Loughborough University

Institutional Review
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

May 2012

Contents

About this review

This is a report of an Institutional Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Loughborough University. The review took place between 28 May and 1 June 2012 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers:

- Ms Susan Blake
- Professor Mark Davies
- Dr Alan Howard
- Ms Charlotte Richer (student reviewer)
- Dr Richard Harrison (review secretary).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Loughborough University and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. In this report the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - threshold academic standards[1]
  - the quality of learning opportunities
  - the enhancement of learning opportunities
- provides commentaries on public information and the theme topic
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the institution is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the key findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

In reviewing Loughborough University, the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The theme for the academic year 2011-12 is the First Year Student Experience.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[2] Background information about Loughborough University is given on page 4 of this report. A dedicated page of the QAA website explains the method for Institutional Review of higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland[3] and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

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[1] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx
[3] www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/ireni/pages/default.aspx.

Key findings

This section summarises the QAA review team's key findings about Loughborough University (the University).

QAA's judgements about Loughborough University

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Loughborough University.

- Academic standards at the University **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at the University **meets UK expectations**.
- The quality of student learning opportunities for collaborative provision at the University **requires improvement to meet UK expectations**.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University **meets UK expectations**.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at Loughborough University.

- The activities of the Careers and Employability Centre (paragraph 2.7.1).
- The constructive and coordinated approach across departments and the Counselling and Disability Service to managing learning opportunities for students with disabilities (paragraph 2.8.3).
- The Loughborough Skills Matrix for postgraduate research students, and the effective monitoring of the progress of students through it (paragraph 2.10.1).
- The comprehensive provision of, and support for, placement learning opportunities (paragraph 2.13.1).

Recommendations

The QAA review team recommends that Loughborough University should:

- ensure that external examiner reports are consistently shared with student representatives at staff-student committees, in line with the policy in the Academic Quality Procedures Handbook, by the start of the 2012-13 academic year (paragraph 1.2.1)
- strengthen institutional oversight of collaborative provision to further secure academic standards by developing a comprehensive action plan to respond to issues remaining, by the start of the 2012-13 academic year (paragraph 1.3.4)
- review the Academic Quality Procedures Handbook and associated codes of practice and templates to provide a quality assurance handbook that is comprehensive, consistent and fully implemented, in order to secure current practice by summer 2013 for implementation in 2013-14 (paragraph 1.4.3)
- ensure that all staff who require additional support in learning and teaching methods - in particular communication skills - are identified, and that support is swiftly provided and is monitored for its effectiveness, by January 2013 (paragraph 2.1.2)

- ensure that postgraduate research students are given formal training - which is recorded and is monitored to ensure its effectiveness - prior to undertaking any form of teaching or assessment, by January 2013 (paragraph 2.1.3)
- ensure more effective representation of students on relevant bodies by January 2013 (paragraph 2.3.1)
- update and clarify the assessment policy for students with disabilities regarding reasonable adjustments for poor grammar and spelling, and ensure that it is consistently implemented across all schools by January 2013 (paragraph 2.8)
- incorporate the policy on allowances for late diagnosis of student disabilities into formal published guidance to staff and students by January 2013 (paragraph 2.8.1)
- ensure that formal signed agreements for all collaborative partnerships are in place by the start of the 2012-13 academic year (paragraph 2.11.1)
- ensure that the information published by collaborative partners that refers to Loughborough University is accurate, by the start of the 2012-13 academic year (paragraph 3.7).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms the following actions** that Loughborough University is already taking to make academic standards secure and improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The work the University is undertaking to develop specific learning outcomes and assessment criteria for each module in order to provide more explicit guidance for students (paragraph 1.3.1).
- The implementation of a new Content Management System, which will strengthen the University's processes for scrutinising the accuracy of information on school websites (paragraph 3.6).
- The work to embed institution-led enhancement initiatives at school and programme level (paragraph 4.6).

Public information

The information Loughborough University provides about its higher education is clear, accessible, accurate and up to date.

The First Year Student Experience

Loughborough University has effective arrangements in place for managing the experience of first-year students.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining [Institutional Review for England and Northern Ireland](#).[4]

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[4] [www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/ireni/pages/default.aspx](#).

About Loughborough University

Loughborough University's origins can be traced back to 1909, when Loughborough Technical Institute was established to offer courses in technical subjects, science and art. Loughborough Technical Institute became Loughborough College in 1920 and then underwent several name changes until it was awarded its Royal Charter in April 1966, when it became the country's first technological university. It was renamed Loughborough University in 1996 to reflect the institution's broad-based curriculum and research portfolio. The University has just over 16,000 students.

