



# **The University of Cambridge**

Institutional Review  
by the Quality Assurance Agency  
for Higher Education

March 2013

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## About this review

This is a report of an Institutional Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the University of Cambridge. The review took place from 4 to 8 March 2013 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Anu Arora
- Dr Douglas Halliday
- Professor Denis Wright
- Ms Rebecca Watson (student reviewer)
- Ms Alison Blackburn (review secretary).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the University of Cambridge 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<sup>1</sup>
  - the quality of learning opportunities
  - the information provided about learning opportunities
  - the enhancement of learning opportunities
- provides commentaries on 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 the University of Cambridge, the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The [themes](#) for the academic year 2012-13 are the First Year Student Experience and Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement, and the institution is required to elect, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>2</sup> Background information about the University of Cambridge is given at the end of this report. A dedicated page of the website explains the method for [Institutional Review](#) of higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland<sup>3</sup> and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

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<sup>1</sup> For an explanation of terms, see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

<sup>2</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx)

<sup>3</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx)

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about the University of Cambridge

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at the University of Cambridge (the University).

- Academic standards at the University **meet UK expectations**.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at the University **meets UK expectations**.
- Information about learning opportunities produced by the University **meets 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 the University.

- The central direction and timely support for the management of academic standards given by the General Board Education Committee and the Educational and Student Policy Office (paragraph 1.27).
- The accessibility of the extensive library resources and the service provided to students (paragraph 2.11).
- The wide-ranging support provided for all students by the Careers Service and the engagement of the Careers Service with the wider University (paragraph 2.41).
- Student Links, the joint Cambridge University Students' Union and University initiative which brings together representatives from equality and diversity groups and provides a formal channel for the University to consult with students (paragraph 2.44).
- The highly effective support provided to disabled students through the specially trained staff in the Disability Resource Centre and the network of Disability Liaison Officers in Departments (paragraph 2.50).
- The wide-ranging programme of research skills training provided to postgraduate research students by the University, Colleges, Faculties and Departments (paragraph 2.60).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following recommendations:

By the start of the 2013-14 academic year:

- the University should meet the Expectation for external participation in the course approval process across all programmes, as set out in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (paragraph 1.21)
- the University should establish a central mechanism to secure institutional oversight of the fitness-for-purpose, accessibility and trustworthiness of published information (paragraph 3.7)
- the University should take deliberate planned steps to ensure that the nature and purpose of enhancement is clearly identified and agreed across the institution (paragraph 4.7).

By January 2014:

- the University should ensure that its expectation that external examiners' reports for taught programmes are shared with all students is implemented across the University (paragraph 1.11).

By the end of the 2013-14 academic year:

- the University should take steps to collate and analyse the results of Faculty and Departmental student surveys as part of their routine annual quality monitoring (paragraph 2.23)
- the University should ensure that it is informed of the nature and extent of complaints and appeals within Colleges (paragraph 2.36).

By the start of the 2014-15 academic year:

- the University, Colleges, Faculties and Departments should work collectively to put in place an integrated system of support for international students, particularly during induction (paragraph 2.55).

## Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The action taken by the General Board Education Committee at its October 2012 meeting to enhance the quality of supervision given by postgraduate research students (paragraph 2.7).
- The use of the internal Research Experience Survey, which looks particularly at postgraduate research student views of supervision, and follows up the outcomes of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2011 (paragraph 2.25).
- The steps taken by the University and Cambridge University Students' Union to determine the means by which the mutual expectations of the University, Colleges, Faculties, Departments and students are identified and disseminated to the student body (paragraph 2.83).
- The continuation of the legacy of the Trans-skills project through the establishment of the new Teaching and Learning joint sub-committee (paragraph 4.5).

## Student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement

The University provides opportunities for student involvement across a wide range of quality assurance and enhancement processes.

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

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<sup>4</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx)

## About the University of Cambridge

The University of Cambridge comprises a confederation of over 100 Faculties (some of which may contain a number of departments) and other academic institutions, most of which are attached to one of six Schools. The Collegiate University includes 31 Colleges; each College is a separate legal entity. As a consequence, the University has a complex federal governance structure, with Regent House as the governing body, and the Council and General Board of the Faculties as its principal decision-making bodies. There is a high level of devolved responsibility to academic departments.

The University's mission is 'to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence'. The University commits to the encouragement of a questioning spirit; a close inter-relationship between teaching, scholarship, and research; a policy that residence in Cambridge is central to most courses; and an education that enhances the ability of students to learn throughout life. These key commitments inform the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy.

There are four formal categories of degrees or awards: the Tripos, Graduate Degrees, Postgraduate Courses and Non-Member Awards. There are 28 Triposes - full-time undergraduate degrees composed of two parts. The University offers over 100 courses at master's level and 25 graduate-level diplomas and certificates, as well as the PhD degree and a number of professional doctorates. Non-member awards are not full degrees and do not require matriculation or residence. All students registered for a University degree must also be matriculated members of a College. Colleges provide resources to complement University facilities and academic, financial and pastoral support through the tutorial system.

In 2011-12, there were 11,948 undergraduate and 7,217 postgraduate students. The University's strategic plan is to maintain its undergraduate numbers rather than strive for growth, as it is committed to sustaining the quality of the Collegiate Cambridge education. The University is planning for a gradual annual increase in graduate numbers as part of its commitment to pursue research of an excellent standard on an international stage.

The QAA Institutional Audit in 2008 resulted in judgements of confidence in the management of academic standards and in the quality of student learning opportunities. Since the last Institutional Audit, the University has introduced some significant changes, which include:

- a clearer and more comprehensive role for the General Board's Education Committee (GBEC)
- the establishment of the Teaching and Learning Services Support Group as a forum for strategic discussion of support for teaching and learning
- the launch of the annual Learning and Teaching Innovation Fund in 2011-12
- the establishment of a Board of Executives and Professional Education
- the establishment of an Equality and Diversity Standing Committee of the GBEC.

The University identifies the following key challenges:

- the transition between school and University, which is being addressed through a number of initiatives
- the need to meet residency requirements for the planned increase in master's students, which will be addressed in the longer term by the development of accommodation on University land
- the level of funding for PhD students, which will be the subject of a fundraising campaign

- the approach to recruiting the best international undergraduate students, which will be assessed by a working group.

