# University of Brighton

## Institutional Review
## by the Quality Assurance Agency
## for Higher Education

March 2013

# Contents

# 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 Brighton. The review took place on 18-21 March 2013 and was conducted by a team of reviewers, as follows:

- Professor V Robinson (reviewer)
- Dr S Ryrie (reviewer)
- Professor K Spelman Miller (reviewer)
- Dr C Stevens (reviewer)
- Ms L Carson (student reviewer)
- Ms B Ollerenshaw (review secretary).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the University of Brighton 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 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 4.

In reviewing the University of Brighton the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The theme is Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[2] Background information about the University of Brighton 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[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/pages/ireni.aspx

# Key findings

## QAA's judgements about the University of Brighton

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

- Academic standards at the University **meet** UK expectations for threshold standards.
- 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**.

## Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following recommendations to the University of Brighton.

- Within one year of the publication of this report strengthen institutional-level oversight of academic standards through the consistent application of institutional policy in faculties and schools (paragraph 1.3.1).
- Within one year of the publication of this report introduce and systematically implement at institutional level a policy for the accreditation of all prior learning and experience in such a way as to secure the credit value of all higher education awards (paragraph 1.4.2).
- Within one year of the publication of this report take steps to ensure that approval and monitoring procedures reflect the risks inherent in different forms of collaborative activity (paragraph 1.4.4).
- Within one year of the publication of this report strengthen institutional-level procedures to ensure that it takes a consistent approach to periodic course review and to course and module modifications (paragraph 1.4.8).
- By the start of the academic year 2013-2014 require all postgraduate research students with teaching responsibilities to be appropriately trained prior to commencing their duties (paragraph 2.10.3).
- By the start of the academic year 2013-2014 ensure in advance that all partner institution staff teaching on courses leading to its awards are appropriately qualified for their role (paragraph 2.11.1).
- By the start of the academic year 2013-2014 strengthen oversight of partner institutions' published information to ensure its accuracy, currency and comprehensiveness (paragraph 3.2).

## Affirmation of action being taken

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

- Agreeing and implementing standard module and course evaluation forms for all undergraduate students (paragraph 2.3.1).

- Improving the completion rate of postgraduate research students (paragraph 2.10.1).
- Increasing student engagement with the student charter (paragraph 2.14).
- Embedding enhancement in quality assurance processes, particularly annual health checks and periodic review, and taking an increasingly systematic approach to disseminating good practice (paragraph 4.1).

## Student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement

Comprehensive student representation and feedback systems are in place, and the University, while aware of the challenges involved (some of which have still to be met), is committed to engaging with students in quality assurance and enhancement, and is taking a proactive approach to doing so.

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.[4]

# About the University of Brighton

The University of Brighton was awarded university status in 1992. It describes its mission as conserving, generating, transmitting and sharing knowledge locally, professionally and globally, with a focus on application for social purpose. It aims to contribute critically to citizenship and to the public good, based on a spirit of enquiry and the active co-production of knowledge amongst staff and students.

The University has three campuses in Brighton, and further campuses in Eastbourne and Hastings. Of its student population of 22,000, almost three-quarters are full-time and 80 per cent are undergraduates. The creation of the Doctoral College for its 450 research students, supported by subject centres in different campuses, reflects a strategic decision to strengthen this area. The University has collaboration agreements with eight local colleges and a small number of more distant ones, and a joint Medical School with the University of Sussex, which was subject to detailed consideration in 2008 in the University's Institutional Audit. Since that time it has remained structurally unchanged.

The University's internal academic organisation is based on five faculties (in addition to the Medical School and Doctoral College), mostly subdivided into schools. Its 550 courses cover a broad range of areas, and half its students are enrolled on courses subject to accreditation or other forms of oversight by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.

Since 2008 the University has made changes to senior staffing, academic organisation and the estate (with, in particular, two new buildings), and has instituted several policy developments: these include moves to improve retention rates, strengthen management information, and heighten engagement with students. The aspirations of the current (2012-2015) Strategic Plan include investment in research, strengthened digital and international activity, a commitment to the centrality of students, and an emphasis on employment and employability.

