QAA

University of Salford

Institutional Review
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

June 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 Salford. The review took place on 24-27 June 2013 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Jeremy Bradshaw
- Dr Kate Gillen
- Dr Mark Lyne
- Mr Tom Thompson (student reviewer)
- Dr Victoria Korzeniowska (review secretary).

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

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

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 Salford the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The theme was 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 Salford 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
[3] www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx

Key findings

This section summarises the QAA review team's key findings about the University of Salford.

QAA's judgements about the University of Salford

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

- Academic standards at the University **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at the University **meets UK expectations**.
- The quality of the information produced by the University about its learning opportunities **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 of Salford:

- the role of ASPIRES in guiding and promoting enhancement activities (paragraphs 2.3, 4.2)
- the University's approach to enhancing students' employability (paragraphs 2.17).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to the University of Salford:

- by the beginning of the 2013-14 academic year, develop and implement, in concert with student representatives, a comprehensive action plan to monitor and mitigate the impact on student learning opportunities of the programme closures recently agreed (paragraph 2.6)
- by the end of the 2013-14 academic year, or the next occasion on which such a development is undertaken (whichever is sooner), revise its approach to the design and implementation of large-scale developments in information technology so as to further prioritise the interests of students (paragraph 2.5)
- by the beginning of 2014, ensure that all staff who are responsible for teaching or supporting students with disabilities have a full understanding of students' individual learning plans and how these plans are to be implemented (paragraph 2.23).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- the embedding of the Assessment Handbook in staff development activities (paragraph 1.15)
- the work now underway to collect, analyse and disseminate management information about taught and postgraduate research students (paragraphs 2.11, 2.29)

- the implementation of plans to further develop the virtual learning environment as a learning resource, including the role of the Technology Enhanced Learning Champions (paragraph 2.34)
- the prosecution of the action plan arising from the academic audit of support for placements and internships, as well as other planned activities in this area including the development of a network of, and training for, placement tutors (paragraph 2.38)
- the implementation of the plan for the production of students' timetables for 2013-14 (paragraph 3.3).

Student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement

In general, students are able to contribute fully and effectively to quality assurance and enhancement, though the student representative system could be improved with the University's support.

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 Salford

The University of Salford traces its origins to 1896 and the founding of the Royal Technical Institute Salford. In 1967 the Royal College of Advanced Technology became the University of Salford when a Royal Charter was granted. In 1996 the University merged with Salford College of Technology and two Colleges of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Studies.

In 2012-13 the University had a total of 19,032 students. Of these, 14,864 were undergraduates, 3,552 were following postgraduate taught programmes and 616 were postgraduate research students. Fifty three per cent of the University's students were female and 11 per cent were from outside the EU. The University has a strong widening participation profile with 43 per cent of students in 2012-13 drawn from low participation neighbourhoods. Sixty three per cent were in receipt of full or partial Higher Education Maintenance Grants. In 2012-13, 854 students were registered as studying on programmes offered with collaborative partners.

The University's academic provision is organised in four Colleges (Arts and Social Sciences, Business and Law, Health and Social Care, and Science and Technology), which are further subdivided into nine Schools.

The vision of the University is to be, by 2017, an outstanding university renowned for the quality of its engagement, humanity, global reach and leadership in research, innovation and education. The University's mission is: 'Salford is an enterprising University which transforms individuals and communities through excellent teaching, research, innovation and engagement'.

The last Institutional Audit of the University of Salford took place in February 2008 and resulted in judgements of confidence in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The Institutional Audit identified 14 features of good practice and nine recommendations for action (two being advisable and seven desirable).

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

According to the Self-Evaluation Document prepared by the University for this review, the challenges that the University will face over the next seven years include changes in the number of students wishing to study particular subjects at different levels, the emergence of new subject areas or combinations to support demand from new occupational groups, and variations in the modes of learning and teaching.

Explanation of the findings about the University of Salford

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 Salford **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards. The team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1   The University's Policy for Programme Design, Approval, Amendment, Review and Withdrawal explicitly refers to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and describes the procedures for mapping qualifications to external benchmarks, including the FHEQ. The FHEQ level of each programme is indicated in the standard programme specification template and in the examples of completed specifications scrutinised by the review team. The University's Assessment Handbook further provides guidance on mapping learning outcomes to the FHEQ.

