

The Queen's University of Belfast

March 2009

Annex to the report

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Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited The Queen's University of Belfast, (the University), from 30 March to 3 April 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit team found that the University has made good progress in recent years in developing a more enhancement-led approach to the student experience, consistent with its objective of developing an overall strategy that would be of assistance in determining the University's priorities, and in evaluating the progress it is able to make. Its approach also underpins the University's claim to be a reflective institution with an increasing emphasis on quality enhancement.

Postgraduate research students

The audit team found the University to have a widely and fully developed research culture appropriate for the recruitment of research students. The University's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and quality of provision for postgraduate research programmes meet the expectations of the precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by the QAA.

Published information

The audit team found that, overall, reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards, but felt that more could be done to improve the consistency and completeness of school handbooks.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following features of good practice:

- the ways in which the University makes effective use of feedback from students, which is collected at institutional level
- the range and degree of staff support and development at all levels and in all areas of the University's work.

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- consider whether the Annual Programme Review process provides the Education Committee and the Collaborative Provision Group with sufficient evidence of appropriate quality and reliability from schools and collaborative partners, to enable them to discharge their responsibilities on behalf of Academic Council
- address the variability in education practices at school level, to ensure equity of treatment of all students and of the student experience
- consider the means by which it might secure a direct involvement in the partnership between Stranmillis University College and Omagh College
- review the memoranda of agreement and current arrangements, including its own structures, for the management of collaborative provision in theology.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- consider establishing a formal reporting and accountability relationship between each school's senior academic committee or committees and the relevant committee(s) of Academic Council, and make committee minutes and papers readily accessible to staff and students
- develop an institution-wide framework for enhancing the quality of the student experience which embraces both school-level and University initiatives, in order to maximise the benefits of steps that are already being taken
- clarify further, and standardise across schools, both the training the University requires of those postgraduate research students who teach, demonstrate and/or contribute to the assessment of undergraduate students, and the limits it imposes on the extent of such activities.

Section 1: Introduction and background

The institution and its mission

1 The Queen's University of Belfast, (the University), traces its roots back to 1845, when it was founded as one of the three colleges within the federal Queen's University in Ireland. It became an independent university in 1908, when it received its Charter to become The Queen's University of Belfast. It is a member of the Russell Group of research-intensive UK universities.

2 It operates within the context of Northern Ireland, receiving most of its funding from the Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland (DELNI), while maintaining and developing close links with universities in the Republic of Ireland.

3 At the time of the audit, there were 17,092 full-time equivalent students (14,000 undergraduates, 1,916 taught postgraduates, and 1,176 research postgraduates). Of these, 4,013 are part-time students (2,178 undergraduates, 1,561 taught postgraduates, and 274 research postgraduates) and 767 are international students (309 undergraduates, 180 taught postgraduates, and 767 research postgraduates). There are 3,687 staff, of which 1,134 are academic.

4 Stranmillis University College (934 undergraduates, and 42 taught postgraduates) and St Mary's University College (844 undergraduates, and 46 taught postgraduates) are academically integrated with the University, having the status of schools. The intention is for Stranmillis to become fully merged with the University in 2009-2010.

5 In its Briefing Paper, the University indicated that its Charter precludes the employment of staff to teach theology, so this is carried out on its behalf by four independent colleges. There are currently 341 students (240 undergraduate, and 101 postgraduate) taking degrees in this way, managed through the University's Institute of Theology. There is also an Institute of Professional Legal Studies, which operates within the University's statutes to deliver postgraduate training on behalf of the Council of Legal Education (NI).

6 The University has an increasing number and variety of collaborative arrangements involving, in 2008-09, a total of about 1,800 students. It has collaborative agreements with several Northern Ireland further education colleges for undergraduate and Foundation Degrees, articulation arrangements and access courses. It also has collaborative arrangements with six overseas institutions in China, Malaysia, and Brunei.

7 The University's mission statement is to:

- provide a broadly-based, research-driven university with a dynamic world-class research and education portfolio and strong international connections
- promote the widest possible access to this portfolio of excellence in an environment of equality, tolerance and mutual respect
- fully embrace its leadership role in Northern Ireland and beyond.

8 It is half-way through its current Corporate Plan (2006 to 2011), which has three objectives, referred to as Plan 435:

- towards 400 Tariff Point Entry - an average tariff entry target of 400 points for undergraduate students seeking admission to the University
- 30 per cent Graduate Students - to increase the graduate student cohort to 30 per cent of the number of first degree students
- 5 per cent increase in externally derived income over the period of the plan.