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

# Explanation of the findings about the University of Brighton

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 operational description and handbook for the review method, also on the QAA website.[7]

# 1 Academic standards

## Outcome

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

## Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1 Academic courses are generally planned, developed and implemented with attention to the levels specified in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*. Evidence for this was found at University, faculty and school levels, in reports of previous engagements with QAA, and, in the overwhelming majority of cases (see paragraph 1.4.2), in the approval and monitoring of the work of partner institutions. QAA reports on the partner institutions visited in the course of this review are similarly positive in tone and content. Members of academic staff appear familiar and comfortable with the external expectations to which their activities are subject.

## Use of external examiners

1.2 The University's use of external examiners meets the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. Procedures associated with external examiners' appointment, induction, support and reporting are scrupulously discharged; the institutional website contains a page for external examiners; responses to their reports (the reports themselves being overwhelmingly positive) are efficiently administered and appropriate in content; and the reports' availability to students meets external expectations. In collaborative activity the same applies: on one occasion, for example, when concern was expressed at an examiner's temporary lack of engagement, the University investigated and resolved the situation in a timely and appropriate fashion.

## Assessment and standards

1.3 The QAA Institutional Audit (2008) recommended that the University keep under review the balance between central policy and local flexibility in assessment and feedback to students. QAA's mid-cycle follow-up of this Audit in 2011, while noting that good progress was being made, identified developments in assessment practice as requiring further attention, and as being potentially of particular interest to the present review team.

1.3.1 The team found that this recommendation has yet to be addressed in full. While the University describes the situation as one in which policies and practices are *applied*,

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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.

instances exist of them being *developed* at faculty level. Hence, one faculty's assessment code of practice includes grading descriptors which differ from those approved by the University (the faculty concerned describes its approach as 'under development'). Another faculty deploys alphanumeric achievement categories and maps alphabetic grades to percentage marks differently from those specified in Regulations, with the potential for inconsistency in the award and use of marks in different parts of the institution. The University expresses confidence that any such disparities (which extend to policies on second marking and the calculation of final awards) will be addressed by the introduction, in September 2013, of institution-wide grade descriptors. Current policies will, however, be implemented for current students. Accordingly the team **recommends** that within one year of the publication of this report the University strengthen institutional-level oversight of academic standards through the consistent application of institutional policy in faculties and schools.

## Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.4      The review team found scope for improvement in the approval, monitoring and review of on-campus and collaborative provision.

1.4.1      In respect of the accreditation of prior achievement, the credit ratings attached to different institutional awards are specified in regulatory documents: an honours degree, for example, normally requires 360 credits, some of which may be awarded by accrediting prior (experiential) learning (described internally as prior achievement). The relevant procedure is set out in the institutional Admissions Policy, supplemented by locally developed subject-related expectations. These expectations, while detailed and embedded in one faculty with extensive experience in this area, are less so elsewhere: accordingly there is no straightforward method for the University to assure itself that they are consistently applied.

1.4.2      A particular issue arose following the approval of a Level 5 Diploma in a partner college. Admission to the Diploma is open to graduates of any discipline and to non-graduates with appropriate experience: admissions decisions are made by the partner, in accordance with the validation agreement. A BA (Hons) in the same subject and with the same partner was subsequently approved, with the partner institution permitted to admit Diplomates to its third year. Since the Diploma bears only 120 credits, graduates acquire an honours degree based on 240 rather than 360 credits (in fact the programme specification describes the BA as consisting of 120 credits) - in practice, two years' work. In addition, the approval procedure lacks the safeguards built into the Accreditation of Prior Achievement Policy. The review team **recommends** that within one year of the publication of this report the University introduce and systematically implement at institutional level a policy for the accreditation of all prior learning and experience in such a way as to secure the credit value of all higher education awards.