1.2   The same expectations for meeting external qualification benchmarks apply to both home and collaborative provision. The Academic Programmes and Partnerships Committee also reviews alignment with the FHEQ before granting business case approval for new programmes.

1.3   External examiners are asked annually to confirm that the standards set by the University are at an appropriate level and the reports provided to the review team confirmed that they do so.

1.4   The Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes note that one credit is equivalent to 10 hours of indicative learning time. Although the evidence for programme approval, annual review and periodic review considered by the review team had very few explicit references to volume of study, it is implicit in the scrutiny to which programmes are exposed in each of these processes.

Use of external examiners

1.5   The University's use of external examiners is strong and scrupulous.

1.6   The roles and responsibilities of external examiners and the University's approach to identifying, nominating, appointing, inducting, supporting and responding to them are specified in its External Examining of all Taught Programmes document. This document was revised in 2011 to reflect the Expectation and Indicators of sound practice in *Chapter B7: External examining* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code).

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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.

1.7   The appointment of external examiners is the responsibility of the College Executives, using a standard process of nomination. Induction of external examiners is by a combination of central and school-based events, including an annual induction event which about 20 per cent of new examiners appointed in 2012-13 attended. The University also provides a dedicated webpage for external examiners, which includes detailed information on University structures, regulations and contacts as well as a list of frequently asked questions.

1.8   External examiners verify summative assessments and moderate student work for modules at levels 5, 6 and 7 (and, where required by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, at levels 3 and/or 4). They also attend Module Boards of Examiners' meetings to ratify module marks and, where required, Programme Board of Examiners' meetings. Their reports are submitted to the Vice Chancellor and responded to by the schools. Colleges verify that their constituent schools respond appropriately, particularly to any negative comments.

1.9   External examiner reports are a key source of evidence for the Annual Programme Monitoring and Enhancement process. Student representatives' participation in this process as members of Staff/Student Committees allows student representatives to be involved in the consideration of external examiner reports.

1.10   Separately, the central Governance Services Unit produces an annual overview of external examiner reports which draws out themes or recurring recommendations as well as examples of good practice for consideration by the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee. The review team saw an example of a recommendation in an external examiner report ultimately leading to the introduction of standard referencing conventions across the whole University.

1.11   The University's approach to external examining is common to home and collaborative provision, except for the accredited provision at The Manchester College, where the Chair of the Accreditation Sub-Committee (as opposed to the College Associate Dean) considers the School's response to the external examiner's report.

Assessment and standards

1.12   Programme specifications demonstrate that the University matches student assessment to learning outcomes carefully and diligently as part of the approval and review of programmes.

1.13   There is a common assessment scale for undergraduate provision and a common scale for taught postgraduate provision will be introduced from the start of the 2013-14 academic year. Schools supplement the grade descriptors for each band with subject-specific criteria. These criteria were recently the subject of an internal academic audit. The audit found some discrepancies between local criteria and the University's generic descriptors, leading to a recommendation that Schools review the relationship annually.

1.14   Since the start of the 2012-13 academic year, students on most programmes have both submitted assessments and received feedback electronically. The deadline for the provision of feedback to students is within 15 working days of submission. Students reported to the review team that this deadline was not being met in all cases. The University is developing an electronic system to track when feedback is provided in order to promote compliance across all programmes and modules.

1.15   The University introduced a new Assessment Handbook in autumn 2012 to promote consistency and good practice in assessment design, marking, moderation, feedback and electronic assessment. Notwithstanding the fact that the review team found no evidence of

threats to standards or quality arising from current practice, the review team's discussions with teaching staff indicate that awareness of the new handbook is not yet widespread. The University acknowledged this limited awareness and has begun to include the Handbook in staff development activities. The review team **affirms** the embedding of the Assessment Handbook in staff development activities.

1.16   The Academic Misconduct Procedure defines misconduct and its penalties. Students are made aware of this procedure at induction and through programme handbooks and the virtual learning environment. They also receive training early in their programmes to help them avoid common pitfalls, such as poor referencing. The student written submission for the review suggested that students would like to see clearer explanations of 'collusion' and 'falsifying experimental or investigative results' in the University's regulations and examples of unacceptable practices. The University is addressing this as part of its action plan for the student written submission.

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.17   The University's procedures for the design, approval, monitoring and review of programmes (including programmes delivered collaboratively) set and maintain academic standards at the right level and allow students to demonstrate the learning outcomes of their awards.