Loughborough University's mission is:

- to increase knowledge and understanding through research which is internationally recognised
- to provide a high-quality international educational experience with wide opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds which prepares graduates for the global workplace
- to influence the economic and social development of individuals, business, professions and communities.

The University has 10 academic schools, comprising 21 academic departments and over 40 research centres and institutes. The University has nine collaborative provision partners, three of which are overseas. In 2011-12, the University had 1,881 collaborative partner students, 1,550 of whom were studying with overseas partner institutions, and the remainder studying with UK partner institutions.

The last QAA Institutional Audit of the University took place in May 2008. The most significant change since then was a major reorganisation of the structure of the academic units of the University, which became fully effective on 1 August 2011. The Learning and Teaching Committee is mindful of the potential disruptive effect of the restructuring on the learning and teaching experience, and has undertaken to monitor and review the impact and effectiveness of the changes. The Learning and Teaching Working Group identified a number of potential future challenges that the University faces. Several of these challenges will be common to all other UK higher education institutions, such as uncertainty over student recruitment in light of changes to student funding.

Explanation of the findings about Loughborough University

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.[5]

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a brief glossary at the end of this report. A fuller glossary of terms[6] is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the handbook for the review method, also on the QAA website.[7]

1   Academic standards

Outcome

The academic standards at Loughborough University **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1   Programme approval and review processes ensure that programmes are allocated to the appropriate level in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). Programme specifications relate each programme to an FHEQ level. More guidance might usefully be provided for staff and students with regard to the relationship between credit and contact hours, and the detail in which contact hours should be specified.

1.1.1   External examiners confirm that programmes are at the appropriate level, but in a few instances commented on whether particular modules and assessment tasks are at the right level. In general, the university responds effectively to external examiners' comments.

Use of external examiners

1.2   Overall, the University's use of external examiners is strong and scrupulous. The process for appointment of external examiners and reporting is clear. The report form provides a range of potentially useful information. The University could further clarify which duties are expected of external examiners rather than being optional, and ask external examiners to provide examples of good practice to be shared.

1.2.1   The use of the external examiners' reports could be strengthened further if they were routinely shared with all student programme representatives, in line with the policy in the Academic Quality Procedures Handbook (AQPH). This would assist in making the assessment process more transparent to students. The review team **recommends** that the University ensure that external examiner reports are consistently shared with student representatives at staff-student committees, in line with the policy in the Academic Quality Procedures Handbook, by the start of the 2012-13 academic year.

1.2.2   External examiners for collaborative provision are appointed by and report to the University. The reports about home and collaborative provision are equally thorough.

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[5] The full body of evidence used to compile the report is not published. However, it is available on request for inspection. Please contact QAA Reviews Group.
[6] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx.
[7] See note 4.

External examiners raised serious concerns about one collaborative partner; some of these concerns had been addressed, and led to improvement. However, not all concerns had been fully addressed in a clear and timely way (see paragraph 1.3.4).

Assessment and standards

1.3 Overall, the design, approval, monitoring and review of assessment strategies is effective, and ensures that students have the opportunity to demonstrate the learning outcomes of their respective awards. The conduct of assessment is well managed, and programme assessment boards work effectively. However, the University regulations, AQPH and associated codes, and other documents might be more fully consistent and comprehensive. For collaborative partners, assessment processes and strategies vary according to the formal agreement. The home school for the partnership nominates a link person responsible for advising staff in partner institutions on standards, including marking, sampling and assessment.

1.3.1 Learning outcomes are identified for each module, although some are generic and shared across more than one module. University guidance suggests that module specifications should provide more detailed information on learning outcomes, teaching methods and assessment. The team confirmed the findings of the University's Assessment Criteria Project that the level of specificity and detail in module specifications varied. The review team **affirms** the work the University is undertaking to develop specific learning outcomes and assessment criteria for each module in order to provide more explicit guidance for students.

1.3.2 Each school is required to have a clear policy on assessing individuals in group situations, which may vary from school to school. It is not always clear to students how feedback in relation to group work takes account of individual contributions. External examiners have commented on whether assessment and feedback processes for group work might be further developed.

1.3.3 A Memorandum of Agreement provides that a collaborative partner's academic regulations may be used, having been approved by Loughborough University. Programme boards are chaired by the partner's deans of faculty. The external assessor (appointed by Loughborough University) and the University's Associate Dean (Teaching) attend. External examiners' reports confirm that standards at the partners are equivalent to UK standards. However, some have raised standards-related concerns, over a number of years, in relation to condoning failures, adjustment of marks, generous marking, the use of questions available online, and some problems with programme board arrangements. The Institutional Revalidation Report 2010 and Subject Adviser Reports also note similar concerns.

