the process and its outcomes.

118 The audit team found that the University's approach to staff support and development made a positive contribution to the management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

119 The audit team concluded that the University's approach adopted for the management of the quality of learning opportunities provides a sound basis for enhancement. Specifically, the oversight by the Learning and Teaching Committee made a significant contribution. The Learning and Teaching Committee developed a Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy for 2006-2009, which provided a clear expression of the direction of the many enhancement activities planned and in place. The team found support for the claim made in the Briefing Paper that the University was committed to systematic improvement.

120 The Enhancement Strategy is congruent with the Strategic Plan, the Learning and Teaching Strategy and other strategic plans at institutional, school and department levels. The main aims of the Strategy are to develop, maintain and enhance the programmes of study that continue to meet students' needs; to ensure that the quality of the student experience is monitored and enhanced through reflective practice; to encourage the development of innovation in learning and teaching practices; and to encourage the dissemination of good practice in learning and teaching across the University and the sector. These four aims are then expressed in 27 items for implementation identifying lead persons and timescales for reporting. The reporting mechanisms vary, but the progress of the strategy is regularly reviewed by the Learning and Teaching Committee.

Management information - quality enhancement

121 External examiner reports are central to the standard set of management information used by subject teams in drawing up annual reports. In reviewing external examiner reports through annual reporting it was clear that issues requiring action are pursued through the cycle of annual monitoring, and examiners are informed of actions to be taken as a result of their reports. In the samples of documents reviewed there were few items raised that could be used systematically to improve the quality of learning opportunities, rather, reports are predominantly designed to provide assurance of the confirmation of standards.

122 Within the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy implementation, several of the 27 items that highlight the systematic use of management information occur. For instance, detailed analysis is carried out at institutional level, and in schools, of the views of graduates as expressed in the National Student Survey. The minutes of the Learning and Teaching Committee show comprehensive evaluation of the outcomes, which has led to specific actions, such as the development of policies related to the employability agenda.

Good practice

123 The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy identifies the dissemination of good practice as an aim and requires that the Learning and Teaching Committee maintain an overview. A specific example of this is the development of the virtual learning environment. The Learning and Teaching Strategy identified the need for the development of a University virtual learning environment to promote independent learning. The Learning and Teaching Committee established a working group of virtual learning environment 'champions' to manage the operation of the system with Information Services, but with an additional remit to disseminate good practice across the institution. The coordination of this type of good practice dissemination is now the responsibility of the Academic Staff Development Coordinator and regular reports are made to the Learning and Teaching Committee.

124 The University's Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Artsworld, has become central to the University's approach to enhancement in several ways. An Artsworld project is to develop models of employability that can be disseminated and embedded within other curricula across the institution. Another example is a further Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning project, 'Learning in the Arts: Student Questionnaire'. This four-year longitudinal study aims to track student progress from entry to the University through to their early career. It focuses on students' perceptions of their abilities with the aim of exploring how Artsworld related activities can enhance learning and how teaching and learning can be continuously enhanced. The first report of this project (May 2007) shows an analysis of students' career aspirations on entry and provides opportunities for comparison by student type. The audit team concluded that projects such as this demonstrate how the University has developed an ethos to encourage the enhancement of learning opportunities. Moreover, the monitoring of such activities by the Learning and Teaching Committee provides the opportunity for the identification and dissemination of good practice. The team found that the way in which the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning has been incorporated into the institution's strategies to enhance learning opportunities is a feature of good practice.

125 The audit team concluded that the University has developed systematic mechanisms for the identification and dissemination of good practice.

Staff development and reward

126 The Learning and Teaching Strategy identifies the importance of supporting professional standards in the teaching of students. Alongside the new teacher qualification and staff development activities is the means to recognise and reward teaching excellence via the University's teaching fellowship scheme. Papers of the Learning and Teaching Committee show the development of criteria for the scheme resulting in a clear set of procedures for staff to seek recognition for their efforts. Successful staff receive the title of 'Teaching Fellow' and £1,500. The scheme extends to learning support staff and staff leading learning and teaching in Artwork. The audit team met staff who had benefited from successful applications, who reported satisfaction with the process stating how the scheme had rewarded earlier efforts and encouraged further enhancements. They also stated how more senior staff, such as the institution's National Teaching Fellows, provided support and encouragement to their colleagues wishing to enhance their professional standards.