## Explanation of the findings about the University of Cambridge

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.<sup>5</sup>

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](#)<sup>6</sup> is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the [review method](#), also on the QAA website.<sup>7</sup>

### 1 Academic standards

#### Outcome

The academic standards that the University of Cambridge delivers on behalf of its awarding body **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards. The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

#### Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1 The University approves and reviews its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes with explicit reference to the appropriate level in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and, in a subset of programmes, to relevant public, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) frameworks.

1.2 The regulations relating to taught and research awards are set out in the University's *Statutes and Ordinances*. The General Board has oversight of all programmes, including collaborative arrangements and, in response to the 2008 Institutional Audit, non-member awards offered by the Institute for Continuing Education and other University bodies. The General Board's Education Committee (GBEC), which reports to the General Board and is chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education), has operational responsibility for the quality assurance and standards of programmes. The office of Educational and Student Policy (ESP) of the University's central administration supports the GBEC. The University delegates considerable responsibility to Faculty Boards for the teaching provision in their areas and the GBEC receives regular updates on the outcomes of their quality assurance activities.

1.3 The University's committee structure provides a delegated model that is effective in the management of standards for its programmes, with approval, monitoring and review processes providing institutional oversight and ensuring that the learning outcomes of each programme match their award-level descriptors and that there is a sufficient volume of study for the learning outcomes to be met.

1.4 The course approval process (and PSRB accreditation where applicable), includes consideration of the appropriate FHEQ level. The relevant Faculty Boards or Degree

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<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx)

<sup>7</sup> See note 4.

Committees are also asked to comment on the level of the award and ESP provides guidance on alignment with QAA subject benchmarks. The MPhil/MRes new course template includes whether there is equivalent provision elsewhere in the UK and refers to the QAA descriptor of M-level provision. Although external examiners are not explicitly required to refer to the FHEQ level, they are expected to comment on the appropriateness of standards for the qualification and examination, and the comparability of standards with similar programmes nationally.

1.5 Programme specifications for taught courses are aligned with the appropriate FHEQ level and comprehensively describe the programme in relation to the learning outcomes. These are archived on CamDATA, and Departments are asked to update them on an annual basis, subject to verification from ESP.

### **Use of external examiners**

1.6 There are clear processes for the appointment and induction of external examiners for Tripos, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research programmes. External examiners' reports are integral to the annual monitoring process and make an effective contribution to the management of standards.

1.7 In 2010-11, the University's policies and procedures on external examining were reviewed by the GBEC and aligned with the new *Chapter B7: External examining* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). The General Board sets out clear and comprehensive guidance on arrangements for external examiners including appointment, role and responsibilities. External examiners receive general guidance from ESP, which is available on the ESP website, and course-specific information from the appropriate Faculty Board or Degree Committee. Courses with a collaborative component have identical examining procedures.

1.8 The University uses two types of external examiner: 'Moderating External Examiners' and 'Examiners'. The former are appointed for all or part of the examination and except for larger, more complex programmes, no more than two Moderating External Examiners are appointed for each examination. Moderating External Examiners are fully involved in the setting of examination papers for all awards. In some examinations, an external examiner (or Assessor) may be appointed for a single element of the examination. For Tripos, external examiners are nominated by Faculty Boards for confirmation of appointment by ESP on behalf of the General Board. Faculty or Departmental Degree Committees appoint external examiners for master's and for research degrees, diplomas and certificates. A Graduate Code of Practice sets out the examining process and the role of Schools, Faculties and Departments for research degrees and certificates of postgraduate study. ESP and GBEC monitor compliance with external examining procedures.

1.9 All Tripos examiners are required to attend the final examination meeting and all external examiners are required to submit a report to the Vice-Chancellor on the conduct and outcomes of the examination. Although the development of a template for reports was a recommendation arising from the 2008 Institutional Audit, the University has chosen instead to provide a coversheet which requires some specific responses and provides guidance on other issues that the external examiner may wish to comment on.

1.10 There is a clear procedure for handling external examiners' reports. All reports are read by an ESP officer, who draws any serious concerns (highlighted on the coversheet) to the attention of the relevant Faculty or Department and to the GBEC. Where there are serious concerns, external examiners' reports and responses from the Faculty or Department are considered at the next scheduled GBEC meeting. The GBEC meets eight or



nine times each year which ensures that external examiners' reports are considered in a timely manner. Reports and responses are routinely considered by the appropriate Faculty Board or Degree Committee and a summary is submitted to GBEC. The General Board expects all external examiners to receive a detailed response from the Faculty Board or Degree Committee. ESP tracks the responses from year to year to ensure that all issues have been adequately addressed, and compiles an annual summary report highlighting University-wide issues and identifying trends for discussion at GBEC. Work is underway to streamline the administration of the external examiner process so that the summary report can be submitted to GBEC earlier in the Lent term.

1.11 Comments made by students in the written submission suggest that the level of student engagement with the external examiner process is not high, and in meetings with the review team, students confirmed that they did not meet external examiners. Reports and responses are discussed as unreserved business at Faculty and Departmental meetings where student representatives have an opportunity to participate in the approval of the response. The General Board requires reports to be made accessible to all students, but the review team heard from staff and students that this requirement was not uniformly applied across all Departments. The review team **recommends** that, by January 2014, the University should ensure that its expectation that external examiners' reports for taught programmes are shared with all students is implemented across the University.

### **Assessment and standards**

1.12 The University's procedures for the design, approval, monitoring and review of its assessment strategies are effective in enabling students to demonstrate that they have achieved the learning outcomes for their programme of study.

1.13 Assessment and examination methods for Tripos and master's degrees are set out in the University's Ordinances . Following internal consultation, the University adopted the recommendation from the 2008 Institutional Audit that the award of the BA Honours degree should involve completion of Part II of the Tripos.

1.14 The appropriateness of assessment methods is considered as part of the course approval and review process. Programme specifications are required to indicate assessment methods and how they address the learning outcomes, including any PSRB requirements. Where there is shared teaching between Tripos and master's students, the University differentiates at assessment, not at the point of teaching.