1.4.3      In respect of the approval and monitoring of collaborative partnerships, the review team noted that decision-making responsibility is delegated to validation panels without further reference to senior institutional committees. While taking the view that this level of delegation, lacking as it does the benefit of senior institutional-level oversight, risks inconsistent decision-making, the team found no evidence of academic standards having been compromised by it.

1.4.4      The University is introducing, with effect from September 2013, a new quality assurance regime for some but not all collaborative provision. This regime will apply to further education colleges but not to smaller specialist providers and overseas partners, where risk appears potentially greater. Under the proposed procedure, reports on large further education providers will be considered institutionally, with responsibility for smaller providers remaining with schools. While the University considers current policies and practices adequate to mitigate the risks inherent in the different kinds of collaboration, the review team found that the University's oversight of its collaborative provision currently takes

insufficient account of the need to identify and manage the levels of risk which can exist in partnerships of this kind. The team **recommends** that within one year of the publication of this report the University take steps to ensure that its approval and monitoring procedures reflect the risks inherent in different forms of collaborative activity.

1.4.5    In respect of internal review, the University operates annual and periodic review systems. Annual monitoring (known as academic health checks) aims to ensure that courses remain current and satisfactory. The reliability of this approach, which was until recently somewhat uncertain as a result of the lack of evidence and analysis contained in a small minority of reports, has now been strengthened and is fit for purpose.

1.4.6    Since academic year 2007-2008 periodic review has ceased to involve revalidation, increasingly assuming an enhancement focus. In meetings, however, the review team heard different accounts of the balance between assurance and enhancement, and was informed that it varies across the institution. In consequence, no formal termination procedure exists. The team learned in particular that, with the anxiety associated with revalidation removed and enhancement seen as a continuing process not a quinquennial event, this arrangement has been well received internally. It follows, however, that the University depends on the professionalism of teaching staff and faculty-level managers, combined with annual health checks and external examiners' reports, to fulfil the responsibilities associated with revalidation. In the absence of examples of programmes which had either ceased to meet external benchmarks or had been identified by the University as requiring reapproval, the team was unable to determine whether these responsibilities would be consistently discharged should the need arise.

1.4.7    In respect of course and module modifications, the distinction between major course changes (which require an approval event) and minor changes (which do not) is drawn on the basis of what the University terms the professional judgement of senior members of faculties combined with discussion with relevant officers. The review team found this system unclear, inadequate to ensure that the cumulative effect of changes over time is adequately addressed, and vulnerable to inconsistent interpretation. While the University identified this as an issue requiring consideration in March 2011, a year later, when it reached a similar conclusion, no action had been taken.

1.4.8    In the light of the factors explained in paragraphs 1.4.6-1.4.7, the review team **recommends** that within one year of the publication of this report the University strengthen institutional-level procedures to ensure that it takes a consistent approach to periodic course review and to course and module modifications.

## Subject benchmarks

1.5    For on-campus courses and those offered at partner institutions, benchmark statements are used consistently in course planning, and routinely recorded.

## Conclusion

1.6    In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified. Of the five sets of expectations concerned, the University has met three. Of the two it has not met, the risk to academic standards involved is judged to be high in one (with which three recommendations are associated) and moderate in the other.

1.6.1    Of the four recommendations deriving from the two 'not met' sections, three relate to variable practice resulting from what the review team considers the University's devolution of responsibility for the development as well as implementation of policy. In respect of two of these recommendations the University states that its implementation, in September 2013, of a strengthened assessment regime will ensure institution-wide consistency. This introduction signifies an institutional awareness of the need to strengthen current policy.

1.6.2     The two remaining recommendations relate primarily to collaborative provision. Of these, one reflects the review team's view that plans to strengthen the scrutiny of some partner institutions will not be applied to those which pose the greater risk. The University takes a different view, but the team's concern should nonetheless be afforded careful consideration. Secondly, the recommendation explained in paragraph 1.4.2 involves the consequences of the exclusion of a top-up degree from the Accreditation of Prior Experience Policy. The problem, while serious, is, however, amenable to speedy resolution, and no evidence was found that academic standards had failed to meet external expectations.