127 A similar scheme operates for staff wishing to apply for a 'Promising Researcher Fellowship'. The Research, Consultancy and Scholarship Committee developed a set of criteria to recognise and reward staff research efforts. Applications are open to staff with up to six years experience of teaching in higher education, and successful staff receive significant teaching relief for one year to enable the achievement of agreed outcomes of the individual's research activities. Such outcomes must be compatible with institutional policy, demonstrating how the research is able to enhance the curricula and student experience.

128 The audit team concluded that the University had developed suitable mechanisms to recognise and reward good practice in relation to teaching and learning, and that its fellowship schemes encouraged the enhancement of learning opportunities.

129 The audit team found that the University's institutional approach to quality enhancement was informed by clear strategic direction and was leading to systematic improvements in learning opportunities.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

130 The framework for the management of academic standards and learning opportunities in collaborative provision has been noted in paragraph 25 above. The last audit identified as good practice the 'secure and collegial framework for managing CP' and reported that the mechanisms for assuring quality and standards are 'of the same kind as those for home campus programmes, but more extensive'. Since then there has been some growth in the collaborative provision. The development of University Centres at the partner institutions, the first one being at Weston College in 2007, as part of the overall strategy for 'greater collaboration with regional and local further education colleges, higher education institutions and others', is one of the key themes in the current strategic plan. The Briefing Paper also suggested that the University 'is well placed to offer some autonomy to further education colleges' although such developments are at an early stage of consideration.

131 The audit team learned of the University's intention for planned growth via collaboration with private providers. However, senior staff recognised that current approval procedures would require development, for example different legal and financial checks would be necessary.

132 The School for Development and Participation is responsible for ensuring that the University's collaborative arrangements are managed and executed appropriately with due reference to the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. The audit team found clear evidence that this was being undertaken and that the Academic Quality and Standards Committee was kept fully informed.

Approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision

133 The audit team examined the Wessex Partnership Policy and Guidelines (2008) and found that it defines a standard validation check list, in the form of a set of focused questions to be asked during a centre validation, covering staffing and resources, assessment and external examiners, link tutors and training, the monitoring and oversight of quality assurance and the monitoring of work-based learning to ensure the appropriateness of the provision. The validation panel includes staff from the supporting school and Library and Information Services.

134 Formal approval of new partnerships and programmes is given by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. A memorandum of cooperation, based on the *Code of practice, Section 2* defines the agreement between the University and the partner institution including academic, management and review arrangements. Financial arrangements are covered in a separate Financial Memorandum. Having examined the template for a memorandum of cooperation, the audit team found it to be fit for purpose in most respects but considered that it would be desirable for the University to make explicit reference to student representation in the memorandum of cooperation with partner institutions (see above paragraph 84).

135 The process of annual monitoring is also defined in the Wessex Partnership Policy and Guidelines (2008). For the first three years of a new programme, a review panel, which includes staff from the home school and partner institutions, student representatives and chaired by the Head of the School for Development and Participation, assesses the programme using a set of standard questions covering academic quality and standards and the maintenance and enhancement of the provision. A detailed report is submitted to the Subcommittee for Collaborative Provision for approval and the outcome is reported to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. An action plan is then prepared by partner and University staff for approval by the Subcommittee. After three years, a modified approach is used where the partner produces a self-evaluation document, which is based on the same series of questions described above. This document then forms the basis for the panel visit. The audit team confirmed that this process was being undertaken diligently and concluded that the annual review process was robust.

136 Every three years, the annual review is extended to include a review of the partnership itself. In addition to the process for annual review described above, the triennial review requires a number of additional strategic issues to be addressed including the relationship between the programme and the partner's mission and strategic plan; a review of the memorandum of cooperation; evidence of the continuing focus on quality assurance and the maintenance of standards; and the partner's continuing commitment to the partnership. The audit team was informed that the successful outcome of this review is the renewal of the contract.

137 Six-yearly periodic review is subject-based and is part of the review of the home school. The audit team was told that periodic review is informed by the triennial review of the partner. Reference to collaborative provision is made in the self-evaluation document for the home school, although the team found that the level of detail in one case was minimal. Nevertheless, the team found that the additional triennial reviews provided a more stringent approach to programme monitoring and review at partner institutions. The team was informed that programme closures had taken place, for example, after review. In one case, an executive decision had been made based on a number of factors including falling recruitment. In these cases, an appropriate exit strategy was prepared and implemented.