1.18   New programme approval is a two-stage process, wherein the second stage focuses particularly on the academic merits of the programme, including its standards. Externality is encouraged in the development of new programme proposals through the use of external examiners, employers or colleagues from other institutions as critical friends, and then guaranteed in the second stage of the approval process through the membership of the programme approval committee of an external advisor. The Fast Track Approval method, which is used in exceptional circumstances (such as where the University needs to respond quickly to a time-limited funding opportunity), also draws on the advice of an external expert.

1.19   An Annual Programme Monitoring and Enhancement report is completed for each programme, drawing on external examiner reports and feedback from students. These reports are considered by Staff/Student Committees and then feed into a summary report for the whole school which is considered by the parent college. In turn, each college prepares a summary report based on the summary reports of their constituent schools, for consideration by University Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee. The Pro Vice-Chancellor is responsible for preparing the Committee's response.

1.20   Programmes are periodically reviewed for reapproval every five years. Periodic review draws on the views of a wide range of stakeholders, including staff, graduates, employers, external examiners and, where applicable, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). Furthermore, a Students' Union representative attached to the parent school or college is a member of the review panel. Representatives whom the team met felt their contribution to periodic review had been worthwhile and effective, although they suggested the University could give them more notice of the events given the amount of preparation required. In response, the University has agreed to give them a schedule of periodic reviews at the start of each academic year.

Subject benchmarks

1.21   Programme design, approval, review and assessment processes (including external examining) each make use of subject and qualification benchmark statements, where they are available.

1.22   Many of the University's programmes are approved or accredited by PSRBs. Programme teams are primarily responsible for responding to any recommendations or conditions arising from PSRB engagements, overseen by the College Quality, Standards and Enhancement Committees. The University Academic Programmes and Partnerships Committee also maintains an overview of PSRB reports on behalf of Senate, and the Governance Services Unit provides a biennial overview of all PSRB reports in order to draw out any cross-cutting themes or recurrent recommendations.

2   Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

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

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1   The University supports professional standards in learning and teaching by ensuring that staff are appropriately qualified at appointment and through development opportunities that align with the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy.

2.2   New members of teaching staff who do not hold a higher education teaching qualification or equivalent must undertake the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice as a condition of their probation. In addition, all new staff are assigned a mentor, who is guided in their role by a formal Code of Practice on Mentoring. The review team met staff who had studied the Postgraduate Certificate and been mentored within the last year or so. These staff commended the arrangements for new staff.

2.3   Research and professional practice contribute to teaching in different ways, reflecting the particular discipline. Research-informed teaching is becoming particularly evident through its selection as one of seven themes of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy. The University has created an ASPIRES checklist (Accessible Higher Education, Student Focused, Pedagogically Excellent, Internationally Orientated, Research-Informed, Employability and Enterprise Led, and Sustainable) which programme teams must complete when proposing, reviewing or revising programmes; the checklist requires all programmes to incorporate leading edge research. The review team identified the role of ASPIRES as **a feature of good practice** (see paragraphs 4.1 and 4.2).

Learning resources

2.4   The University initiated a fundamental library redevelopment programme in 2011-12 to tackle declining student satisfaction with learning resources. The programme involves consolidating library provision on the Peel Park Campus and enhancing its effectiveness, including by extending library opening hours and introducing the 'you try, we buy' scheme, by which the library purchases a copy of any e-book that a student views for longer than five minutes online.

2.5   The University has also recently made several significant developments in IT, including the electronic submission of student assignments and the provision of feedback, a digital media records management system for students at the MediaCityUK campus and the introduction of centralised, electronic timetabling. The review team noted that students and staff had experienced significant problems with two of these developments: the digital records management system had partially failed with the loss of some student work; and accurate timetables had not been available by the beginning of the academic years 2011-12 or 2012-13. While the team was assured that the University was taking appropriate action to

mitigate the effects of these problems, nevertheless it took the view that more could have been done through the design and implementation stages to identify and manage potential risks to the quality of the student experience. The review team **recommends**, therefore, that by the end of the 2013-14 academic year, or the next occasion on which such a development is undertaken (whichever is sooner), the University revises its approach to the design and implementation of large-scale developments in information technology so as to further prioritise the interests of students.