9 The University has already achieved the third of these objectives and is making good progress towards the first. Progress on developing postgraduate numbers has been slower than planned, which has led to some restructuring of responsibilities in the senior management.

The information base for the audit

10 The University provided the audit team with a Briefing Paper and substantial supporting documentation. This included material that related to the two sampling trails selected by the team. Most of the material was available in both hard and electronic copy; in addition, the team had access to the University's intranet, Queens Online.

11 The audit team found the Briefing Paper to be inadequate as a description of the University's organisation and arrangements for the management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards. As a result, the team required substantial additional information during its visits to the University. This was provided in hard copy or electronic format by the University.

12 The Students' Union provided a written submission, setting out the students' views on the accuracy of the information provided to them by the University, the extent to which they know what is expected of them, the experience of students as learners and their role and influence in the management of the University.

13 In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the previous QAA Institutional audit in 2004
- the report of a QAA audit of overseas provision in 2006
- the report of a QAA Review of research degree programmes in 2006
- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.

Developments since the last audit

14 The previous QAA Institutional audit in December 2004 found that broad confidence could be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards.

15 The audit report contained three recommendations advising the University to:

- reconsider the terms of reference for the University Learning and Teaching Committee, to make explicit the Committee's responsibility for maintaining an overview of academic standards
- further develop the assessment framework, with a view to securing greater commonality of judgement and practice across the University with regard to progression rules and degree classifications
- complete the development and publication of distinct programme specifications for all awards of the University.

16 The University described its progress in responding to these issues in its Briefing Paper. Changes resulting include:

- new Terms of Reference for the Education Committee, which replaces the Learning and Teaching Committee, including an indication of its role in maintaining an overview of academic standards
- a new Assessment Policy for implementation in 2008-09 and a revision of the University's Study Regulations
- the introduction of a programme specification template. This is being revised further for use in 2009-10 within the University's new student information system.

17 The 2004 audit also considered it to be desirable for the University to:

- consider whether the pathway approval procedures, as articulated, enabled it to be satisfied that sufficient use is always made of suitably qualified independent subject and/or professional experts external to the University, to advise on the appropriateness of the quality and standards of its provision
- incorporate, within its process of annual review, a means to ensure that all institutions with students registered for awards of the University are aware of the University's expectations in relation to the Academic Infrastructure
- complete the work and training necessary to make fuller statistical data more easily available to schools, faculties and relevant committees, to facilitate analysis of student performance across the University
- enhance the quality of the students' learning experience by sharing good practice in the area of student support.

18 The University's response to these recommendations, as outlined in its Briefing Paper, includes:

- new programme approval procedures for all programmes, including collaborative provision, requiring the input of independent experts
- new guidelines for University Coordinators for overseeing collaborative provision at programme level, to ensure 'compliance' with the academic infrastructure
- a new student information system being rolled out over a three-year period from September 2008. This should, in due course, provide a fully integrated system to provide all core student and course administration information
- the amalgamation in 2005 of all student services into a single Directorate of Academic Affairs (DASA) with three divisions (Academic Affairs, Educational and Skills Development, and Student Affairs), to facilitate the sharing of good practice at a senior level and the creation in 2008-09 of a Student Support Forum to involve staff directly involved in delivering services.

19 These changes go some way towards meeting the recommendations in the 2004 audit. However, their implementation has been relatively slow, priority being given to the introduction of the new management structure (see paragraph 22), and some of them, for example on commonality of assessment and programme specifications, are not yet complete.

20 The 2004 audit report also noted several areas of good practice:

- teaching awards, which serve as an enhancement tool to promote and disseminate good practice across the University
- the rigour of the University subject review process and associated follow-up activity
- the responsiveness of the University to its students, manifest in the various means by which it ensures that the student voice is heard, and in its orientation programme for international students
- the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching, which it makes available to all staff of the University, including part-time staff, and its potential for enhancement.

21 The audit team found that these remain strengths, apart from the University's review process, which has been modified since the last audit and is discussed in detail later (see paragraphs 42 and 43).

22 In addition to these changes, there has been a substantial reorganisation of the University's academic structure since the 2004 audit. This is described in more detail below (see paragraph 30), but in brief, a two-tier structure involving schools and the University was introduced in 2005. There are 20 schools, varying in size from about 20 to more than 70 academic staff. There are no longer faculties (the term is, however, still used on occasions), although there are three groups of schools each under a Dean. As part of this reorganisation, directors of education (DEs) and directors of research (DRs) were introduced (see paragraphs 29, 33 and 34).