1.15 The Board of Examinations is responsible for arrangements for the conduct of all University written examinations. Proposals from Faculty Boards for changes in assessment methods, titles of papers, or examination requirements must be published in the 'Reporter' and may require a change to the regulations. Faculty Boards and Degree Committees are required to publish the marking and classification criteria for their courses to students and to send links to this information to ESP. The Board of Examinations Examiners' Guide 2012-13 requires all examination scripts and submitted work to be marked anonymously. Dissertations and examination papers are double-blind marked, with the exception of purely numerical answers. Boards of Examiners are responsible for each part of Tripos. In July 2010, responsibility for the examination outcomes of master's degrees was devolved to Degree Committees from the Board of Graduate Studies (BGS), but BGS has retained approval for Doctoral degree candidates.

1.16 The University is responsible for the summative examination of its degrees, and College work does not contribute to the summative assessment for the award of the BA degree. For Tripos students, formative assessment and feedback is delivered largely

through College supervisions. Tripos students can access their College supervision reports through 'CamCORS', an online reporting system. In cases where the Tripos includes Preliminary Examinations, permission can be requested to release exam scripts to students for formative purposes. Return of summative examination scripts to students is not normally permitted, but Faculty Boards may make a case to GBEC for disclosure. The student written submission commented on a lack of clarity regarding Faculty decision-making in respect of summatively assessed scripts being returned to students for formative use. Postgraduate students receive formative feedback from their Faculty or Departmental supervisor and access termly supervisor reports through the Cambridge Graduate Supervision Reporting System (CGSRS). Students who met the review team did not make reference to the CGSRS, but highlighted the value of direct contact with their supervisors.

1.17 A dedicated area of the website provides advice and guidance on good academic practice and plagiarism to students and staff, and increasing numbers of courses are utilising plagiarism detection software.

### **Setting and maintaining programme standards**

1.18 The University's procedures for the design, approval, monitoring and review of its programmes are effective in setting and maintaining standards, and enable students to demonstrate the learning outcomes for their programme of study.

1.19 Policies and procedures for the design, approval, monitoring and review of programmes are set out on the ESP website and the General Board applies proportionate scrutiny for the approval and review of programmes. Major developments, such as a new Tripos, taught master's degree or professional doctorate, require the University's full legislative process, with final discussion and approval by the Regent House. The introduction of a new MPhil or MRes course and non-member awards require the approval of the General Board. Other changes, such as revisions to titles of examination papers, may be approved by an ESP officer under delegated authority and reported to the GBEC and in the 'Reporter'. For approval of a new course or a major change to programmes, the initial consultation process includes the Council of the cognate School and Faculty Board or Degree Committee. For Tripos, Colleges are also consulted via the Senior Tutors' Committee (STC) with regard to the provision of supervisions.

1.20 Formal course approval is not undertaken by a panel but by the GBEC on behalf of the General Board. The GBEC receives a collection of documents, which form the course proposal. A proforma is used for graduate courses, but there is no comparable document for a new Tripos proposal which, the team were informed, is a relatively rare occurrence. However, guidance is provided regarding the information required for the approval of new or substantially revised Triposes, postgraduate courses and other certificates and diplomas. Proposals for new master's awards are considered by the cognate Faculty Degree Committee while new Triposes are considered by the Faculty Board; both then proceed to the GBEC. ESP assists with the development of the proposal and the drafting of regulations. The minimum time taken from proposal to final approval of a new degree course is approximately two years, and the team found evidence of an effectively iterative process.

1.21 External participation in the design and approval of programmes varies depending on the programme, but is usually limited to programmes with PSRB or learned society accreditation. The review team considered that the absence of a requirement for externality in the approval process is out of alignment with the Expectations of the relevant section of the Quality Code for institutions to apply independence and objectivity at key stages of programme approval. The review team **recommends** that by the start of 2013-14, the

University should meet the Expectation for external participation in the course approval process across all programmes, as set out in the Quality Code.

1.22 The General Board reviews the effectiveness of the University's programmes through its periodic Learning and Teaching Review (LTR) process, which runs on a six-year cycle. There are clear terms of reference and specific guidelines for review members on the objectives of the review and the procedures involved. The schedule of periodic reviews is approved by the General Board, and all LTR reports and responses are considered by GBEC. A one-year follow-up to each review is conducted to monitor progress on the original review recommendations. The University considers external participation in the monitoring and review of existing programmes to be an integral and valuable part of the process, in particular through the input of external examiners and the periodic accreditation reviews by PSRBs and learned societies. LTR panels include an external member and, since 2011, a student. The review team concluded that the University has maintained a robust and effective system for the review of the standards of its programmes, which was identified as good practice in the 2008 Institutional Audit.

1.23 Programme monitoring is undertaken through teaching committees, or equivalent, which oversee programmes to ensure that they remain current and relevant, and that standards are maintained. The Annual Quality Update (AQU) system provides a light-touch approach and allows the GBEC to monitor local review processes. The self-evaluation notes that the AQUs have become more analytical, as recommended in the 2008 Institutional Audit. In addition to receiving external examiners' reports and an annual summary report, feedback is also available to GBEC from Faculty and Departmental 'Quality Contacts', together with student feedback, including the outcomes of national surveys.

### **Subject benchmarks**

1.24 The University makes appropriate use of subject benchmark statements and qualification statements in the design, approval, delivery and review of its programmes, which inform the standard of its awards.

1.25 The GBEC advises Faculties and Departments to refer to subject benchmarks when designing new programmes, and the ESP website provides detailed guidance on developing proposals for new or substantially revised courses, including a link to subject benchmark statements. Programme specifications must indicate any subject benchmarks and/or PSRB requirements relevant to the course.

1.26 There is no explicit request for comment on the use of subject benchmark statements on the external examiners' report coversheet. However, the LTR Terms of Reference invite consideration of any 'relevant subject benchmarks' and any 'requirements of PSRBs', and the external panel member brings a national and/or international perspective to discussions.

1.27 Overall, the work of the GBEC, with support and advice from ESP, provides the institution with effective oversight and management of its academic standards. The review team identified the central direction and timely support for the management of academic standards given by the General Board Education Committee and Educational and Student Policy to be a **feature of good practice**.

## 2 Quality of learning opportunities

### Outcome

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

### Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1 The University upholds professional standards for teaching and support for learning.

2.2 Academic staff are not required to complete Higher Education Academy (HEA)-accredited or other teaching qualifications. The student written submission expressed some concern about an apparent lack of interest in training and the variability of teaching quality, although the team found no systematic evidence to support this.