138 The audit team found the University's arrangements for the approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision to be effective. The robust review mechanisms for collaborative provision are a feature of good practice.

External examining and assessment

139 Awards, assessment procedures and regulations for collaborative provision are identical to those at the University. The audit team learnt that, for programmes delivered both at the partner

and University, the same external examiners are used and they review student work from both sites without knowing the location of the students. Unlike the University, first-year work is also reviewed by the external examiner. The team was informed that this additional quality assurance measure continues until the University is confident with the assessment procedures. In the case where only the partner offers a programme, a 'discrete' external examiner is appointed, having been nominated by the link school at the University.

Role of students in quality assurance

140 A description and evaluation of the extent of student representation at partner institutions is provided in paragraph 84 above. The audit team learnt that the main source of student feedback is from the module questionnaires and, when modules are common to the partner and the University, the same questionnaire is used and the findings inform the annual reviews at both institutions. In addition, the partner may have its own institutional level questionnaire but this does not inform the University's management of collaborative provision. There is no formal requirement for a staff-student liaison committee in the memorandum of cooperation and the partner can make its own arrangements for student representation.

141 Annual review monitors the formal structures for enabling students to express their views on the programme and the quality of their learning experience. Opportunities for students to give their views appeared to be available, including direct informal contact with the tutors. In addition, the team heard from students that the University's link tutor had sat in on lectures and asked for their feedback at the end of the lecture. Senior staff who met with the audit team reinforced the effective use of gathering informal feedback and suggested that such mechanisms can operate successfully when provision at the partner institution is small.

Learning resources, staff support and development

142 The Briefing Paper was clear that the responsibility for, and quality of, the learning resources is delegated to the partners. The audit team was informed that the link tutor plays an important role in managing the provision, including regular reviews of the resources and help with staff development. The team was also told that the University had provided funding for learning resources at a partner institution. Annual review considers the available resources.

143 In addition to the approval of teaching staff as part of the validation process, the audit team learnt that the curricula vitae for new staff have to be approved by the Subcommittee for Collaborative Provision on the recommendation of the head of the relevant school before they can teach on any collaborative provision programmes.

144 The audit team found the staff handbook for collaborative provision on the Wessex Partnership website to be comprehensive and valuable in that it contains information on all aspects of collaborative provision. This includes administration, legal and operational matters, access to the University's website, staff development activities, quality assurance and reviews, features of good practice, arrangements for visits by link tutors and useful contacts.

145 The staff handbook for collaborative provision refers to two one-day staff development workshops being organised per year by the School for Development and Participation. The aim of these workshops 'is to provide opportunities for BSU staff to work together with colleagues from our partner FE Colleges in the Wessex Partnership on key aspects of collaborative provision and in subject-specific areas'. These are referred to as Wessex Staff Development Days and the audit team found reference to a forthcoming session on the home page of the website. The team was told that the link tutors encourage and monitor attendance. The Briefing Paper indicated that some staff are involved in postgraduate study (taught master's and research) and this was confirmed by senior staff. A discount has been agreed to encourage partner staff to register for higher degrees.

Student support and information

146 The student handbook for collaborative provision on the Wessex Partnership website provides extensive information for students. The website provides a comprehensive range of information including a guide to using the University computing facilities and links to the University Students' Union, virtual learning environment, the student portal and the careers service. The audit team was told by students that they are kept informed of any changes to modules or the programme by email or directly by the tutor during lectures.

147 The audit team found that students in collaborative provision have access to the support and services provided by the University, although take-up appeared to be minimal. Nevertheless, students appeared to be satisfied with the support being provided by the partner institution.

148 The audit team was provided with details of the Wessex Summer School, organised by the School for Development and Participation, which is designed to help students with the transition from the partner institutions to the University by introducing them to the campus and the support facilities available. The course covers student services, library and information technology facilities and a guide to the Newton Park campus. One issue identified by the Students' Union was that students transferring from partner institutions were not familiar with the virtual learning environment and this had caused problems during the early stages of their studies at the University.

149 The audit team's view of the accuracy and completeness of the information available to collaborative provision students is considered in paragraph 177 below.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

150 The University offers programmes of supervised study leading to research degrees of the University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE) under a validation agreement dating back to 1993. The arrangement accords Bath Spa University the responsibilities of a UWE Faculty, with delegated powers for admissions, registration and management of procedures relating to research degree programmes. Bath Spa University's processes are congruent with the regulations, ordinances and procedures governing research degrees at UWE.