23 The central management of the University has also been changed, introducing a University Management Board and a University Operating Board and a new core academic committee structure, described in more detail in paragraphs 27-33 and Y. There is also now a Directorate of Student Plus, bringing together the management of the Students' Union, Hospitality Services (including accommodation), sports facilities and childcare. There is a new Student Guidance Centre, and three Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs), funded by the Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland (DELNI), have been created in Active and Interactive Learning, Creative and Performing Arts, and Interprofessional Education respectively.

24 A revised Academic Quality Assurance Framework and module and annual review procedures have been introduced and an educational enhancement process has replaced the previous system of periodic review (see paragraphs 42, 43).

25 The report of the previous audit suggested that the University's Quality Handbook might benefit from an introductory section giving an explicit account of the principles guiding the Handbook's policies and practices, and setting out the broad framework in which they operate. It was also suggested that such information might be of assistance to the University in evaluating the effectiveness of its policies and practices for quality assurance. The University reviewed its academic quality assurance procedures in 2006-07. The proposals considered and approved by Academic Council in November 2006 included a commitment to establish an 'enhancement-led approach' based on a set of clearly stated principles. Annual Programme Review (APR) and periodic review reports were to be 'forward-looking, action-focused, strategic and evaluative'; reports were intended to 'provide early warning of issues and factors that might affect the University's provision'; and they should include an action plan that would 'distinguish between the action required from staff within the School, and that which is required from the other parts of the University'. The minutes of a subsequent meeting of the Education Committee also record that 'the Committee...recommended that consideration should be given to the need to align the APR more effectively with the academic planning process'.

26 While the audit team considered that these principles and the recent recommendation of the Education Committee provided a strong basis for the development of an enhancement-led approach, in its discussions with staff it became apparent that they more readily identified examples of its implementation in the educational enhancement process. It was also observed that the implications of the principles set out in the 2006 Review were not strongly reflected in the APR procedure as proposed by the Review, and as currently practised within the University.

Institutional framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities

27 Senate is the governing body of the University and responsibility for the control of internal academic affairs rests with Academic Council. Responsibilities for taught and research programmes are delegated by Academic Council to its Education and Research Committees, respectively. The Education Committee is responsible for the development, implementation and evaluation of the University's Education Strategy and for overseeing the standards, quality and enhancement of taught programmes. The Education Committee is served, in turn, by the Courses and Regulations Group (CRG), Collaborative Provision Group (CPG) and Scholarships and Awards Group (SAG), and by an Academic Board that acts as the 'central University Staff/Student Consultative Committee'. General responsibility for research, including the quality and standards of research degree programmes, is held by the Research Committee and its Research Ethics, Regulations and Research Governance Groups.

28 The University's structure includes three bodies which, although they contribute to the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, are not formally accountable to Academic Council. The first of these bodies is the Planning and Finance Committee (PFC), which reports to Senate. PFC receives reports from the University Management Board (UMB) which, in turn, is served by the University Operating Board (UOB). The UMB and the UOB are described as having 'roles to play in managing academic standards through the endorsement of relevant strategies and policies, monitoring implementation of strategies and policies and through the management of the integrated academic and financial planning process'.

29 Schools, together with the Institutes of Theology and Professional Legal Studies, are the key academic management units within the University's structure. Schools and institutes are grouped into three cognate areas, namely: Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences; Engineering and Physical Sciences; and Medicine, Health and Life Sciences, each of which is managed by a Dean who, through their membership of the University Management Board, are able to

ensure that decisions are informed by the needs and views of staff in their areas of responsibility. Deans are also members of the University Operating Board. Each school is itself managed by a head who chairs the school management board, the membership of which includes one or more director(s) of education and the directors of research. Schools are supported by nine academic support directorates, including the Directorate of Academic and Student Affairs (DASA), which serves as the primary interface between all the directorates and the academic schools and students. The divisions of DASA comprise Academic Affairs, Education and Skills Development, and Student Affairs.