2.3 The staff appointment process includes a thorough assessment of teaching potential. New probationary lecturers undertake a compulsory Pathways in Higher Education Practice (PHEP) course. The course has a good range of options available in academic practice covering both teaching and supervisory skills and it is delivered via a combination of face-to-face, online and blended learning approaches. New staff commented that this had been valuable in explaining how the University worked. Effective teaching is a condition of progressing through probation and subsequent promotion, and the criteria for Senior Lecturer appointments include 'sustained excellence in teaching'. Briefings are provided for staff who wish to gain Fellowship (FHEA) status.

2.4 Mentoring is in place for new staff, although it takes different forms across different departments and in many cases includes peer observation. Mentoring is explored during LTRs and recommendations for improvement are made when necessary. Guidance on mentoring is provided centrally on the Centre for Personal and Professional Development (PPD) webpages and the topic was also explored in an ESP Learning and Teaching Support event in April 2010.

2.5 The Learning and Teaching Innovation Fund provides grants of between £10-20,000 for innovative practice in learning and teaching in accordance with the aims of the Learning and Teaching Strategy. One of the stated criteria is 'engagement with and feedback from students'. In 2011-12, these awards were made for a range of projects mainly featuring the use of online and information technology. Teaching innovation is also recognised through the Pilkington Prize and senior staff commented on the considerable kudos accrued from the 12 prizes awarded annually.

2.6 The Learning and Teaching Support Network run by ESP holds an average of four workshops per year on a theme relevant to learning and teaching. Themes may be identified by ESP during the course of their analysis of Departmental responses to AQUs or can be suggested by staff. Staff reported that attendance at the workshops is healthy.

2.7 Students were generally very positive about the supervision system, recognising it as a highly distinctive and valuable aspect of the Cambridge experience. Students also valued the opportunity to experience supervision from a range of staff with varying experience and levels of seniority.

2.8 In response to the 2008 Institutional Audit, training for postgraduate research (PGR) students who undertake undergraduate supervisions was introduced. The STC has oversight of training, and during 2010-11 supervision training for graduates was selected as an

enhancement theme on which Departments were required to report in their AQU submission. The AQU 2010-11 report confirms that training is available via the Centre for PPD, as part of the Researcher Development Programme, and that graduate supervisors must complete the training before supervising undergraduates. Different programmes are run to meet the training needs of PGR students across the various disciplines. PGR students who teach can also participate in the Teaching Associate Programme (TAP) which is accredited by the HEA and gives Associate (AHEA) status. The AQU report also notes a general lack of refresher training for supervisors and sets out recommendations for continuing training which are under consideration. The review team **affirms** the action taken by the GBEC to enhance the quality of supervisions given by PGR students.

2.9 Training is in place for new supervisors of PGR students and is an expectation of the BGS. New staff confirmed that they were not permitted to supervise PGR students until training had been completed, and there is a high level of satisfaction with training. Feedback from the 2011 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) expressed some dissatisfaction with supervision (see paragraph 2.25).

## Learning resources

2.10 The extensive range of learning resources provided by the University enables students to achieve their learning outcomes.

2.11 The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Planning and Resources) has oversight of resource allocation and the annual planning round which places academic plans in a wider strategic and financial context. Very substantial resources are available through the University and College libraries. Students reported some variability in the provision of the different College libraries, but the vast majority were highly enthusiastic about library resources and the 2011 National Student Survey (NSS) scores for library and IT provision were recorded at over 90 per cent. Postgraduate students reported that they were generally able to access all the primary and online resources they required. Many students were highly complimentary about the service provided by the University's libraries, notably the speed of the response to requests. The review team identified the accessibility of the extensive library resources and the service provided to students as a **feature of good practice**.

2.12 A review of teaching and learning support services in 2008 established the Teaching and Learning Services Steering Group (TLSSG), a sub-committee of GBEC, to administer a rolling development programme for pedagogic support. The review also extended the remit of the University Library to include the Centre for Applied Research in Educational Technologies (CARET), which has developed a range of innovative projects to support teaching and research using leading technologies.

2.13 The AQU 2010-11 summary report identified a number of innovative practices in the use of e-resources and virtual learning environments (VLEs) by Faculties and Departments. The student written submission commented on the variability of the provision of VLEs across the University, although in meetings, students interpreted this variation as a reasonable reflection of different disciplinary and Departmental approaches. The University plans to adopt Moodle as its VLE in the near future.

2.14 In 2012, the Council commissioned a cross-institutional review of IT provision, the outcomes of which are currently being considered. The report recommended a new Information Services and Systems Committee to provide greater coordination between the different parts of the University's computing services.

2.15 The LTR effectively monitors the resourcing of learning and teaching and student views on the use of resources. AQUs also provide an annual overview of resource use and Departmental plans.

### **Student voice**

2.16 There is evidence of student representation at all levels of the University and students have membership of all the principal decision-making bodies.

2.17 Students are represented on the Council, General Board and STC, and staff and students value the meetings held between senior University officers and student representatives. Each Tripos has a Director of Studies Committee which reports to the Senior Tutors' Standing Committee on Education, which in turn regularly brings issues to the attention of the GBEC. Not all arrangements for discussion with students are formalised, but the General Board considers that opportunities to provide explicit and effective arrangements for obtaining and considering student opinion, acting upon it as appropriate, and providing prompt and detailed feedback to students on the outcomes of the consideration of their feedback should be in place in all Faculties and Departments. Discussion with staff and students confirmed that each Department normally has a Student Staff Joint Committee (SSJC).

2.18 In January 2012, the BGS was reorganised in order to give increased attention to individual graduate cases. The University decided that student membership would no longer be appropriate, given the large volume of reserved business now being considered by the BGS. The quality assurance aspects relating to PGR programmes have subsequently been transferred to GBEC.

2.19 Meetings with staff and students confirmed that students had many formal and informal opportunities to give feedback on their experience of teaching. Graduate students who gave supervision confirmed that undergraduates provided regular feedback on their performance as supervisors, and it was noted that Directors of Studies intervened if the quality of supervision fell below student expectations.

2.20 Student membership of LTRs, which became standard practice from 2011-12, is valued and makes an effective contribution to the review process. Briefings on the role and responsibilities of LTR team members are provided by ESP. As part of its evidence base, the LTR considers a summary report on and examples of the Departments' student feedback for the last three years.

2.21 The University provides guidance on support for student representatives in order to encourage engagement with formal representation opportunities. Although the guidance contains examples of good practice, students met by the review team commented on the variability of support offered across Departments, and the student written submission noted that the resources for training students to participate in quality assurance procedures were inadequate. A request from the Cambridge University Students' Union (CUSU) for funding to effect improvements has been approved by the University.