1.3.4 Validation and review of collaborative programmes is sound. The University has responded effectively to many comments from external examiners, and to recommendations in Annual Programme Reports. Through the annual quality cycle, the University has identified a number of matters that need continued attention. However, it is not always clear in the documentation who will be responsible for taking action, what action is required, or the timescale for completion. The review team **recommends** that the University strengthen institutional oversight of collaborative provision to further secure academic standards by developing a comprehensive action plan to respond to issues remaining, by the start of the 2012-13 academic year.

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.4 The processes for design, approval, monitoring and review of programmes enable standards to be set and maintained, and allow students to demonstrate the intended learning outcomes for their awards. These new processes work well at school level, but the role of the school Learning and Teaching Committees could be made more explicit at department and programme level.

1.4.1 The process for approving new programmes is appropriate, and includes checks on learning outcomes, workload, assessment and resources. The assessment matrix is a useful development. The University constitutes a panel to conduct the approval process, whose membership includes someone from outside the University. This external member may be an external examiner from another programme within the same school, which is not fully in line with the guidance in QAA's *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*). The external member may contribute to the panel's deliberations by email rather than attending the University in person, but the examples of written contributions provided to the team were insufficiently detailed. The requirements for externality in relation to programme approval could be strengthened.

1.4.2 Schools are required to review all programmes annually, but the process is not described within the AQPH in detail. Annual Programme Reports are supported by comprehensive data on admissions, progression, student feedback and external examiner reports. The reports include evaluation and summaries of issues. There are also action points, though the number and detail of action points varies between schools. The Learning and Teaching Committee agreed in February 2012 that it would receive updated action plans on Annual Programme Review actions at every meeting to ensure that the full range of action points are monitored and evaluated. The role of school Learning and Teaching Committees, along with the role of staff at school and department level within the process, could usefully be made more explicit within the AQPH.

1.4.3 The AQPH and online templates are supported by a variety of codes of practice and other policy documents. The AQPH sets minimum expectations, and the other documents provide more information and give examples of practice. However, not all policies or codes are clearly in line with the content of the AQPH. There are further policies and guidance at school level. Some sections of the AQPH lack detail, and the coverage of different documents overlaps in a way that can make it difficult to find clear or consistent policy on a particular point. The review team **recommends** that the University review the AQPH and associated codes of practice and templates to provide a quality assurance handbook that is sufficiently comprehensive, consistent and fully implemented, in order to secure current practice by summer 2013 for implementation in 2013-14 (see also paragraphs 2.10, 2.11.1 and 2.11.2).

1.4.4 For collaborative partners, processes for programme approval, monitoring and review are the same as they are for home provision. Detailed scrutiny of a partner involves consideration of programme specifications (which should normally use the Loughborough University model). However, annual reports for a collaborative partner contained concerns that had persisted for more than a year. Monitoring visit reports continued to have significant lists of recommendations. Some action has been taken, and has led to significant improvement in several areas. The Annual Programme Review for 2010-11 includes a number of action points, with time frames. The University should pursue these actions with rigour, and check that all recommendations are promptly addressed.

Subject benchmarks

1.5   External examiners comment positively on the use of subject benchmarks in the design and delivery of programmes. The programme approval process includes a check on whether a relevant subject benchmark has been followed. The Guide to Programme Specifications in the AQPH identifies subject benchmark statements as important, but could usefully provide more detailed guidance on what they are and how to use them.

1.5.1   Many of the programmes offered by the University are accredited by professional bodies. The requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) are important to many programmes and they are considered in a similar way to subject benchmark statements in relation to programme design and review.

2   Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

The quality of learning opportunities at Loughborough University **meets UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

The quality of learning opportunities for Loughborough University's collaborative provision **requires further improvement to meet UK expectations**. The team's reasons for this judgement are also given below.

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1   Teaching Innovation Awards are available for academic and learning support staff, and have led to demonstrable improvements. The University monitors closely the outputs and benefits of these awards. The University is strengthening its reward for teaching excellence by launching the Award for Outstanding Contribution to Research-informed Teaching, the first round of which will run later in the current year. Students are aware that much of the teaching they receive is informed by current research, scholarship and professional practice.

2.1.1   The University offers a New Lecturers' Course that is aligned to the UK Professional Standards Framework. New staff are required to undergo this course unless they can demonstrate teaching experience gained elsewhere. The University has strengthened its professional standards for teaching and learning via the introduction of a new scheme for promotion to Senior Lecturer. Applicants must be able to demonstrate continuing professional development in their teaching practice and underpinning knowledge in order to be considered suitable for promotion.