30 The Academic Plan 2006-2011 emphasises that the 'atmosphere and ethos' of the University are reliant on 'ambitious academic and managerial leadership in all areas to create the ethos of "one University" in a spirit of collaboration and collegiality'. This was reflected by restructuring the University to create a two-tier decision-making process founded on a close working relationship between the academic and academic-support areas. The audit team learned that the purposes of the exercise had been to strengthen academic leadership through the creation of a flatter structure and the empowerment of schools, and to promote 'coherent, effective and efficient working across academic and academic-support areas'.

31 This strengthening of lateral and vertical relationships was accompanied by a review in 2005 of the University's committee structure, prompted in part by the observations of the 2003 Lambert Review of business-university collaboration and by the desire to establish a streamlined decision-making process. Seven core committees were disbanded following Senate's earlier approval of a 'Scheme of Delegation', which authorised Academic Council, Education Committee, CRG, CPG and schools to undertake certain responsibilities on its behalf. The key principles which underpinned the revisions included the maintenance of 'a minimalist structure', 'expeditious decision-making', a 'lighter touch regulatory and accountability regime' and the location of 'accountability for quality and responsibility for standards' at the point of delivery.

32 While Academic Council has ultimate responsibility for the quality and standards of the University's provision, the restructuring of the University had resulted in a devolution of 'greater responsibility for academic standards to the Schools'. Although the establishment of the new structure was governed by the principle that a school should have a 'scale sufficient to justify adequate administrative support and reduce duplication', a uniform set of responsibilities is delegated to all schools irrespective of their size. In view of the significance of the restructuring for the empowerment of schools and for the responsibilities invested in heads of school, the audit team sought to establish the means by which the University, and in particular Academic Council and its committees, directs and oversees operations at this level.

33 The audit team learned that each school has discretion to manage its affairs over and above the minimum requirement that it establishes a School Management Board with a prescribed constitution, and that it appoints one or more directors of education and of research. There are education and research committees in most, if not all schools and all have a school board, which acts as a forum for all academic staff. The number and accountability of programme boards and staff student consultative committees vary from school to school and staff informed the team that University approval is not required for the internal committee structures which a school may establish.

34 The introduction of the role of school-based directors of education and research (see paragraph 22) is intended to facilitate 'a more focused approach to academic standards within the schools', and the significance of their role was confirmed by the academic staff met by the audit team. Operations at school level are also overseen by the committees of Academic Council through the receipt of information generated by the University's quality assurance procedures, supported by DASA, undertakes regular audits of module and programme specifications, and monitors external examiner reports and school responses to these reports. In addition to these measures, the line management of heads of school by deans is an important means by which schools are accountable for the discharge of their responsibilities for academic standards, and the

quality of learning opportunities. Deans have a responsibility for ensuring sound academic management; they meet with their heads of school on a monthly basis and maintain close relationships with the school-based directors of education and research. Although deans are not ex officio members of school committees, they may attend school management board and senior team meetings.

35 Both the student written submission and the students met by the audit team commented on variability of practice between the schools of the University. Academic staff also commented that the University's new structure did not encourage interschool collaboration, and that there had been more effective informal mechanisms for the exchange of ideas and good practice across the institution when the University had faculties. There was, however, a general recognition that the role of the deans could provide a means of resolving inconsistencies of practice and of contributing to the realisation of the 'One University' aspiration in the Academic Plan. The audit team noted that deans are required to '...initiate and develop interdisciplinary activities across the University'. Each holds one or two areas of corporate responsibility, and they perform a key role in representing the interests of schools to the wider University. Interschool liaison is also facilitated by regular meetings of school managers, which are convened by DASA, and each Directorate contributes to interschool liaison through the appointment of 'territorial officers'. The constitution of the Education Committee at the time of the audit allowed for the nomination of one Director of Education and one Head of School from each Faculty grouping. In addition, the co-opted members consisted of a Director of Education from each Faculty grouping.

36 The University's framework includes robust arrangements for securing the management accountability of heads of school and, by this means, ensuring supervision of the exercise by schools of their responsibilities for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. The DASA also makes an important contribution to monitoring and advising on activity at school level, and there are various informal arrangements by which the University is able to address variability in education practices. The audit team concluded, however, that it would be desirable for the University to consider whether the authority of Academic Council and its committees might be strengthened by establishing a formal reporting and accountability relationship between each school's senior academic committee or committees, and the relevant committee(s) of Academic Council. In the view of the team, the University may also wish to consider whether the desirability of ensuring that committee minutes and papers are readily accessible to staff and students as one means of addressing the variability in education practices between schools and promoting greater staff awareness of issues and developments outside their own Schools.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

37 The University's quality assurance procedures were reviewed in 2006-07. The review documentation did not distinguish between these procedures in terms of their particular contributions to the management of academic standards, and the Briefing Paper states that 'academic standards are considered in all of the University's quality review procedures', some of which are conducted at school level and others by the University.