2.22 AQUs provide opportunities for issues about student support and engagement to be considered. In 2011, an overview of Faculty and Departmental arrangements for student feedback surveys was considered by a General Board Working Party and, as a result, revised guidance on Departmental feedback was developed in order to improve student representation.

2.23 Surveys are conducted at Faculty and Departmental levels across the University, but these are not collated and analysed centrally. The review team **recommends** that by the

end of the 2013-14 academic year, the University should take steps to collate and analyse the results of Faculty and Departmental student surveys as part of their routine annual quality monitoring.

2.24 The University gathers feedback from students using the NSS, the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and the PRES. Faculties develop action plans in response to NSS results for the consideration of the GBEC, which also discusses the outcomes of the three national surveys. The recent increase in the participation rate in the PTES from 2010-12 is indicative of the University's drive to obtain feedback from master's students.

2.25 Following a relatively low performance in the PRES (2011), the BGS developed an ad hoc follow-up survey for all PGR students seeking their views on supervision, which will be administered following the 2013 PRES, for future consideration by the BGS. The review team **affirms** the use of the internal Research Experience Survey, which looks particularly at postgraduate research student views of supervision, and follows up the outcomes of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2011.

### **Management information is used to improve quality and standards**

2.26 The University uses a range of data and management information to safeguard quality and standards and enhance learning opportunities, although it is not always collated and analysed centrally (see paragraphs 2.23 and 2.36).

2.27 GBEC receives and considers a range of quantitative data and student statistics, and it is a published aim of the Learning and Teaching Strategy to improve the use of management information across the University.

2.28 As noted in paragraph 2.24, GBEC gives detailed consideration to the results of NSS, PTES and PRES. Outcomes indicate high levels of satisfaction but response rates are relatively low. The self-evaluation document commented on the challenges of obtaining reliable data on PhD completion rates, although the official returns indicate a higher-than-average completion rate compared to the sector.

2.29 Equality Assurance Assessments consider data to monitor different categories of students covered by the 2010 Equality Act. The GBEC has established an Equality and Diversity Standing Committee which receives annual data on gender attainment and equality and diversity, and reports to the GBEC. It can consult; consider external requirements; commission ad hoc working groups to address specific issues, such as gender; and make recommendations to the GBEC. The Standing Committee's remit covers a range of issues and demonstrates effective engagement with Faculties and Departments.

### **Admission to the University**

2.30 The University's admissions policy and procedures are clear, fair and consistently applied.

2.31 The University Undergraduate Admissions Committee has institutional oversight of undergraduate admissions and reviews procedures. The Colleges, as separate legal entities, are responsible for the selection and admission of undergraduate students. The Undergraduate Admissions Policy applies to and is implemented by the 29 Colleges that admit undergraduates, and responsibility for widening participation is shared across the University and the Colleges. There is a very comprehensive and useful website for prospective applicants with sections targeted at prospective students, parents and teachers.

2.32 Students did not raise any particular issues with the admissions process. The postgraduate admissions process, overseen by the BGS, has recently been updated with an online application system, which has resulted in an improved response time. Senior staff confirmed they were working towards a response time of three to four days and PGR students commented on improvements, although some PGT students reported difficulties with delays. Students were aware of the complaints process. Information provided for prospective PGR students in the offer booklet is thorough.

2.33 Training is provided by PPD, and new staff confirmed that training was mandatory for those involved in admissions.

## Complaints and appeals

2.34 The University's complaints and appeals procedures are generally effective.

2.35 Comprehensive information on complaints and appeals policies and procedures is readily available to students on the Student Gateway. The student written submission raised an issue about the number of different complaints and appeals procedures and their duration. The review team learned that the University is reviewing its appeals and complaints procedure, taking into account the revised *Chapter B9: Academic appeals and student complaints* of the Quality Code and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) framework. The University has established a working group and a scoping paper has been produced for the internal review. The University also commissioned an audit, as part of the Audit Committee's annual programme of internal audits, of the complaints process. One of its key recommendations was to review stage three complaints which were taking longer than the specified three months to resolve.

2.36 The Deputy Academic Secretary ensures institutional compliance with OIA findings. Recent feedback from the OIA indicates that the number of complaints received about the University is less than the average for an institution of its type. However, the University has no oversight of appeals or complaints raised within the individual Colleges and has no immediate plans to effect this. The review team **recommends** that by the end of the 2013-14 academic year, the University should ensure that it is informed of the nature and extent of complaints and appeals within Colleges.

## Career advice and guidance

2.37 There is a very well-organised Careers Service, providing comprehensive information, advice and guidance to all students.

2.38 The University's Careers Service is governed by the Careers Syndicate with external membership and its aims and objectives are clearly detailed on the University's website. Although both the University's self-evaluation and the student written submission concur with the view that preparation for employment is not the main purpose of a Cambridge education, there is evidence of a high uptake by students of the Careers Service for advice and guidance, particularly in the final year of undergraduate study.

2.39 The Careers Service provides an extensive range of activities for students including preparing curricula vitae and other workshops, which were described as 'excellent', and there is evidence of working in partnership with Colleges to run events such as taster days. The Skills Portal website contains statements about the skills that students can be expected to develop for each Tripos. Data relating to the destinations of graduates is available on the website which can be disaggregated to programme level and indicates a generally high rate



of employability for its graduates. Students and staff commented very positively about the level and quality of support provided by the Careers Service.

2.40 The Careers Service makes an annual report about its activities to the Council, as well as regular reports to other relevant committees, and there is evidence of strategic input from the GBEC into the work of the Careers Service.

2.41 The review team identified the wide-ranging support provided for all students by the Careers Service and the engagement of the Careers Service with the wider University to be a **feature of good practice**.

## **Supporting disabled students**

2.42 The University's management of the quality of learning opportunities to meet the entitlement of disabled students is very effective.

2.43 The Disability Resource Centre (DRC) is a dedicated unit for the development, implementation and monitoring of policy, and an integrated, holistic approach to the provision of student support with particular regard to disability. The DRC reports to the Head of ESP and also into the deliberative structure via the GBEC's Standing Committee on Equality and Diversity and the STC to which it delivers an annual report. This report is considered by the GBEC, reflecting institutional and strategic management of the quality of learning opportunities for disabled students.