1.6.3     The review team's concern about these issues is manifest. Nevertheless, because any threat to academic standards is potential rather than demonstrable, and because the University's internal and external examining systems in particular are robust, the team judges that academic standards at the University of Brighton meet external expectations.

# 2     Quality of learning opportunities

## Outcome

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

## Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1     The University, which regards the recruitment and development of well qualified staff central to supporting student learning, offers appropriate support and development through its Centre for Learning and Teaching. New members of academic staff are inducted, mentored and encouraged (but not required) to take a Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. While most staff take all or part of this course, the University may find it helpful to identify and address the reasons why some do not. Developmental opportunities, including the Postgraduate Certificate, are open to partner institution staff, and the University's commitment to developing such staff is both genuine and appreciated.

## Learning resources

2.2     Responsibility for developing and delivering the institutional strategy for deploying learning resources is clearly demarcated at institutional and faculty levels. Evidence deriving from the National Student Survey, the oral and written opinions of students who met the review team and academic health checks confirms that students, while noting variability across campuses, are largely satisfied with such resources. Nevertheless, in the context of research students, where matching admission decisions to the availability of appropriate learning resources is critical, the University should note that some negative comments were made about book, journal and periodical availability (see also paragraph 2.10.2).

2.2.1     In collaborative provision, partner institutions are responsible for learning resources: this responsibility is competently overseen by the University. Partner institution students who met the review team were broadly satisfied with learning resources, albeit that some dissatisfaction with library materials and restricted out-of-hours access was expressed.

## Student voice

2.3     Students are widely represented on University committees and working groups; training is provided by the Students' Union, and the University actively supported the Union in planning the representatives' training programme. The student written submission

confirms that students have been involved in revising University regulations; they are also used as panel members in periodic review.

2.3.1   All monitoring and review procedures take cognisance of student opinion through course and module evaluations and the National Student Survey. Evidence was found of outcomes being effectively collected, disseminated, discussed and acted upon, locally and institutionally. The University is, however, aware of the variability of its arrangements for collecting, analysing and addressing course and module evaluations, and plans to introduce a standardised and coordinated system this year. The review team **affirms** the progress the University is making towards agreeing and implementing standard module and course evaluation forms for all undergraduate students.

2.3.2   There is evidence of generally sound student engagement in partner institutions.

## Management information is used to improve quality and standards

2.4   The Strategic Planning Office and Registry are responsible for generating, analysing and disseminating extensive student data, and producing annual retention reports; the National Student Survey is overseen by an institutional-level steering group. Systems are in place to monitor the effectiveness of provision for disabled students, evaluate progress and identify opportunities for enhancement. In collaborative provision a comprehensive annual monitoring template is in use. Overall, the University's use of management information, both on campus and in collaborative provision, is satisfactory.

## Admission to the University and partner institutions

2.5   The University's Admission Policy sets out all relevant policies and procedures, including those relating to the accreditation of prior achievement. It does not set a minimum level in English for relevant international students, devolving this responsibility to courses, subject to agreement at validation. A senior institutional committee satisfactorily oversees these arrangements. In collaborative provision, depending on the nature of the partnership concerned partner institutions may use their own admissions procedures, which, while formally subject to approval at validation, are in practice not always discussed. Particularly given the issues described in paragraph 1.4.2, the University may wish to review this omission.

## Complaints and appeals

2.6   The student complaints and appeals processes, which are open to on-campus and partner institution students, are satisfactory, clearly specified in the Procedures Manual, and monitored annually by the Academic Board.