2.1.2   Students expressed concerns about the quality of some teaching staff, including their communication skills. The University is aware of these concerns and has put in place remedial activity for some staff. However, the effectiveness of remedial action is dependent on both the cooperation of staff and on the existence of effective processes for managing performance in departments and schools. The team **recommends** that the University ensure that all staff who require additional support in learning and teaching methods - in particular in communication skills - are identified, and that support is swiftly provided and is monitored for its effectiveness, by January 2013.

2.1.3   Research students may teach both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Students expressed concerns about the teaching ability of some research students. Not all research students had received formal training before they started teaching. The team

recommends that the University ensure that postgraduate research students are given formal training - which is recorded and is monitored for its effectiveness - prior to undertaking any form of teaching or assessment, by January 2013. This includes research students undertaking demonstrations in practical classes or tutorial work.

Learning resources

2.2 Appropriate development opportunities in learning and teaching are available for staff; these are driven by the University's Strategic Plan and Learning and Teaching Strategy. Much staff development is coordinated or delivered by the Teaching Centre. The Centre produces high-quality materials appropriate to support the needs of academic staff both in maintaining and in enhancing their teaching practice. Opportunities are effectively communicated to staff, and attendance is recorded. Effectiveness of staff development is monitored through performance reviews. It is not clear how the effectiveness of staff development is analysed across the board in order to identify further development opportunities.

2.2.1 The University manages resource deployment through the Strategic Plan, the Learning and Teaching Strategy, and the Operations Committee. IT resources are managed though an Information Technology Committee, which considers overall strategy and implementation in relation to IT, and has student membership. A Student Information Steering Group considers issues such as timetabling, attendance monitoring, the student portal and email provision for students. Students input into the work of this group through participation in focus groups, specific working groups and in testing pilot systems.

2.2.2 Library stock is informed by schools and departments. There may be a library representative on staff-student groups, but this is not consistent. The Library Users' Committee includes a student representative, but no student had attended since 2010. The Learning and Teaching Committee agreed that schools/departments should invite their Academic Librarian to attend an appropriate meeting of their staff-student liaison committees in view of the success of this initiative in some schools.

2.2.3 Students on taught programmes confirm that they have a personal tutor and expressed satisfaction with the personal support available to them. However, not all students have timetabled access to their tutor, in accordance with University policy.

Student voice

2.3 There are close links between senior institutional managers and representatives of the students' union, and regular meetings take place. There is student representation on many institutional-level committees and groups, and on Annual Programme Review and Periodic Programme Review panels. In 2011-12, Programme Presidents were introduced at school/department level - an initiative proposed by the students' union and welcomed by the University. This is a senior role which coordinates' student representatives' activities relating to academic matters. As this role is new, it is not yet fully embedded. While the University has engaged with student representation at an institutional level, at a more local level the representation system is less fully developed. Students are not consistently represented on all relevant school and departmental committees.

2.3.1 The AQPH contains a Code of Practice for Staff-Student Liaison Committees. There is some variation in the operation of these groups, including the frequency of meetings, the consideration of module feedback, reporting lines (including to students) and the production of minutes. It is not clear whether some meetings did not take place or were simply not recorded. The minutes do not show consistent and systematic closing of feedback

loops or action planning. The team **recommends** that the University ensure that there is more effective representation of students on relevant bodies by January 2013.

2.3.2   Modules are evaluated by students on a three-year cycle, though some schools and departments make yearly evaluations. In general, good use is made by the University of the results of module feedback in Annual Programme Review and Periodic Programme Review. However, the University might wish to reconsider the trigger for reporting dissatisfaction on a module in the Annual Programme Review. There is no clear system for formally feeding back to students on how their comments have been responded to. Programme-level feedback may be gained from Programme Presidents and through staff-student liaison committees. No written feedback is collected from students at programme level.

Management information is used to improve quality and standards

2.4   The University uses management data effectively in safeguarding quality and standards and to promote enhancement. Student data are stored centrally and are released under the control of the Academic Registry and the Careers and Employability Centre to schools for use in programme reviews. Teaching staff report that there are occasionally errors in the data returned to schools and that these data are usually, but not always, subsequently checked. The University may wish to formalise the checking process to eliminate the errors in the data.

2.4.1   Some data subsets are compiled as part of the Loughborough University Statistics Handbook to provide a ready set of commonly used data for schools and departments. The review team regarded the Loughborough University Statistics Handbook as a useful resource for staff.