2.44 The Equality and Diversity Standing Committee and the BGS consider matters relating to disabled undergraduate and postgraduate students respectively. Since 2012, an officer from the Educational and Student Policy team has met regularly with the Student Links team to better understand issues relating to specific groups, for example disabled students, the Women's Campaign, mature students and international students. The review team identified Student Links, the joint CUSU and University initiative which brings together representatives from equality and diversity groups and provides a formal channel for the University to consult with students, to be a **feature of good practice**.

2.45 A designated area of the website provides information for prospective and current students and staff with a disability, which includes admissions procedures. Training for interviewers on interviewing disabled students is provided by the DRC in consultation with the Colleges.

2.46 Learning disability advisers within the DRC hold specialist qualifications, and many of the study skills tutors engaged by DRC hold a certificate from the Professional Association of Teachers and Assessors of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties, and are expected to have experience of delivering within a higher education setting. The DRC also works effectively with Disability Liaison Officers located in each Faculty/Department. The further training and development of the Disability Liaison Officer network was a priority for the DRC in 2011-12.

2.47 ESP provides comprehensive guidance to staff on learning, teaching and assessment practices for disabled students. A Code of Practice on Reasonable Adjustments for Disabled Students sets out guidance on the support available, and there is a procedure for the consideration of requests for alternative modes of assessment. Students are permitted to record lectures, and lecture materials are often made available in advance and distinguish between essential and desirable reading.

2.48 The University recorded a rise in the number of disclosed disabilities and an increase in demand for support services during 2011-12. Once the University is alerted to a

specific need, an individual study plan is actioned. Specialist support is available for a range of disabilities, and the team noted some particularly interesting and commendable research initiatives undertaken in the areas of support for Asperger's syndrome and autism. The University uses donations and bursaries to fund additional facilities for disabled students, and there is also an International Disabled Students' Fund. Students who do not qualify for Disabled Student Allowances may apply for a bursary. The Library website provides information for disabled students on assistive technologies. The University Counselling Service has a dedicated Mental Health Advisor, and the Careers Service has a Careers Advisor who supports disabled students and provides information on the Careers website.

2.49 There is a Disability Access Guide and regular meetings are held between the DRC and those with responsibility for estates management, planning and resource allocation and fire safety. The review team heard that the University is currently revisiting its Access Audit.

2.50 The review team identified the highly effective support provided to disabled students through the specially trained staff in the Disability Resource Centre and the network of Disability Liaison Officers in Departments to be a **feature of good practice**.

### **Supporting international students**

2.51 Overall, the University's policies and procedures are applied appropriately to support the quality of learning opportunities for international students.

2.52 The University's Learning and Teaching Strategy 2012-15 aims to provide a 'stimulating educational environment and attract and support outstanding students from the UK and overseas'. The University provides comprehensive guidance for international students on its website.

2.53 As an entry requirement, international students are normally required to have an IELTS (International English Language Testing System) score of 7 or 7.5. The University provides additional language support for personal, academic and professional needs, and students with the minimum English Language requirement may also attend pre-sessional courses.

2.54 The International Office works effectively with senior University officers, Colleges and Departments to ensure an integrated approach to the provision of a good student experience. It also provides support to students regarding UK Border Agency (UKBA) requirements and visas. CUSU publishes a guide for international students which includes information about arriving in the UK and about Cambridge in particular. An ESP officer meets regularly with the Student Links team to better understand issues relating to international students.

2.55 The student written submission sought clarification on how the quality of induction for international students was assured. Staff who met the team stated that a general orientation was provided and that consideration was being given to how arrangements for integrating overseas students into the Cambridge academic environment and the wider culture could be enhanced. The team noted that the Careers Service was running a number of initiatives to assist international students in finding employment when they return to their home and others wishing to work overseas after graduating from Cambridge. The review team **recommends** that by the start of 2014-15, the University, Colleges, Faculties and Departments should work collectively to put in place an integrated system of support for international students, particularly during induction.

## Supporting postgraduate research students

2.56 Effective support is provided for PGR students to complete their studies and to enable staff to fulfil their responsibilities.

2.57 Departments make recommendations to the BGS on the admission of PGR students and set subject-specific entry conditions. The recently centralised application system (see paragraph 2.32) requires only a single application to the University, and PGR students stated that decision-making and communication with applicants had improved as a consequence. It is also anticipated that the new system will improve correspondence with the UKBA and facilitate more timely access to funding sources.

2.58 The University's Graduate Code of Practice articulates the role and responsibilities of supervisors, Departments, Faculties and Schools, and the entitlement of students to supervision. The Code also provides guidance on dissertations, expectations for undertaking research, and the relationship between supervisor and student. The review team heard that, rather than being prescribed, the student-supervisor relationship is organic and develops in accordance with the relevant Departmental ethos.

2.59 There is an expectation that all PGR students should receive generic skills training. The Researcher Development Committee oversees the skills agenda for PGR students and postdoctoral researchers. A recent exploration of student engagement in this area has highlighted the ways in which Departments and Faculties have worked collaboratively in the development and delivery of graduate training skills.

2.60 The review team heard that there is a strong bespoke element to graduate training, which produces desirable variations across the University. Skills training at College and Department level is tailored to the individual needs of each PGR student, and students commented positively on the efficacy of the research and transferable skills courses which were extremely popular. Clear information is provided regarding access to support and guidance, including the complaints procedure. Assistance is readily available for students who commence their studies later than scheduled. Students keep an individual training record and are asked to analyse their skills development. The review team identified the wide-ranging programme of research skills training provided to postgraduate research students by the University, Colleges, Faculties and Departments as a **feature of good practice**.

2.61 PGR students who met the team commented that although they do not expect to be 'spoon-fed', the flow of information within Departments was variable, with some being more successful at fostering a sense of community than others. Although some PGR students said that they had little involvement with Graduate Schools, others commented that they offered valuable skills seminars and welcomed the way in which the Graduate Schools brought students from different disciplines together.

2.62 There is no formal approval process for the continuation of graduate studies after the initial recommendation at the end of year one and middle of year four, but progress is monitored through an annual report and as a function of the close relationship between student and supervisor.

2.63 PGR students are selected for undergraduate supervision by College Directors of Studies and mandatory training in supervision is provided, supplemented by discipline-specific training within Departments and Schools (see paragraph 2.8). Tutors oversee the delivery of teaching by PGR students, and undergraduates can provide feedback on supervision through the tutorial system.