## Career advice and guidance

2.7   The University's commitment to employability, enterprise and volunteering, which includes an aspiration to integrated placement learning for all students, is set out in its Strategic Plan. It is supported by a range of structures and activities: for example, a Steering Group, chaired by an employer, aims to enhance employability and enterprise. The Careers Service is well regarded by students and monitored against the University's Operational Plan, both generally (for example through satisfaction surveys) and against performance indicators (which include a 92 per cent success rate). The Service provides workshops for collaborative provision students, though most such students rely on staff in their own college, many of whom who have access to specialist local networks and advice.

## Supporting disabled students

2.8 The University's emphasis on developing and disseminating good practice in diversity includes an institution-wide commitment to supporting students with a disability. Admissions procedures meet their needs; assessment policies are clear and constructive; the Policy on Disabled Students and Placements requires schools to undertake an accessibility audit. The Disability Team covers all campuses: its support is available to collaborative provision students, it works with heads of school to identify and meet staff development needs, and it aims to ensure its service is comprehensive. It is possibly a mark of the success of this approach that students with a registered disability have a higher retention rate than students as a whole.

## Supporting international students

2.9 International students come from over 100 countries. The University has specific services for potential and actual international students, including an English Language Support Programme, which appear to be successful. Withdrawal rates, which were indicating a problem, have improved considerably and 12.6 per cent of international students did not progress in 2011-12 compared to 23 per cent in 2010-11. The few international students in the partner institutions scrutinised appear to receive appropriate support.

2.9.1 In furtherance of its aim of increasing international student numbers, the University has entered into partnership with a private provider to offer preparatory courses for University entry: in the first year of operation 71 students progressed to the University.

## Supporting postgraduate research students

2.10 The establishment in 2011 of the Doctoral College, which built on earlier initiatives, signified an institutional commitment to supporting research students, expanding numbers and strengthening the research environment. The College is supported by five centres, led by directors of postgraduate studies, which provide subject-level support; the Doctoral College itself provides the organisational and administrative framework within which the centres operate.

2.10.1 The context in which the Doctoral College was established was one in which strategic oversight was ineffective, enquiries from potential students were inconsistently handled, and wastage rates were high. The College has addressed these problems with some success in that since its establishment the trajectory of almost all success indicators has been upward. The review team **affirms** the progress the University is making, through its Doctoral College, towards improving the completion rate of postgraduate research students.

2.10.2 The registration system for prospective supervisors aims to ensure that only well-qualified and trained staff assume supervisory responsibilities. While most students rate their supervisory experience positively, in some cases extremely so, a minority have criticised the motivation and competence of their supervisory teams, and some claim that learning resources do not meet the needs of their research topic. The University might review its admission criteria in the light of this comment (see also paragraph 2.2).

2.10.3 Comprehensive research training, although available to all postgraduate research students, is mandatory only where required by sponsoring bodies. Training for students with teaching responsibilities is available, but not always before they have begun teaching; nor is it always mandatory. The team **recommends** that by the start of the academic year

2013-2014 the University require all postgraduate research students with teaching responsibilities to be appropriately trained prior to commencing their duties.

## Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.11 The legal framework of collaborative provision appears in non-standardised memoranda of cooperation, which vary in the detail with which they specify the respective responsibilities of University and partner institution. Link tutors are assigned to each partnership to oversee provision and ensure the quality of learning opportunities. Evidence was found of satisfactory communication between the University and partners at an operational level, but of partner institution managers and staff having a variable understanding of such significant strategic documents as the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy.

2.11.1 The University approves the curricula vitae of relevant partner institution staff both initially and at periodic review, but arrangements for approving newly-appointed staff are inconsistent. The review team **recommends** that by the start of the academic year 2013-2014 the University assure itself in advance that all partner institution staff teaching on courses leading to its awards are appropriately qualified for their role.

## Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.12 The University delivers a small number of courses through flexible and distributed learning: all of them are subject to institutional approval, monitoring and review, and to the Blended Learning Policy. The review team found no evidence of bespoke progression and completion data for these courses, but the well regarded virtual learning environment appears to be an effective vehicle for information for, and interaction with, students.