Admission to the University

2.5   The University has a robust Admissions Policy, based on the University's regulations, which frames admissions in terms of equal opportunities and lists the selection factors to be applied. It contains explicit criteria for undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research programmes. The AQPH contains a brief section on admissions, which is supplemented by a number of additional guidance notes. However, the status of some additional guidance notes is unclear. For example, the central Learning and Teaching Committee endorsed a proposal on a policy for the admission of high-performance student athletes. This proposal operates as guidance to admissions tutors, though it has not been formalised as a policy. The University may wish to formalise the admissions policy for high-performance student athletes and clarify the University's guidance to admissions tutors.

Complaints and appeals

2.6   The complaints and appeals procedures are generally effective, but there is scope for faster resolution of appeals. The University has increased the number of staff available to handle appeals in response to this issue. Complaints and appeals procedures for both taught and research degree students are well set out and easy to understand. Students know where to find such information, should they need it.

2.6.1   Oversight of complaints and appeals activity is conducted by the Learning and Teaching Committee, Senate and Council, who receive useful reports that enable them to monitor outcomes and reasons for complaints or appeals.

Career advice and guidance

2.7   The University has a strategic approach to career education, information and guidance (CEIG) that is overseen by the Careers and Employability Centre Advisory Board, which reports to Council and is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. In part, this Board is a means to share information about the University with industry representatives. The Board receives an annual report from the Careers and Employability Centre (which also goes to Senate). The Board is a useful forum for discussing the activities of students in relation to industry and employability.

2.7.1   There are many opportunities for students at all levels to interact with activities and schemes that promote their employability. The Careers and Employability Centre offers extensive support and guidance to students. The activities of the Careers and Employability Centre are a feature of **good practice**. An annual Careers Guide, which is available in hard copy and online, is designed to introduce students to the facilities of the Careers and Employability Centre and to support them in career planning and job seeking.

2.7.2   The Loughborough Employability Award is a points-based scheme, where points are awarded dependent on commitment to, level of responsibility in, and development of skills in various activities, some of which can be completed using the University's virtual learning environment. On receipt of at least 100 points, a student will be eligible to apply for the Award by submitting a curriculum vitae and an application form, which asks competency-based questions similar to those on a graduate recruitment form. The award scheme has been available since 2008, and at the time of this review there had been 169 awards.

Supporting disabled students

2.8   There are inconsistencies in the implementation of the Assessment Policy for Students who have a Disability within and between schools, and the potential exists for inequitable treatment of students. Schools should develop a policy on how students who have a specific learning difficulty should not be penalised for spelling and grammar that does not affect clarity of the writing. These policies should be submitted to the Examinations Office for approval. The review team did not see evidence that this process occurs. The team **recommends** that the University update and clarify the assessment policy for students with disabilities regarding reasonable adjustments for poor grammar and spelling, and ensure that it is consistently implemented across all schools by January 2013.

2.8.1   There is a policy on taking retrospective action for students diagnosed with a disability mid-session, which outlines a sound process for assessing and implementing appropriate action. However, the policy does not currently appear in the University Regulations or in published guidance to staff or students. The review team **recommends** that the University incorporate the policy on allowances for late diagnosis of student disabilities into formal published guidance to staff and students by January 2013.

2.8.2   The Counselling and Disability Service (CDS) provides good support to students newly diagnosed with learning disabilities. The service works well with schools to support the development of sustainable and inclusive teaching and assessment strategies, including good advice to staff on effective teaching practice.

2.8.3   Students' individual needs are taken into account when planning visits and field trips. It is apparent that the CDS engages with schools prior to enrolment to take account of potential special needs within the on-campus learning environment for students with disabilities. The constructive and coordinated approach across departments and the CDS to managing learning opportunities for students with disabilities is a feature of **good practice**.

Supporting international students

2.9   Support for international students is generally sound. Study advisers for international students comprise part of the study advice and support service. The Loughborough Students' Union (LSU) Global Development Officer and the International Students Association provide ongoing dedicated support for international students. However, the section of the AQPH dealing with international students has not been amended since 2003. The team found that more detailed guidance existed elsewhere, which reflected major changes in external policy in recent years.

2.9.1   Additional specific arrangements are in place to support the transition of international students. A pre-departure guide and video are available, and additional institutional and school induction events are run for international students. Students suggested that there may be some inconsistency in the provision of these resources. The University may wish to review this situation to ensure consistency. Overall satisfaction among undergraduate international students is equal to or higher than home students. However, they are less satisfied in terms of English language support.

Supporting postgraduate research students

2.10   There are sound arrangements in place for the allocation of appropriate supervisor(s) and the Director of Research Degree Programmes has an active role in ensuring continuity of supervision for students within their school. Students may discuss any concerns about supervision arrangements with the Director of Research Degree Programmes. The University takes steps to ensure that individual supervisors do not take on an excessive number of research students, through monitoring in staff development reviews and workload modelling activities. However, the Periodic Review of Research Degree Programmes in Design highlighted some staff with heavy supervisory responsibilities. Students are responsible for making a record of supervisory meetings. This process is largely informal but students are satisfied with it.