151 Responsibility for the quality of postgraduate research degree programmes rests with Academic Board. Higher Degrees (Research) Committee maintains oversight of the processes, receiving notification of progression reports and approving all registrations, changes to mode of study and arrangements for progression assessment, as well as requests for extensions, suspension and termination of study. Higher Degrees (Research) Committee is chaired by the Head of Graduate School and its membership includes higher degree tutors from the seven schools, two representatives from UWE, and a third external from another university. The link with UWE is further facilitated through the Head of Graduate School's membership of UWE's Graduate Studies Committee, which is responsible for overall quality assurance and standards at both institutions. Higher Degrees (Research) Committee is charged with the adoption of UWE's policy, agreed through the Graduate Studies Committee, and reports annually to the Graduate Studies Committee as well as to Bath Spa University's Academic Board.

The research environment

152 The last institutional audit raised slight concern that the very small numbers of postgraduate research students in some subject areas could lead to intellectual isolation, although at the time students stated that they were well integrated and given opportunities and funding to attend external conferences and similar events. Although the overall number of postgraduate research students has increased since 2003, the numbers in some subject areas remain small. Despite this, students who met the present audit team appeared to feel part of a university

research community, in particular through the activities of the Graduate School and through school-based workshop and seminar programmes. Students also spoke of their engagement with the wider subject research community through attendance at events and conferences at the University of the West of England, Bristol and elsewhere. The team noted that, in addition to a programme of research-skills workshops, the Graduate School hosts a seminar series comprising presentations by postgraduate research students.

153 The University acknowledged that it does not have the in-house library facilities of a research-intensive university, though it referred to its long-established specialist Art and Design library, and to its ability to enhance its provision through electronic resources. The audit team heard from students that the University had purchased specialist texts that had been identified as essential to their work. There is additional provision through the SCONUL (Society of College, National and University Libraries) Research Extra Scheme, which gives students access to other university libraries. As to the provision of other kinds of research facilities, students spoke positively about these and about the outcomes of their pre-application dialogue with schools, for instance the provision of specialist laboratory facilities, equipment and appropriate studio space for creative art work. The Sophia Centre, where the administrative hub of the Graduate School is located, incorporates computing, printing and photocopying facilities as well as meeting and social spaces for students. It also provides a central venue for the Graduate School skills workshops and seminar series. It was evident that students used and valued the Sophia Centre, which provides sufficient resources, given current student numbers, and helps promote a sense of a community. Students seemed very satisfied with the facilities provided.

154 Pastoral support for postgraduate research students operates through directors of study and other supervisors, or directly through school higher degrees tutors, heads of school or the Head of Graduate School. Students indicated that the arrangements were effective and fit for purpose.

155 Some postgraduate research students undertake teaching. Where PhD students are contracted for regular teaching duties, they are treated like any other hourly paid lecturer, with the full requirement of induction, mentoring, probation, and so on. Some students teach occasional seminars, and for the latter, there did not appear to be any institutional requirement for support or training for this work. If the number of postgraduate research students grows, the University may wish to consider how it can continue to ensure appropriate support in this area.

Selection, admission and induction of students

156 There is a two-stage process for full admission to postgraduate research degree study, managed by the Graduate School. Successful applicants are first enrolled as advanced postgraduate students and subsequently, after a period of three months (full-time students) or six months (part-time students), students apply to register for a research degree.

157 At the pre-enrolment stage, discussions take place between the applicant and the school to ensure that the proposed area of research aligns with school expertise and that the necessary resources can be provided, including an appropriate supervisory team and adequate equipment and other physical resources. Following checks on qualifications and references by the Graduate School, academic schools select by interview before a panel. Candidates are supported in their preparation for interview by a guidance note for interviewees.

158 Successful applicants receive an induction pack including the 'Welcome to Research Degree Study at BSU' Handbook, which sets out very helpful and comprehensive information on practical, procedural, regulatory and other matters. Induction, which is undertaken both by the Graduate School and the relevant academic school, includes supporting seminars, meetings with the Head of Graduate School and the relevant library tutor and local induction by supervisors. Students who met with the audit team expressed satisfaction with the induction support they had received.

159 The registration stage entails the submission of a formal research proposal. Higher Degrees (Research) Committee considers the viability of the research project and the appropriateness of the supervisory team. Full registration is conditional on Higher Degrees (Research) Committee's approval. The Graduate School's guidance notes to students on application to register for a research degree provide useful information to students at registration stage.