## Work-based and placement learning

2.13 The University's long tradition of offering vocationally-oriented courses requires an emphasis on work-based learning, either in the workplace itself or through employment-related assignments. The University has developed a comprehensive suite of policies and guidance documents for faculty placement offices (placement management is devolved to faculties) and subject-specialist placement tutors and coordinators. These cover all matters from academic assessment to risk assessment, and from insurance arrangements to equal opportunities. The same satisfactory arrangements apply in partner institutions.

## Student charter

2.14 The University introduced its student charter in academic year 2011-2012 and plans to review it this year. While the charter is widely disseminated, electronically and in the student handbook, and in all meetings with students (both at the University and in partner institutions, where it is also applicable), student awareness was very low. The University acknowledges and plans to address the resultant challenge. The review team **affirms** the progress the University is making towards increasing student engagement with the student charter.

# 3      Information about learning opportunities

**Outcome**

The information about learning opportunities produced by the University of Brighton **meets UK expectations.** The team's reasons for this conclusion are given below.

3.1      The review team found the University's public information in general fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy, with clear lines of responsibility in place for signing off publicly available materials. The University meets all its statutory obligations, including providing a Key Information Set.

3.2      For collaborative provision, while responsibilities are clearly expressed, content is variable. Inconsistent and potentially misleading references to the identity of a validating institution was found on one partner website; partner institution key information sets are not always available despite University guidelines having been made available; and some partner institutions have adopted nomenclature which departs from University guidelines. The review team **recommends** that by the start of the academic year 2013-2014 the University strengthen its oversight of partner institutions' published information to ensure its accuracy, currency and comprehensiveness.

# 4      Enhancement of learning opportunities

**Outcome**

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

4.1      While the University regards the enhancement of learning opportunities as central to its quality system, it acknowledges that historically enhancement has largely been a local responsibility. Its current approach, however, is clearly articulated in its Strategic Plan. This Plan is, however, very recent, and the Learning and Teaching Strategy, which is central to the delivery of a strategic approach to quality enhancement, is in draft form. Accordingly the enhancement potential of some areas has yet to be realised. For example, while periodic review reports offer opportunity for comment on course level enhancement, the Annual Report on Periodic Review does not highlight quality enhancement, dissemination remaining a faculty responsibility. The review team **affirms** the progress the University is making towards embedding enhancement in quality assurance processes, particularly annual health checks and periodic review, and towards taking a more systematic approach to disseminating good practice.

4.2      The University has for some time been addressing the problem of variable retention rates in the context of strengthening students' learning opportunities. Most schools have appointed student support and guidance tutors (of whom students speak highly). A system of Peer Assisted Study Sessions, set up in 2009 as part of a national and international scheme, is operational in nine schools and a local partner college. The scheme has expanded since its inception, has been positively evaluated, and is embedded on the institutional website's Student Life page.

# 5      Thematic element

Each academic year a theme relating to higher education provision in England and Northern Ireland is chosen for special attention by QAA's Institutional Review teams. The theme selected for this review is Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement.

## Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

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

5.1      The University's commitment to strengthening student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement is expressed in activities which include supporting the Students' Union's development of a toolkit for student representatives involved in academic health review, the Student Engagement in Quality Steering Group, and creating a Student Experience Development Adviser post, effective from the current academic year.

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

5.2      Academic staff emphasised the University's strong commitment to student engagement, citing as examples their efforts to optimise the contributions of student representatives and the University's support for the Students' Union's development of a representative training programme. The review team also noted the Student Engagement and Experience Forum, convened jointly by the Students' Union and the University's Centre for Learning and Teaching.

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

5.3      The University's manifestly strong interest in the National Student Survey is consolidated in a report stating points at which institutional action is deemed necessary or beneficial. Internally the University aims to ensure that students receive responses to issues they have identified, by means which include a 'You said, We Did (or We Listened)' system. Nevertheless, while evidence was found of appropriate responses to students' comments, the University acknowledges that the effectiveness of its communication system remains variable.

# 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.