2.10.1   The Graduate School coordinates and provides training for postgraduate research students in collaboration with schools. Students are required to undertake training amounting to 30 days' effort over three years. The Loughborough Skills Matrix assists in identifying and targeting training priorities and supports research students' development. Student engagement with the Matrix is monitored in annual progress meetings. The Loughborough Skills Matrix, and the effective monitoring of the progress of students through it, is a feature of **good practice**.

2.10.2   The processes in place for the upgrade from MPhil to PhD registration work well. Extenuating circumstances are taken into account, students are treated fairly and the process is clear and straightforward. Students are positive about the research culture. They may be attached to research groups and often work closely with their supervisors and other staff. Students have opportunities to attend seminars and to informally present their research. The University intends to consider the further development of departmental research seminars as part of the next quality review.

Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.11   Collaborative partnerships are overseen by the Teaching Partnerships Sub-Committee. For one partner, there is additionally a Validation Sub-Committee of the Learning and Teaching Committee. The policy and procedures for establishing a new collaborative partnership do not set out in detail how a process of due diligence would be completed. Nor do they make clear how the University maintains full control of the academic

standards of its awards (see paragraph 1.3.4). The University may wish to incorporate reference to these processes within its policy, which otherwise was found to appropriately reflect relevant precepts in the QAA Code of practice.

2.11.1   A Memorandum of Agreement for one partner was signed by both parties in 2009, covering the period 2007-2011. The University agreed to extend this agreement for two intakes in November 2010; however, this extension is not formally documented and signed by both parties. The review team **recommends** that the University ensure that formal signed collaborative agreements for all collaborative partnerships are in place by the start of the 2012-13 academic year.

2.11.2   Programme approval, monitoring and review processes and external examining arrangements for collaborative provision are discussed in paragraphs 1.2.2, 1.3.3, 1.3.4 and 1.4.4.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.12   The University delivers 15 postgraduate courses in part or in full through distance learning, with a current enrolment of approximately 897 distance learners, of whom approximately half are studying part-time. Programme delivery involves a blended approach combining e-learning with other methods of delivery. The University developed an e-learning strategy in 2008, and a University-level Implementation Plan for 2011-13. Not all schools have yet developed a local implementation plan. However, the School of Civil and Building Engineering: E-learning Implementation Plan 2012-13 provides an excellent action-based strategy for curriculum development and staff engagement.

2.12.1   There is a compulsory element of e-learning for provision delivered on campus, with the minimum being an online presence for all modules on the University's virtual learning environment. Programme-level staff stated that this minimum presence was desirable and working well in practice. There are additional local quality assurance procedures in departments/schools where distance learning is a significant activity.

Work-based and placement learning

2.13   The University provides excellent opportunities for many students to take a placement. For some students, following 45 weeks work and assessment of a 10,000 word report, they may receive a Diploma. The University is seeking to extend this opportunity to all students.

2.13.1   The placement is a core part of many programmes, particularly in business and engineering. The University requires each school that offers placements to have a designated Placements Tutor (an academic staff member). There is a clear role description for the Placement Tutor, which includes providing general support and advice to students regarding health and safety and insurance, and acting as - or organising a - visiting tutor for students on placement. A Placement Tutors Group meets twice a year to share experiences and practice. The comprehensive provision of, and support for, placement learning opportunities is a feature of **good practice**.

Student charter

2.14   The University introduced a Student Charter at the start of the 2011-12 academic year. The responsibility for the management, oversight and revision of this resource lies with the Learning and Teaching Committee. The Charter includes reference to a range of expectations and points of information. The University may wish to consider including further

sign-posting to additional sources of information (for example, to appeals and complaints procedures), although students have a good general awareness of where to find information. The Charter is a 'living document' that has been incorporated into the student learning experience. It has been adopted within schools primarily through making reference to it within student handbooks or student meetings. For example, in the Design School, the February 2012 Staff-Student Liaison Committee meeting had asked student representatives to familiarise themselves with the Charter and to inform their peers about it.

2.14.1   The Student Charter will be reviewed and updated annually. The Student Charter Working Group will wish to continue to work closely with the students' union to help identify areas for improvement.

3   Public information

Summary

Loughborough University makes information about academic standards and quality publicly available via its website. The information is clear, accessible, accurate and up to date. Students find the information useful in helping them make an informed choice when applying to the University and in preparing for what they might expect when they join. The team's reasons for this conclusion are given below.