Approval

38 The development of programme specifications and module pro formas is undertaken at school level, and responsibility for the approval of new modules and changes to existing modules has been delegated by the Education Committee to schools subject to regular audits which are conducted by the Directorate of Academic and Student Affairs (DASA) and reported to the Courses and Regulations Group (CRG). Programme proposals are considered by programme evaluation panels. A programme evaluation meeting (PEM) considers documents produced by a programme team and meets with members of the team. Each programme evaluation panel must include at

least one external member 'to provide an objective and independent view of academic standards', and a PEM is normally attended by a representative from DASA, who provides advice on study regulations and quality assurance requirements. A PEM report is submitted to the CRG, together with the response of the school involved to any recommendations made by a panel. The CRG either approves the new programme or returns the report to the school for further action. The Group then reports on the approval of new programmes to the Education Committee.

39 A Programme Evaluation Panel is chaired by the head of the school in which the programme is located and its membership includes at least one colleague from the school. Having noted that the approval procedure for collaborative programmes requires that the PEM is chaired by a representative of Collaborative Provision Group (CPG), the audit team considered the possibility that a panel's independence of judgement might be compromised by the fact that its chair is responsible for the development and management of the proposed programme. However, the documentation seen by the team demonstrated the objectivity and rigour of the programme approval process.

Monitoring

40 Modules are regularly reviewed by schools, taking into account student evaluations of teaching and student attainment. The module reviews, which in the view of the audit team are detailed and thorough, are then considered in the annual review of the relevant programme. The Annual Programme Review (APR) procedure also requires the consideration of other evidence such as the programme specification, student attainment and external examiners' reports. The APR outcomes are considered at school level by programme review groups. School overview reports and individual APR reports are considered at University level by a subgroup of the Education Committee.

41 The subgroup's annual APR reports to the Education Committee provide a brief analysis of common themes and a short list of issues for the attention of the University. Although the analysis provided in school overview reports varies in its detail and depth, most reports are brief, offer little evidence of critical reflection and lack specific reference to individual programmes. It appeared to the audit team, therefore, that there is a progressive filtration of APR outcomes from programmes to schools, and from schools to the Education Committee, and that the information that is ultimately available to that Committee is limited by the nature of the questions contained in the templates for programme and school reports. For example, school overview and programme reports contain closed questions on standards-related issues and further details are only required if a programme review panel or a school's programme review group choose to answer them in the negative, and the forms do not encourage reflection on such issues as the appropriateness of the curriculum and assessment strategies. The team also noted that the template does not include a question on the evidence that has been considered at programme or school level. For these reasons, the team concluded that the formal documentation submitted to the Education Committee would not itself provide the evidence that justified the formal record that 'the results of the review demonstrated...reflective practice across the University' and that 'most schools took into account student views.'. The team, therefore, recommends that it is advisable that the University considers whether the APR process provides the Education Committee and the Collaborative Provision Group with sufficient evidence of appropriate quality and reliability from schools and collaborative partners, to enable them to discharge their responsibilities on behalf of Academic Council (see also paragraph 178 in respect of collaborative provision).

Review

42 The report of the previous audit noted the rigour of the University's subject review process as a feature of good practice. In 2007-08, the University piloted a new form of periodic review, termed the Educational Enhancement Process (EEP). This procedure is carried out in partnership between a school and the University and is managed by DASA. Schools are required to produce a reflective statement focusing on the enhancement of their educational provision. A panel, comprising student representatives and the relevant school manager, staff from other schools, and two external members, visits the school to be reviewed for one day to meet with staff and students and to review documentation. The EEP report is considered by the Education Committee, and schools are now required to demonstrate how they are addressing emergent issues in the annual academic planning process.

43 The EEP is said to differ from the previous subject review process, and from the University's other quality assurance procedures, by its focus on enhancement. In the reflective statements that they prepare in preparation for EEP, schools are invited to consider matters relating to the quality of educational provision and the student experience, the implementation of the University's quality assurance procedures and their future plans for development and enhancement. The documentary evidence submitted by schools includes programme specifications, APRs and external examiners' reports. On the basis of the evidence considered by the audit team, it was apparent that care had been taken to secure the involvement of students in the EEP pilot review. However, the extent to which this process is intended to provide either an assurance of the maintenance of academic standards, or results in the enhancement of provision, was unclear to the team and whether, therefore, the new process provides the Education Committee with the full range of information that it would require to fulfil its remit.