2.6   Declining student recruitment in several subject areas has led the University to close a number of programmes since the last review and to announce that a number of others will recruit students for the last time in 2013. The student written submission suggested that some of the closures had had a detrimental impact on learning opportunities, mainly connected to the departure of teaching staff, a concern echoed by some of the students whom the review team met. Although the team was confident that the University had identified and considered the potential threats to both academic standards and learning opportunities from its academic restructuring, the University did not provide a detailed action plan or similar showing precisely how it intended to monitor the programmes affected and attempt to ensure the threats did not emerge. The review team **recommends**, therefore, that by the beginning of the 2013-14 academic year, the University develops and implements, in concert with student representatives, a comprehensive action plan to monitor and mitigate the impact on student learning opportunities of the programme closures recently agreed.

Student voice

2.7   Students make an effective contribution to quality assurance and enhancement through their membership of University Council, Senate and its key standing committees, and of key college committees. Students' Union representatives also meet senior institutional managers on a regular basis bilaterally; and managers attend events organised by the Students' Union to talk to larger groups of students. These arrangements are described in more detail in paragraph 5.1.

2.8   At school level, student representatives provide for student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement primarily through their membership of Staff/Student Committees. These arrangements are described in paragraph 5.2 along with suggestions from the Students' Union for how they could be improved.

2.9   The University uses module evaluation questionnaires to gather feedback from students and uses the results to inform annual monitoring. It has also introduced a broader Salford University Programme and Learning Experience survey for students on taught programmes, and a similar survey for research students in spring term 2013. The outcomes of the National Student Survey inform schools' operational plans and the review team noted that some schools had raised their National Student Survey scores for feedback markedly in the last two years.

2.10   The University's efforts to gather student feedback extend to 'hard-to-reach' students, such as those studying off-campus; the review team met several distance-learning students who commended the opportunities they had to provide feedback through an online conferencing system.

Management information is used to improve quality and standards

2.11   The University has effective policies and systems for the collection and consideration of management information, including for provision delivered through collaborative arrangements. The only exception is in the area of postgraduate students (and particularly research students), where the University acknowledges it has need for more information about progression, completion and student satisfaction and is in the

process of introducing mechanisms to collect it. The review team **affirms** the work now underway to collect, analyse and disseminate management information about taught and postgraduate research students.

Admission to the University

2.12   The University's policies and procedures for the admission of students are clear and explicit to applicants and fairly and consistently applied by staff.

2.13   The University's Admissions and Retention Policy describes arrangements for pre-entry support, admission and progression for all courses leading to the award of a degree, diploma or certificate. The Policy provides clear information for applicants and states where responsibility lies for each part of the admissions process. The implementation of the Policy is monitored by the University Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee through its annual review of management information, including, for example, retention and progression statistics and degree classifications.

2.14   The University's admissions procedures also demonstrate a firm commitment to widening participation among students from backgrounds underrepresented in higher education. Applicants are considered on the basis of both merit and potential, the definitions of which are provided in the Admissions and Retention Policy. The Get Ahead programme works with students studying at level 3 to help prepare them for higher education. On successful completion of the programme, students are awarded a 20-point reduction on their UCAS tariff should they choose to apply to Salford.

2.15   Admissions arrangements for programmes delivered through collaborative arrangements are the same as for programmes delivered by the University.

Complaints and appeals

2.16   The University's complaints and appeals procedures apply to all students who have a current registration, including distance learners and students studying through collaborative links. The procedures are clear and explicit, accord with the indicators of sound practice in the Quality Code, and are made known to students primarily through their handbooks. The Governance Services Unit provides guidance for both academic appeals and complaints investigators, gives support to students going through the processes, and reports annually on the operation of the processes to the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee. The annual report includes details of complaints escalated to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator and their outcome.

Career advice and guidance

2.17   The enhancement of students' employability is a key part of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy (the E in the acronym ASPIRES). There are a wide and comprehensive range of specific curriculum, co-curriculum, work-based and work-related activities to help students improve their chances of finding work after graduation, some of which were identified as areas of strength in an independent audit. The review team, therefore, regarded the University's approach to enhancing students' employability as **a feature of good practice**.

2.18   Employability is a consideration at programme approval, leading to the development of enterprise and employability modules in several schools. The pilot Personal and Professional Academic Career and Experiential framework is building on this work by supporting the embedding of employability skills throughout the curriculum.