3.1   Published information is monitored for accuracy through several processes. Statistical data is collected and reviewed through the Planning Office, and internal websites are maintained and monitored by both the Registry and the Marketing and Communications Team. The processes for reviewing the accuracy and completeness of data and published information are robust. Information published by partner institutions is monitored by central administrative staff, who review websites periodically to ensure accuracy and compliance with University regulations and policies. An Associate Dean (Teaching) and the Assistant Registrar also review copies of marketing material provided by a collaborative partner, and information on academic courses - such as programme and module specifications - is part of standard annual review procedures.

3.2   Programme specifications are made publicly available to prospective and current students through the University's external website. The level of detail on school processes with regard to assessment varies across documents. The University sets minimum expectations, and schools or departments may add further detail. In some specifications, assessment strategies are clearly mapped against learning outcomes. Others contain only cursory reference to criteria for assessment.

3.3   Students have access to and make use of programme specifications. Students place greater emphasis on module specifications, which are also available through a central portal and linked through the virtual learning environment. Module specifications also follow a common format.

3.4   The Student Handbook contains information on assessment, quality assurance and appeals. The Handbook also contains information on the University's central services and indicates to incoming students the various forms of study support on offer. For first-year students, information is largely available through the 'Welcome to Loughborough' website. Students also cite the virtual learning environment as the central point of reference for information on University policies.

3.5   In line with national requirements, key statistical information - including information on student completions, graduate destinations, links with industry and student satisfaction -

is available on a range of external websites. Data for official returns and key performance indicators are collated through the Planning Office, and the processes for the verification of this data, combined with their use in Annual Programme Review and monitoring, are robust.

3.6   Information for prospective students is made available on a designated section of the University's website and through school and department web pages. Though students confirmed that they found the sites to be largely useful and accurate, the team noted some minor discrepancies between the information published on central pages and that published locally, where the school pages had failed to keep pace with changes to entry criteria between recruitment cycles. The team **affirms** the implementation of a new Content Management System, which will strengthen the University's processes for scrutinising the accuracy of information on school websites.

3.7   Programme specifications and module specifications for validated programmes at a collaborative partner follow a broadly similar structure to those at the University, and are made publicly available through the website, where they provide the central source of information for prospective students. One programme specification implies the likelihood of imminent validation of the programme by the University and suggests that the outcome of the award would be both a BSc from the collaborative partner and a BEng from Loughborough University. This information is misleading, particularly given the specification's prominence as a source of information for intending students. The review team **recommends** that the University ensure that the information published by collaborative partners that refers to Loughborough University is accurate, by the start of the 2012-13 academic year.

4   Enhancement of learning opportunities

Outcome

The enhancement of learning opportunities at Loughborough University **meets UK expectations**. The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

4.1   The University's approach to quality enhancement is stated throughout a number of key strategic documents, including the Strategic Plan, the Learning and Teaching Strategy and its associated Implementation Plan. The University characterises its approach as collaborative and based on partnerships between University centres, schools and departments, with a key focus on continuing professional development.

4.2   The University sees its quality assurance and quality enhancement processes as mutually reinforcing. The annual monitoring process is a significant mechanism to systematically identify and disseminate examples of good practice across schools. Schools are invited to provide examples of any key strengths or effective practice, particularly in relation to the outcomes of the National Student Survey and subsequent actions. The opportunity to identify good practice through annual monitoring reports, implemented in 2011-12, is not yet routinely taken up. Where schools reference effective practice, the comments are sometimes cursory and it may be difficult for other schools to meaningfully identify good practice from the summary document. The University may wish to consider ways of encouraging schools to systematically engage with this section of the school evaluation form.

4.3   The University's new academic governance structures are another way of disseminating examples of good practice and developing the enhancement agenda. The role of the Associate Dean (Teaching) within each school provides a direct link between the central academic leadership team, the University's academic committee and governance

structure, and individual schools. This role has the potential to act as a conduit for the dissemination of good practice across the various levels of the University.

4.4   The Teaching Centre is central to institutional and school-level approaches to quality enhancement. Its activities are supported by Quality Enhancement Officers and a broader professional group including an e-learning team, who lead a number of central initiatives designed to support and develop teaching, professional standards and students' learning opportunities. Staff are aware of the support available through the Teaching Centre and those who had been involved in programme review or design spoke positively about the involvement and support of the Quality Enhancement Officers in the process. The Teaching Centre also leads a number of showcase events to share its work with programme-level staff and to provide a forum for staff to share their own experiences.

4.5   The University has continued to fund two Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning: the Mathematics Education Centre and the Centre for Engineering and Design Education. These centres positively support students' learning across subject disciplines.