160 The audit team found admission and induction processes to be appropriate and satisfactory.

Supervision

161 Supervisory teams comprise two or three members, including a director of studies and in some cases a supervisor external to the University, one of whom must have experience of supervision to completion at the appropriate academic level. Supervisors are supported in their role by the Research Degree Handbook and the Graduate School's Research Degree Supervisor Handbook, which provides extensive information and guidance on supervision management, processes and problem solving. The audit team noted that, as this documentation was available online, it was easily accessible by supervisors external to the University, as well as by internal teams.

162 The University has formalised research supervisor training through the introduction of a Postgraduate Certificate in Research Supervision and Management. The programme is delivered by the Graduate School and is open to all staff who undertake or intend to undertake research degree supervision. The first module, on research degree supervision, is compulsory for all 'new' supervisors who have not already had equivalent skills training. At the time of the audit 12 members of staff were taking the module. The University stipulates that supervisor workload must not exceed the supervision of six students at any one time. This is monitored by the Graduate School for the purposes of Higher Degrees (Research) Committee's approval of supervisory teams at the application to register stage.

163 Students who met with the audit team were highly complimentary about the extent and quality of their supervision, including supervision external to the University, and spoke of the helpfulness and accessibility of their supervisory teams.

Progress and review arrangements

164 Higher Degrees (Research) Committee submits an annual report, prepared by the Head of Graduate School, to the Academic Board and the University of the West of England Graduate Studies Committee. For 2006-07, Bath Spa University followed through the commitment it made in its response to the QAA Special review of research degree programmes regarding the provision of more data in annual reporting, addressing the matters under precept 4 of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*. The audit team noted that the 2006-07 report incorporated a wide range of data. Separately from the Graduate School report, each academic school presents an annual report and plan on research degree provision direct to Higher Degrees (Research) Committee, using a template provided by the Graduate School. Additionally, both students and supervisors are required independently to report progress on an annual basis and the school higher degrees tutor is responsible for providing an overview of the outcomes for the academic school and for the Higher Degrees (Research) Committee.

165 The University provides guidance to students and supervisors on the importance of keeping appropriate records of meetings and other activities. The student induction pack includes a research log, in which students are encouraged to record the outcomes of supervisory meetings, agreed targets and development needs. The log is supplemented by an electronic log for the recording of workshop and conference activities. The audit team heard from students that they did not consider the research log, as currently constituted, to be particularly helpful, although some students indicated that they found it to be a useful tool in that it provided a basic template capable of adaptation to their individual needs. The University has recognised that the

research log's current format has not proved effective and is considering a web-based system for recording supervisory meetings and providing a professional development planning platform for research students. The University will wish to continue to press ahead with this project.

Development of research and other skills

166 Postgraduate research students are required to complete a credit-rated element of their programme known as the '60-credit requirement', which is based on the research skills and development needs of each individual student, identified during initial supervisory meetings. This may entail, for instance, the completion of specific skills modules, attendance at workshops or the preparation of a paper for a supervisory meeting. The audit team noted, in particular, the Postgraduate Certificate in Applied Research Skills offered by the School of Science and the Environment, which satisfies the 60-credit requirement. Total or partial exemption from the 60-credit requirement is available through the accreditation of prior learning. Registration on a research degree programme is conditional upon the Higher Degrees (Research) Committee's approval, at the application to register stage, of the proposed 60-credit content and any proposed exemption. Students met by the team, some of whom had been totally or partially exempted from the requirement, described their individual experiences of the process, which appeared to operate effectively.

167 The University stated that all schools provide research seminars or the equivalent for postgraduate research students. School annual reports to the Higher Degrees (Research) Committee seen by the audit team recorded a range of seminar and workshop activity within schools, covering both subject and skills-based content and incorporating presentations by speakers external to the University, and also by students. It was clear that students engaged with these local events and attended seminars offered by the Graduate School and by the University of the West of England, Bristol.

Feedback mechanisms

168 Opportunity for formal feedback from postgraduate students is offered through representation on committees at local and institutional levels. The audit team heard that the student representative role on the Higher Degrees (Research) Committee was supported by the Head of Graduate School through thorough induction and continuing guidance. Student representation at local level appeared to be functioning satisfactorily and students confirmed that action was taken as a result of their feedback. The team also noted that student feedback from annual reporting seemed to be appropriately addressed. Informal feedback from postgraduate students is gathered through contact with supervisors, the school higher degrees tutor, the Head of School and the Head of Graduate School.