External examiners

44 The University updates its comprehensive External Examiner Handbook annually, most recently in September 2008. The responsibilities of external examiners in approving module marks and degree awards are described in the University's Study Regulations. External examiner arrangements for collaborative provision programmes are the same as those for internal programmes.

45 There is no formal training, but external examiners receive a copy of the External Examiner Handbook each year, which briefs them fully on their duties and responsibilities, and schools are required to send them a set of the documents specified in the Handbook, including programme specifications and school examination procedures.

46 External examiners are appointed by the Education Committee, following nomination by the relevant head of school, for a period of four years. They are formal members of boards of examiners, which operate at both subject (module) and programme level. In their first year they are expected to attend sessions of boards in both semester one and two. In subsequent years, they are expected to attend at least one session.

47 External examiners report using a well-designed template which requires them to confirm that academic standards are being maintained, and that they, and student attainment, are comparable with other higher education institutions. In all the reports seen by the audit team, the external examiners were satisfied with the standards achieved by the students. They submit their reports to Academic Affairs, which forwards them to the head of school. Academic Affairs provide a thorough annual overview for the CRG, which reports significant issues to the Regulations Review Group and to the Education Committee. A similar summary of the external examiners' reports for research students goes to the Research Committee (see paragraph 187). The team saw evidence that this system was working well and noted effective responses to University-level issues raised by external examiners. However, the Academic Affairs annual overview does not cover school-level issues raised by external examiners. These are responded to at school level.

48 External examiners' reports are intended to be considered in the Module Review and the APR process. However, some reviews take place before external examiners' written reports are received. In these cases, the review in question has to depend on records of oral reports and the previous year's formal report.

49 The Module Review reports seen by the audit team, although generally thorough, did not normally consider comments from external examiners. The documentation the audit team saw from the APRs of three schools confirmed that these considered external examiners reports, but in varying detail. In fact, in one case, external examiner reports were not listed among the evidence used in compiling the report. There was little indication in the documentation of action being taken as a result of external examiners' comments. The School Overview Report Template, which is how a school informs Academic Affairs that the APR process has been completed, does not include a section confirming that responses have been made to external examiners' reports.

50 Heads of school or their nominee, normally a school director of education, are required to respond to external examiners reports within six weeks of their receipt. These responses are monitored by Academic Affairs for timeliness and completeness. The examples seen by the audit team were good, but were not always integrated with the APRs in either timing or content.

51 Documentation for a recent Periodic Review that the audit team scrutinised included reports from the previous two years and the school's responses to these reports. These were not mentioned in the subsequent periodic review report. There were, however, two comments about the practice of discounting marks from some modules in the final classification and the lack of prescriptive rules for doing this, which were followed up centrally.

52 The evidence the audit team heard indicated that most schools reported the content of external examiners' reports to students, but this did not always occur and when it did it was in a variety of ways, and to varying degrees. There is no reference either to the necessity or to the form for doing this in the External Examiners Handbook.

53 Overall, the audit team confirmed that the University is making appropriate use of independent external examiners in assuring the standards of its awards, although it identified a number of areas where procedures could be improved, particular those determining the way in which responses to external examiners are integrated into the University's Annual Programme Review system.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

54 The audit team saw widespread evidence that the University's own codes of practice and regulations are fully informed by *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), the *Code of practice* and subject benchmark statements. Changes to the external reference points are monitored by Academic Affairs, and the Education Committee has responsibility for ensuring appropriate alignment with them.

55 The approval process for new internal and collaborative programmes is based closely on the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*, and it includes specific instructions to the chair of a programme evaluation meeting to ensure that the programme and module specifications are consistent with both the FHEQ and the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*, defined as Sections 6, 7 and 9. The University's Programme Specification template requires identification of the relevant subject benchmark statement, although the audit team noted that this section was not always completed. There is a requirement for an external academic or business member on each programme evaluation panel.

56 The University's Assessment Working Group, established by the Education Committee in 2005, had in its terms of reference a requirement to ensure appropriate alignment with the precepts contained in the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*, and the revised University Assessment Policy it produced and which was implemented in 2008-09.