2.19   Beyond the curriculum, the University has validated a range of activities such as student societies and clubs, sports, community engagement, placement and work-based experiences and volunteering through the Salford Advantage Student Life Award (SASLA). The Award enables students to demonstrate their co-curricular activities to employers alongside their academic credentials. The University provides co-curriculum courses in areas including teamwork, leadership and curriculum vitae writing, which can also contribute towards the SASLA. The review team met several undergraduate and postgraduate students who had taken part in these courses, all of whom found them very helpful. SASLA itself was highlighted as a particular area of strength during an independent audit of the University's information advice and guidance services in 2012.

2.20   The University's Careers and Employability Service operates a hub and spoke model to assist students in schools and colleges as well as centrally. The Service also offers online resources for distance-learning students and others who are seldom on campus. The Service is accredited by Matrix and is monitored and reviewed by the Academic Audit and Governance Committee and through Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee's oversight of ASPIRES.

Supporting disabled students

2.21   The University's recognition of, and commitment to meeting, the entitlements of disabled students are reflected in its Equality and Diversity Strategy and Meeting the Needs of Disabled Students Policy. The engagement of senior management in this area is manifest in the Vice-Chancellor's chairing of the University's Equality Forum, which includes representation from the Students' Union. Statistical data relating to disability is collected and analysed annually under the auspices of the University's Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee, again demonstrating high-level engagement.

2.22   Students with a disability are encouraged to meet with a member of the central Disability and Learner Support Unit, who is able, if necessary, to draw up an individual student support plan with details of any adjustments that should be made, or additional support provided, to ensure the student's learning opportunities are maximised. It is then largely the responsibility of teaching staff to implement the support plan, particularly where the plan calls for adjustments to be made in areas such as assessment. The University provides extensive guidance to teaching staff with disabled students through the intranet.

2.23   The disabled students whom the review team met confirmed high levels of support from the central Disability and Learner Support Unit, but tended to suggest that this support was not emulated by their schools. Notwithstanding the provision of extensive advice by the University, there appeared to be a particular challenge for teaching staff in understanding and implementing the individual support plans drawn up by Disability and Learner Support. The review team's discussions with staff suggested there was no formal process for transferring the plans to teaching staff, and the University acknowledged in the final meeting a need for further staff training and development to supplement the online guidance. The team **recommends**, therefore, that by the beginning of 2014, the University ensures that all staff who are responsible for teaching or supporting students with disabilities have a full understanding of students' individual learning plans and how these plans are to be implemented.

Supporting international students

2.24   The University provides a range of support mechanisms and services specifically for international students before and after they arrive in Salford. These include the Get Ready information to help them prepare for life and study in the UK, support for the International Society, the International Life Centre, which offers a physical space for

international students and the delivery of support services, and dedicated resources from the Careers and Employability Service.

2.25   The review team met a number of international students, who praised the support the University had given them, particularly on their arrival in the UK and during the first few weeks of living and studying here.

Supporting postgraduate research students

2.26   The University provides appropriate support and guidance to enable research students to complete their programmes and to enable staff involved in these programmes to fulfil their responsibilities.

2.27   The University's Research Awards Regulations and Code of Practice for the Conduct of Postgraduate Research Degrees describe the arrangements for the admission, support and guidance of research students. At offer stage, all students are allocated a supervisor, a co-supervisor and a personal tutor, whose roles are specified in a student handbook. From September 2013 attendance at an induction event is obligatory for students based on campus. Supervisors are compulsorily trained in the role every three years, and meet their students regularly. Students' progress is checked formally three months after commencing and at the end of the first and second years of study.

2.28   Research students have access to centrally organised research and transferable skills training through the Salford Postgraduate and Staff Research Training programme. The research students whom the review team met spoke highly of the programme. They also complimented the courses connected to the SASLA initiative outlined in paragraph 2.19. Research students who teach and who do not already have an equivalent qualification in higher education teaching must undertake training and may complete the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice. The research students whom the team met confirmed they had completed the certificate and that it had been beneficial for their teaching.

2.29   The responsibility for overseeing research students' progress lies primarily with the four Colleges' Research and Innovation Committees. The University has acknowledged that the colleges need access to more management information about progression, completion and student feedback to discharge this responsibility effectively. It has begun to collect more information and to make this information available to more staff. The review team **affirms** the work now underway to collect, analyse and disseminate management information about taught and postgraduate research students.

Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.30   In 2012-13, 854 students were registered as studying on programmes offered with collaborative partners. The University has formal agreements in place for all of these partnerships, full details of which are available on the Collaborative Provision Register published on the website.

2.31   The University's approach to selecting and engaging with partners is specified in its Collaborative Provisions Procedures. The two main types of partnership are affiliation and accreditation: affiliation refers to a relationship between a school or college and an academic subunit of the partner; accreditation is a broader relationship across a range of validated programmes.

2.32   The processes for the assurance of the quality and standards of provision offered collaboratively are almost identical to those for the assurance of home programmes described above, with additional safeguards where appropriate. In addition, the University has a comprehensive process for the identification and approval of information which

partners produce about its collaborative provision. The University retains control of student transcripts, which record the venue of study.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.33   In 2012-13 approximately 600 students were studying distance and flexible learning programmes in several different schools. The review team scrutinised a range of evidence about these programmes, including programme approval and annual monitoring reports and Staff/Student Committee minutes, which reflected careful and deliberate consideration of the specific requirements of such programmes. The evidence also indicated high levels of student satisfaction with the support provided by the University; this was confirmed by several distance-learning students whom the review team met.

2.34   The University uses a virtual learning environment to support the delivery of all its programmes, including flexible and distance provision. In 2012-13, as part of the Elevate project, it introduced minimum standards for the use of the virtual learning environment by every module and conducted an audit which confirmed that most modules complied. In order to increase compliance further, and also to address students' concerns about inconsistency in the use of the virtual learning environment by teaching staff, the University is undertaking a range of actions, including the identification and dissemination of exemplar modules, the development of Technology Enhanced Learning Champions in each school and a re-audit of modules which failed to meet minimum standards in 2012-13. The review team **affirms** the implementation of plans to further develop the virtual learning environment as a learning resource, including the role of the Technology Enhanced Learning Champions.

Work-based and placement learning

2.35   Work-based and placement learning is an integral part of many of the University's programmes (particularly in the College of Health and Social Care), and the University is seeking to make some form of work-based learning available to all students as part of its commitment to enhancing their employability.

2.36   An overarching Placement Learning Policy, drawn up by reference to *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* of the Quality Code, sets out general principles, regulations and policy for programme design, preparation of placement staff and student support and information. Expectations for the relationship with, and responsibilities of, placement providers and tutors are included.

2.37   The University audited levels and forms of support for students on placements or internships and the role of the Programme Leader in placement in 2012. The audit recommended a series of actions to strengthen this area, including the need for clearer ownership of placement activities, more training for academic and administrative staff on managing placements and the incorporation of the evaluation of placements in annual monitoring. In addition, the action plan for the employability and enterprise strand of ASPIRES includes the creation of a Placement Tutor Network to identify and disseminate good practice.

2.38   Some of the weaknesses identified by the 2012 audit - particularly inconsistency in practice among different schools and programmes - were echoed in the student written submission for this review. Students whom the review team met also seemed to have had variable experiences. Some commended the quality of their placements and the support they had enjoyed, while others reported various problems, including the creation by the University of unrealistic expectations about where placements could be undertaken. In the view of the review team, therefore, the University has to address the consistency of placements as well as their availability. The team **affirms** the prosecution of the action plan arising from the academic audit of support for placements and internships, as well as other

planned activities in this area including the development of a network of, and training for, placement tutors.

Student charter

2.39 The Salford Student Charter, published in September 2012, was developed in conjunction with the Students' Union and reflects the key elements of the Student Bill of Rights and the outcomes of the national Student Charter Group. It covers all students, and all the students whom the review team met were aware of it.

3 Public information

Outcome

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

Findings

3.1 The University provides information for students who are considering studying at Salford primarily through the printed prospectus and Course Finder website. The information on Course Finder, which is subject to a rigorous checking process, is accessible and the students whom the review team met were satisfied with its accuracy. Information about provision delivered by the University's partner colleges is subject to the same checking procedure.

3.2 In 2012-13 the University adopted a standardised format for programme handbooks consisting of programme-specific information in Part A and generic material, such as University policies and regulations, in Part B. The review team scrutinised several handbooks and found the information they contained clear and accessible. The students whom the team met confirmed this view.