4.6   There are many positive examples of institutional development of quality enhancement initiatives, but there is less evidence of consistent and meaningful engagement with these initiatives - and with the University's strategic approach to enhancement - at school and programme level. As such, the team **affirms** the work to embed institution-led enhancement initiatives at school and programme level.

5   Theme: First Year Student Experience

Each academic year, a specific theme relating to higher education provision in England and Northern Ireland is chosen for especial attention by QAA's Institutional Review teams. In 2011-12, the theme is the **First Year Student Experience**.

Supporting students' transition

5.1   The University has taken a number of initiatives to support the induction of first-year students. For example, the Enhancing Student Engagement work identified student induction as an area for developing student engagement. A website dedicated to providing incoming undergraduate and postgraduate students with pre-arrival information is now in place. Students are positive about the information provided for incoming students through this website.

5.2   Schools use an induction checklist to plan induction activities for new students. Induction events take place at both institutional and school level. Schools often involve students from later years in the initial induction of new students. Arrangements for inducting new students are operating effectively.

5.3   Students are effectively supported to develop the academic study skills necessary to succeed in higher education. Study skills may be taught through specific modules or embedded across a number of first-year modules. Additionally, a wide range of study and information literacy skills courses are provided by the University library, and this provision was felt by students to be useful and helpful.

5.4   Undergraduate international students found that induction events could be better advertised and that materials were not necessarily being consistently delivered to students ahead of arrival.

Information for first-year students

5.5   Undergraduate students are provided with an appropriate range of information prior to arrival, provided through a mixture of handbooks, online resources and the University's virtual learning environment. In a small number of instances, it was felt that there could be greater clarity in aspects of this information (for example, books and equipment required by students for their programme).

5.6   The pre-arrival information provided to taught postgraduate students was appropriate for students who had previously studied at Loughborough University. Students who had not previously studied at the University did not feel that they had had access to sufficient information about modules and programmes prior to arrival.

Assessment and feedback

5.7   First-year students must meet the University's progression requirements in order to proceed to the second year of their programmes, but the marks obtained from first-year assessments are not included in the classification of final awards. An overview of assessment is provided to all new students through the Student Handbook.

5.8   The form of the feedback given to students on assessed work varies (from generic feedback to all students on a module, to specific individual feedback for each student), as does the means by which this feedback is provided to students (for example via email, on the University's virtual learning environment 'Learn', or in feedback lectures delivered by staff). Students found feedback to be helpful in supporting their learning, and normally provided in a timely way.

Monitoring retention and progression

5.9   All incoming students are allocated a personal tutor, who plays a key role in supporting the progression of first-year students. The University monitors student progression through annual and periodic reviews. Overall, progression and completion rates are high.

5.10   Student attendance is monitored to identify potential student disengagement. The emphasis in promoting student engagement is placed on pedagogical developments and the role of the tutor system, rather than automated attendance monitoring.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to key terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Most terms also have formal 'operational' definitions. For example, pages 18-19 of the handbook for this review method give formal definitions of threshold academic standards, learning opportunities, enhancement and public information.

The handbook can be found on the QAA website at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/ireni-handbook.aspx.

If you require formal definitions of other terms, please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality:
www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx.

Academic Infrastructure Guidance developed and agreed by the higher education community and published by QAA, which is used by institutions to ensure that their courses meet national expectations for academic standards and that students have access to a suitable environment for learning (academic quality). It consists of four groups of reference points: the **frameworks for higher education qualifications**, the **subject benchmark statements**, the **programme specifications** and the **Code of practice**. Work is underway (2011-12) to revise the Academic Infrastructure as the UK **Quality Code** for Higher Education.

academic standards The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Code of practice *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for higher education institutions.

credit(s) A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as 'numbers of credits' at a specific level.

enhancement Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of **learning opportunities**. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

feature of good practice A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

framework A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

framework for higher education qualifications A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*.

learning opportunities The provision made for students' learning, including planned **programmes of study**, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios) and staff development.

learning outcome What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

operational definition A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in reports.

programme (of study) An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

programme specifications Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of **programmes of study**, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

public information Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Quality Code Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is being developed from 2011 to replace the **Academic Infrastructure** and will incorporate all its key elements, along with additional topics and overarching themes.

subject benchmark statement A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

threshold academic standard The minimum standard that a student should reach in order to gain a particular qualification or award, as set out in the **subject benchmark statements** and national qualifications frameworks. Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that students need to achieve in order to gain any particular class of award, for example a first-class bachelor's degree. See also **academic standard**.

widening participation Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

All QAA's publications are available on our website www.qaa.ac.uk.