## **Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements**

2.64 The quality of learning opportunities delivered as part of collaborative arrangements is managed effectively to enable students to achieve their awards.

2.65 The University currently operates four types of collaborative provision which include partnerships with approved University Partner Institutes (UPIs). The University does not offer any joint degrees, although a number of programmes are offered where students receive teaching from another institution.

2.66 The University maintains a register of collaborative partners and UPIs, and the 'host' Faculties and Departments make information about partners available on their websites.

2.67 Proposals for collaborative arrangements originate in Departments and are submitted to the General Board. Departments must demonstrate that the proposed partner institution is of sufficiently high standing and that teaching staff are appropriately qualified and competent, with the capacity to deliver at a standard equivalent to a Cambridge award. Clear lines of reporting and responsibility for quality and standards are established with partners in accordance with the General Guidelines on Collaboration Policy. The policy also articulates arrangements for student support, measures for resolving disputes between partners, and an exit strategy procedure.

2.68 Programme specifications are produced for all collaborative programmes that have a taught element, whether at undergraduate or postgraduate level, which are aligned to the FHEQ and published on the University's website.

2.69 All PGR students registered for awards through a collaborative partner have a second supervisor who is Cambridge-based. All UPI students must be members of a College and have a designated College Tutor, although there is some variability of practice. Careful attention is given to the development of induction programmes to avoid duplication.

2.70 Programmes with a collaborative taught element are subject to the same external examiner reporting and response processes as other University programmes. Such programmes are also subject to the LTR process when the host Faculty or Department is undergoing a review.

## **Flexible, distributed and e-learning**

2.71 The quality of learning opportunities delivered through flexible and distributed learning, including e-learning, is managed effectively.

2.72 The University provides a limited range of flexible and distributed learning (FDL) opportunities, primarily through the Institute for Continuing Education (ICE). The GBEC is responsible for approving new FDL programmes and the review team heard that the University plans to improve the coordination and promotion of FDL activity through the development of a new website.

2.73 Typically, FDL students are not present at the University for all of their teaching and have the opportunity to submit their assignments remotely. Teaching on FDL programmes at ICE is delivered by University staff or ICE tutors, overseen by the Director of ICE. The ICE appoints tutors, who are supported by a tutor training programme, supplemented by course management handbooks for tutors, assessors and examiners.

2.74 Information about programmes, including programme specifications, is accessible on the ICE website and schedules of events are uploaded on a weekly basis. Student handbooks are made available in advance of the start of the course. Methods of learner support are outlined in the handbook and one-to-one tutorials can be arranged. FDL students have access to tutors and an Academic Programme Manager, and the same facilities as College-based students. Students undertaking online or short courses have ready access to ICE staff.

2.75 The ICE takes responsibility for the quality assurance of FDL programmes, which are subject to the same processes of review and external examining as standard programmes. External examiners' reports seen by the team comment positively on FDL programmes and on the use of the VLE in particular.

2.76 The review team heard that ICE is trialling new survey software to facilitate online student feedback and that there are plans to establish a VLE-based forum for student representation.

### **Work-based and placement learning**

2.77 The quality of learning opportunities delivered through work-based and placement learning is effectively managed.

2.78 The University's policies and procedures for work placement are approved by the General Board and managed by ESP. There are limited numbers of courses offering placements and these are located in areas with a professional requirement for work-based learning, such as Engineering, Architecture, Medicine and Languages. Programme regulations in these disciplinary areas clearly set out placement requirements.

2.79 Faculties are responsible for articulating the responsibilities of students, placement providers and Departments, particularly in respect of reporting requirements. Students on placements maintain contact with supervisors and continue to receive supervision. Placement providers receive a booklet on the operation of the placement, including guidance on how the placement will be reviewed. Students are asked to contribute to the review by completing a questionnaire at the end of the placement.

2.80 Monitoring and review of the quality of placement opportunities is conducted through the LTR and external examining processes, as well as through the relevant PSRBs. According to the external examiner's report for the PGCE, the course produces high-quality professionals with sound subject knowledge.

### **Student charter**

2.81 The University does not have a student charter or single equivalent document.

2.82 Information regarding the mutual expectations of the University and its students is available in a number of formats. For example, the Student Gateway provides a range of regulatory, academic, financial, support and disciplinary information. The Learning and Teaching Strategy also makes clear the academic expectations of students.

2.83 The Graduate Code of Practice sets out the mutual expectations of Departments, supervisory teams and PGR students, but a recent consultation with CUSU sabbatical officers indicated that a student charter would not be compatible with the University's structure. The University is therefore considering whether a single document is desirable, and there are ongoing discussions between the University and the CUSU about ways in

which the mutual expectations of staff and students might be most effectively articulated. The review team **affirms** the steps taken by the University and CUSU to determine the means by which the mutual expectations of the University, Colleges, Faculties, Departments and students are identified and disseminated to the student body.

### 3 Information about learning opportunities

#### Outcome

The University of Cambridge **meets UK expectations** that the information it produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities offered is fit-for-purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

3.1 Information for prospective undergraduates about the learning opportunities offered is provided primarily through the Undergraduate Prospectus, which is overseen by the Publications Sub-committee of the Undergraduate Admissions Committee. Information for graduate students is provided through the online Graduate Prospectus and individual Faculties and Departments. For current students, information about individual Colleges is published by the relevant College, and the primary source of information for current students about their course is their Faculty or Department, but there is no single overarching body that approves the quality of the information produced. However, published information is evaluated through the LTR process, where recommendations are made about the content and quality of the information provided, and the outcomes of the LTRs are reviewed by the GBEC. Information about support services is approved and quality assured by the support service provider.

3.2 The University's mission statement, core values and governance structures are clearly displayed on the website, and the University provides an extensive range of information to its students through a variety of channels. Students commented positively on the wide array of information available, and in particular on the usefulness of the Student Gateway and CamTOOLS to access University and College information.

3.3 Students also commented favourably on the wide variety and accessibility of information available about studying at each College, and they felt it had been useful, particularly during the admissions process. However, there were some negative observations about the accuracy and quality of information across the collegiate system and with respect to several courses, notably in Medicine. The University has begun to try to improve the user experience by providing a new template which sets out expectations for the structure of each Departmental website, although the template does not extend to College websites.