57 The current External Examiner Handbook includes as an appendix the precepts from the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*. The external examiner's report form for both undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes ask external examiners to confirm whether the standards of the awards are consistent with the FHEQ and, as already noted (see paragraph 47), that they, and students' attainment, are comparable with other higher education institutions.

58 There is a specific question in the Annual Programme Review templates asking if both the Programme Review Group and, in the Overview Report template, the school, are satisfied that programmes are in line with the FHEQ.

59 The University has a strong commitment to developing its European links. It has mapped its own marking system on to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and has used this since 1990. It has appointed Erasmus Programme Directors for most discipline areas. The Implementation of the Bologna Process Working Group was established in 2007 as a working group of the Education Committee to review progress. This reported to the Education Committee in May 2008 when a detailed action plan for education and research committees to take the European agenda forward was approved. The Working Group is to be reconvened late in 2008-09 to check progress in achieving the targets agreed.

60 Further external involvement in the University's processes is discussed in paragraphs 96 to 98.

Assessment policies and regulations

61 The focus of this section of the report is on the University's supervision of assessment policies and practice for all taught programmes, both undergraduate and postgraduate. The assessment of postgraduate research students is covered in Section 6. This section deals with programmes delivered by, and at, the University.

62 Assessment lies at the heart of the University's Education Strategy, which states that the University will 'ensure that students are assessed effectively, receiving proper and prompt feedback that meets their learning needs'. One of the main tasks of the University Assessment Working Party that met between November 2007 and April 2008, was to 'oversee the production of guidance for academic staff on the operation of assessment within the University, at both undergraduate and taught post-graduate levels, drawing on current good practice as appropriate'.

63 The University introduced a new Assessment Policy during 2008-09, which is published on the DASA website and is contained in the DASA Policy and Procedures Manual. The Policy addresses a recommendation in the 2004 audit report concerning the development of an assessment framework. It outlines 10 broad principles which, it claims, establish a code of good practice for a range of assessment procedures for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes, including collaborative programmes. For each principle, the policy sets out what is required, along with good practice statements and further references, links and/or readings. The Assessment Policy is informed by the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 6*, and is being implemented by schools during 2008-09. Academic Council was advised in July 2008 that 'the Centre for Educational Development will develop an online facility for use by staff from the beginning of the 2008-09 academic year and will provide online exemplars of good practice'. The audit team was able to see a range of useful material relating to assessment, including policy, regulations and resources, on the CED website on Queen's Online.

64 The audit team formed the view that the Assessment Policy offers clear and useful high-level guidance, but says little about implementation, in that while it offers schools broad guidelines on what they should do, it offers little on how they should do it. For example, it states that schools should provide feedback to students on their submitted work, but it gives no required or preferred deadline for the return of such feedback.

65 The student written submission (SWS) reported that students were broadly content with the Assessment Policy, but some concerns were expressed in the submission about variability of implementation between schools, and the lack of institutional monitoring of the Policy. For example, students expressed concerns about equity of treatment between progress committees in different schools, compared with the former faculty progress committees.

66 The Assessment Policy is underpinned by the University's Study Regulations and it forms part of the Assessment Framework, which is published in Section 5 of the DASA Policy and Procedures Manual. The audit team found the framework, which describes approved procedures, to be comprehensive, accessible and clearly documented.

67 Information about assessment on particular programmes is published in course handbooks. The audit team was able to scrutinise a sample of 2008-09 programme handbooks as part of its sampling process. They all included information (not standard text) on assessment, including use of the Conceptual Equivalents Scales (CES) system (see paragraph 70) for deriving the final course mark, requirements for progression between stages, rules for compensation, the method for arriving at degree classification, use of the Predominance Rule (see paragraph 72), and plagiarism.

68 Approved procedures for boards of examiners are published in the Assessment Framework. Subject boards approve module marks; programme boards approve degree awards. Where appropriate, and with the approval of the Education Committee, they may be combined into a single board. The lead school for a joint award is responsible for running boards of examiners for such awards. The chair of each board of examiners is appointed by the relevant head of school, and is responsible to the Director of Academic and Student Affairs for ensuring that a board follows the correct procedures and regulations, and that the correct marks are returned to the University's Examinations Office. Programme boards must include at least one external examiner from the relevant subject boards. School boards approve module marks and degree awards, although Academic Council has ultimate responsibility for quality and standards.