3.3 The student charter commits the University to provide students with their final teaching timetable in a timely manner and normally by 1 August for the forthcoming academic session. The student written submission for this review said that this commitment had not been met for 2011-12 or 2012-13 and some of the students whom the review team met described various problems and delays they had experienced in obtaining an accurate timetable, which, according to some of the students, in some cases had not been resolved until after Christmas. The University acknowledged the problems and explained that they were caused by the introduction of a new centralised electronic timetabling system. In response, the University created a project team, which included representatives of the Students' Union, with a clear timeline for the production of the 2013-14 timetables by 1 August 2013. The review team **affirms** the implementation of the plan for the production of students' timetables for 2013-14. The problems which students had encountered in this area also contributed to the team's recommendation about the design and implementation of large-scale information technology developments in paragraph 2.5.

3.4 Information for those staff involved in the management of standards and quality is comprehensive and fit for purpose. The student written submission noted a lack of awareness among student representatives of the role of external examiners, but anticipated this would improve with the introduction of a new standard agenda for Staff/Student Committee meetings which includes external examiner reports. Furthermore, the University's action plan for the student written submission indicates it will consider the potential for making external examiner reports available to students through the virtual learning environment or website.

4   Enhancement of learning opportunities

Outcome

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

Findings

4.1   The University's deliberate, strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities is manifest primarily in its Learning and Teaching Strategy and the seven enhancement themes described within it. Each of these themes, which are summarised by the acronym ASPIRES, is being addressed by a range of university-wide projects. They also form an integral part of the University's quality assurance processes through the use of the ASPIRES checklist during programme approval and review and in the pilot of the revised annual programme monitoring and enhancement procedure. Each theme is led by a working party comprising members of academic and professional support staff and students, which is expected to maintain a detailed action plan monitored by the University's Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee.

4.2   The review team's discussions with staff and students revealed broad awareness of the ASPIRES themes and their effectiveness in enhancement. The team also saw evidence of good practice being identified through the use of the ASPIRES checklist and of this practice being disseminated across the University. The team, therefore, identified as **a feature of good practice** the role of ASPIRES in guiding and promoting enhancement activities.

4.3   Furthermore, the University promotes enhancement through its formal engagements with the Students' Union and the programme of audits overseen by the Academic Audit and Governance Committee. Audits have covered a range of areas, such as personal tutoring and assessment, giving rise in each case to an action plan for the enhancement of those areas.

5 Theme: Student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement

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. The review team investigated student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement at the University of Salford.

5.1 Student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement at University and college level is systematised primarily through Students' Union membership of University Council, Senate and its key standing committees, and of key college committees. Beyond the deliberative committee structures there are also several other settings in which senior staff and Students' Union officers interact, including the Year Ahead conference, and regular planned meetings between the President and vice-presidents of the Students' Union and Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic and External) and between the Students' Union vice-presidents for each college and the college's Associate Dean (Academic). Furthermore, students are involved systematically in the University's assurance processes for periodic review and programme approval, and participate formally in a number of other significant initiatives described above, including the development of the Salford Advantage Programme (see paragraph 2.19), the audit of the virtual learning environment (paragraph 2.34) and the identification and implementation of the ASPIRES enhancement themes (paragraphs 2.3, 4.1 and 4.3).

5.2 At school level, student representatives provide for student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement primarily through their membership of Staff/Student Committees. There is innovative practice in student engagement in some colleges and schools, such as the College of Health and Social Care holding some of its committee meetings off-site to make it easier for students to attend, the School of Environment and Life Sciences allowing a student to chair the committee, and in the School of the Built Environment the use of an online platform to support distance-learning students' participation in these meetings. More generally, the University's perception of the effectiveness of the Staff/Student Committee system for taught programmes has caused it to introduce a similar arrangement for research students. However, the student representative system is also an area which the Students' Union maintains could be improved with the University's support. More specifically, the student written submission called for:

- a more consistent approach to the recruitment of student representatives
- earlier identification and training of representatives in the autumn term so as to allow them to participate in the first cycle of Staff/Student Committee meetings
- better administration of Staff/Student Committee meetings, including arranging them when student representatives are likely to be available
- specific training for chairs of Staff/Student Committees and other staff as a means of increasing their buy-in to student engagement.

5.3 The University and the Students' Union have jointly produced an action plan to take forward the recommendations of the student written submission. The plan includes improvements to the representative system.

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.