169 There did not appear to have been any recent general survey of postgraduate students' views of their experience other than through module evaluation by master's students. The Graduate School does gather feedback from completing students by means of an exit questionnaire, and has reported that from March 2008 it will be coordinating a student satisfaction survey as part of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey run by the Higher Education Academy.

Assessment

170 Postgraduate students undertaking both master's and doctoral degrees are required to complete a progression assessment, which takes place between nine and 28 months following formal registration, depending on the level and mode of study. This comprises two parts, a research paper and a viva, and is examined by a panel including the director of studies, an academic from the school not engaged in the supervision and the Head of Graduate School or nominee. The outcome of each progression assessment is reported to the Higher Degrees (Research) Committee and the University of the West of England, Bristol. The Graduate School

offers a workshop for students on the preparation of the progression assessment and provides full information for students and supervisors. This highlights the importance of the assessment in helping students to take their work forward by determining its precise future focus and direction. Students confirmed that the progression assessment is both rigorous and useful.

171 Examiners for the final assessment are formally proposed by the director of studies to the Higher Degrees (Research) Committee. Examiners and final assessment arrangements must be approved both by the Higher Degrees (Research) Committee and the University of the West of England. The examination panel has an independent Chair appointed from a list of trained academics from across the seven schools and normally comprises, in addition, one internal and one external member. A further external examiner is appointed if the candidate is a member of staff of more than 12 months standing. The examination process is managed by the University of the West of England, Bristol.

172 The audit team considered the assessment arrangements to be appropriate and satisfactory.

Representations, complaints and appeals arrangements

173 Should problems arise, students are encouraged first to seek advice from either their director of studies, school higher degrees tutor or head of school, as appropriate. The Research Degree Handbook indicated how details of the formal complaints procedure can be obtained on-line and in hard copy and sets out in full the Appeals Procedure and the University of the West of England, Bristol's process for review of a decision of the examiners.

174 The audit team formed the view that the arrangements for postgraduate research students were appropriate and satisfactory and met the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*. The team considered the quality of information provided by the Graduate School for postgraduate research students and supervisors to be a feature of good practice.

Section 7: Published information

175 The Briefing Paper stated that 'a systematic drafting and approval process for printed and electronic published information ensures that information is accurate and complete'. Information produced by collaborative partners is also required to be approved by the University, as specified in the memorandum of co-operation. Specified individuals, such as course leaders, provide information on courses to the marketing department. The Head of Marketing and Communications and the Deputy Vice Chancellor (in the case of the main prospectus and website) are responsible for approval.

176 The audit team had access to a wide range of information published by the University. This included prospectuses, module handbooks, programme handbooks and student handbooks. The team was provided with staff and student access to the University's website and intranet, where a large body of University publications and regulations are available. In many cases, for staff, the Academic Office A-Z Guide on the website provides guidelines and examples for the preparation of published information. Templates and exemplars are made available, such as for student handbooks. While all module handbooks met minimum guidelines, the depth and detail in some handbooks far exceeded other examples. The University's entry on the Unistats website was accurate and detailed. The team concluded that the published information is largely accurate and comprehensive.

177 In the case of collaborative partners, the information reviewed for internal documents was of a similar standard to those found within the University. Investigation of partner websites suggested a generally accurate, but brief explanation of the relationship between the University as the awarding institution and the partner college where study would be located. Moreover,

some aspects of the transfer from the Foundation Degree to the BA final year at the University were not always well expressed. Partner college websites, for some programmes, did not make sufficiently detailed comment on the entry requirements and availability of places for transferring Foundation Degree students. The team considered that it would be desirable for the University to ensure that public information for applicants to collaborative provision published on the websites of its partner colleges makes clear the relationship between the University and the partner, the location of study and the progression and transfer requirements from Foundation Degrees to honours-level study.

178 The student written submission stated that the University had informed students of what is expected of them in order to succeed on their course, and had ensured that all information is made available on the University website or the virtual learning environment. Students who met the audit team largely confirmed this view for information provided both before and during their course of study. Postgraduate research students reported that they were particularly well informed via the range of information they received.

179 On the basis of information gained from meetings with students, the student written submission, and the published information read, the audit team concluded that students were generally satisfied with information they received from the University. The audit found that, overall, reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that Bath Spa University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

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