3.4 Students were very positive about the information provided by the Careers Service throughout their time at University. By contrast, students expressed concern that information provided by the CUSU Advice Service contained numerous inconsistencies, which they again attributed to the collegiate system. However, students also noted that there is a feedback mechanism to report any inaccuracies through the SSJCs and the CUSU.

3.5 Some students have access to external examiners' reports through the University website, although as previously noted (paragraph 1.11), student awareness of these reports is not high.

3.6 The information detailed in HEFCE 2011/18, and in particular the Key Information Set and the Wider Information Set, is up-to-date and accessible to the University's stakeholders.

3.7 Overall, the information about the learning opportunities available to students is comprehensive and accessible, but varies in quality and accuracy, and the approval and quality assurance of information has limited institutional oversight. The review team **recommends** that by the start of 2013-14 academic year, the University should establish a central mechanism to secure institutional oversight of the fitness-for-purpose, accessibility and trustworthiness of published information.

## 4 Enhancement of learning opportunities

### Outcome

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

4.1 The University's approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities is outlined in the Learning and Teaching Strategy. GBEC is responsible for championing enhancement at an institutional level with some operational responsibility devolved to the new Teaching and Learning joint sub-committee of the GBEC and STC. Additionally, GBEC liaises with the STC acting as the College link with the University on enhancement. In providing administrative support to the STC and Graduate Tutors' Committee (GTC), ESP also facilitates the sharing of enhancement issues. The University claims a 'dual-pronged' approach to enhancement in that it also enables Faculties and Departments and the Colleges to set the agenda for their own enhancement activities rather than follow a central directive.

4.2 The University uses the LTR process to disseminate good practice between Faculties and Departments. In respect of the Colleges, the STC undertakes academic audits of each College to report on and disseminate good practice and quality enhancement proposals. AQUs are also used to identify and prompt discussion on University-wide quality enhancement themes, such as innovation, best practice and developing student skills. Feedback on quality enhancement themes is more widely sought, for example through the Centre for PPD, the Transferable Skills Committee and from students through the representation system. AQUs provide a clear commentary on issues relating to University-wide enhancement for the attention of the GBEC and it is evident that the University takes proactive steps to address these issues. For example, Departments are asked to complete a proforma on their quality enhancement plans in response to AQU recommendations.

4.3 The University facilitates Learning and Teaching Lunches which provide a platform for staff from across the Collegiate University to discuss and disseminate good practice and enhancement activity, and staff commented favourably on the value of this exercise.

4.4 Enhancement initiatives are typically organised at College or Departmental level, but the University has introduced centralised, institutional enhancement activities for what it considers to be 'high-impact' initiatives such as the Trans-skills project, Language Centre, IT Review, Gender Report and the Learning and Teaching Innovation Fund.

4.5 The review team were informed that the Trans-skills project, which supports students' transition from school to University and was valued by staff, had come to an end. The team were also informed that plans were in place to continue its work. The review team **affirms** the continuation of the legacy of the Trans-skills project through the establishment of the new Teaching and Learning joint sub-committee.

4.6 The student written submission commented that the University's devolved structure limits the dissemination of good practice. Students are unclear on the institutional approach

to enhancement and how it is defined and implemented. However, students are aware of the opportunities at College level through the supervision system that offer enhancement to learning. Students noted that feedback opportunities on enhancement are numerous, but that the University does not always respond and the encouragement of and support for these activities is 'mixed'.

4.7 The review team found many examples of enhancement activities taking place across the Departments that were having a direct and meaningful impact upon student learning opportunities, and that quality assurance procedures for enhancement are robust and thorough. However, there is limited systematic oversight of enhancement initiatives and no universal agreement of what enhancement means at a University level. The review team **recommends** that the University should take deliberate planned steps to ensure that the nature and purpose of enhancement is clearly identified and agreed across the institution.

## 5 Thematic element

Each academic year, a specific theme relating to higher education provision in England and Northern Ireland is chosen for special attention by QAA's Institutional Review teams. In 2012-13, there is a choice of two themes: First Year Student Experience or Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement. The University, in consultation with its student body, elected to explore the theme of Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement.

### Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The review team explored Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement at the University of Cambridge.

#### Innovations in student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement

5.1 Since 2011, there has been student representation on LTR panels, and student members are briefed on their role by the University. This is seen as a very positive development and the students met by the review team confirmed that they felt like full and valued members of the team. The move by the University to an online voting system (which originated with the CUSU) for elections of student members of Faculty Boards and Councils of the Schools has also been well received. The University acknowledges that gathering feedback from PGR students can be difficult and has designed an internal Research Experience Survey to follow up the outcomes of the PRES (see paragraph 2.25). Student Links, the joint University and CUSU initiative which brings together representatives from equality and diversity groups and provides a formal channel for the University to consult with students, was introduced in 2011 (see paragraph 2.44).

#### Staff experience of/participation in student involvement in quality

5.2 The successful introduction of student representation in LTR reflects the value that staff place on student input to quality processes. The University considers that the implementation of its statutes enables student members to be party to most University business, although students themselves did not share that view in all circumstances. The University has reviewed the elections of student members to Faculty Boards and Councils of the Schools with a view to increasing engagement of the student body. For the 2012 elections to the Councils of the Schools, the Schools were asked to provide a short statement explaining the role and importance of their student members. In addition, the new online election system has increased turn-out and has been well received by students. All new members of the General Board are invited to meet with the Academic Secretary.



Senior University officers are 'critical friends' of the CUSU and Graduate Union sabbatical officers, and hold regular meetings to talk through concerns and issues. Furthermore, in the most recent planning round, the University has provided additional funding to the CUSU to support training for representatives.

### **Acting on student contributions and 'closing the feedback loop'**

The University has an expectation that each Faculty or Department has an SSJC or similar. Committee structures below Faculty level are advisory and the Faculties and Departments manage student involvement in many different ways. It is expected that they will develop and select different modes of communication with students, according to what is most effective for them. The University's oversight of feedback from students at a local level is through the LTRs. The GBEC considers the NSS, PTES and PRES results on behalf of the University and requires follow-up actions from Faculty Boards. The University recognises that NSS results suggest that improvement could be made in changing students' perception of how their feedback is valued and acted upon, and students confirmed this perception in meetings with the team.

## 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](http://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](http://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](http://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 (2012/13) 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.

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