69 Assessment criteria for modules or programmes are set by academic staff, approved by their school, and published in course handbooks. Undergraduate and postgraduate students who met the audit team confirmed that they knew where to find assessment and progression regulations on Queen's Online.

70 Marking of submitted work on all taught programmes is informed by the use of standardised grade descriptors, CES, to help assure equity of assessment of students' work across the schools. Use of the CES system is mandatory 'unless answers are clearly either right or wrong...[and exceptions] for example, due to the requirements of the professional bodies or professional programmes, should be approved by the Courses and Regulations Group'. The audit team was able to confirm that the Scales and guidance on how they are used were published in the course handbooks it saw, but the team found no explicit evidence in a sample of board of examiners' minutes to confirm that 'due consideration had been given to the Scale,' as required.

71 The University has clear rules relating to student progression and qualification for awards, which are designed to ensure equity of treatment of students on different programmes and in different schools, and are published in course handbooks. Students who the audit team met confirmed that they knew where to find assessment and progression regulations on Queen's Online.

72 The approved method of determining all honours degree classifications is based on weighted marks for individual modules, and is published in the DASA Policy and Procedures Manual. The decision is guided by the Predominance Rule taken from the University's General Regulations, which states that 'where the percentage mark is within three percentage points of a higher classification and at least half the weighted module marks are in the higher classification, the higher classification shall be awarded'. The DASA Policy and Procedures Manual also states that 'Boards of Examiners have the discretion to discount the lowest module mark for classification purposes [where] the module mark does not reflect the student's normal level of performance [and] only if it is a pass mark'.

73 There are currently two approved ways of weighting modules when calculating the honours classification (25:75 or 40:60) for Stage 2 and Stage 3, which the audit team was advised are legacies of the former Faculty system. In April 2008, the Regulations Review Group proposed that there should be a single degree classification weighting of 30:70 for level 2 and level 3, but this was referred back by Academic Council. The Education Committee agreed at its meeting on 9 March 2009 that a standard weighting of 10:30:60 should be applied to all three-year undergraduate programmes, subject to approval by Academic Council.

74 At the time of the audit visit, the University was actively discussing how changes in assessment might help to improve undergraduate student retention. Options under consideration include counting first-year performance in final degree classification, adopting a standard weighting (10:30:60) for all three-year undergraduate programmes, and adjusting the structure of the academic year, with particular regard to the timing of Semester One examinations.

75 Approved University procedures for dealing with academic offences, particularly cheating in examinations and plagiarism in coursework, are clearly described in the DASA Policy and Procedures Manual. Students who the audit team met, confirmed that they knew where to find information on these procedures on Queen's Online. Minor offences, where the work counts for no more than a third of the assessment for the module, are dealt with at school level, where the relevant head of school has discretion to decide which of four approved penalties is appropriate for particular cases. There are more formal procedures for dealing with major offences, which are overseen by the chair of the relevant board of examiners. Students have the right of appeal against decisions relating to both minor and major academic offences. Each head of school is required to report annually to the Director of Academic and Student Affairs on all major and minor offences dealt with in their school, and the Director reports annually to the Education Committee. The team found variations between a sample of programme handbooks in descriptions of how cases of suspected plagiarism are handled.

76 The need for schools to provide students with appropriate and timely feedback on their work is explicitly stated in the University's Education Strategy (see paragraph 100). Each school is required to have a written statement of its policy on the provision and timing of feedback to students, and feedback must be provided to students as soon as possible after the student has completed the assessment task in order to maximise its benefit. In addition, feedback must be linked to the stated assessment criteria, highlight strengths as well as weaknesses, be written in clear and accessible language, focus on what the student needs to improve their work and on priorities areas for improvement. Students who the audit team met, confirmed that they had opportunities to discuss their work with appropriate members of staff, in accordance with the Assessment Policy. The team found information school policies on the provision of written feedback on assignments in most of a sample of undergraduate and taught postgraduate programme handbooks provided by schools; those that contained such information stated that feedback would normally be provided within three weeks of a submission deadline.

77 The University is aware from multiple sources, including the Report on Annual Programme Review for Academic Year 2006-07, the National Student Survey 2008 overview of results, and the results of the First and Second Year Experience Surveys 2008, that students have been unhappy with the quality and timing of the feedback they have received on submitted work, and this was echoed in the SWS. In response to this, a number of initiatives have been undertaken by the Education and Skills Development Division of the DASA, and the Education Committee acknowledged that the particular focus for 2008-09 would be in relation to assessment and feedback and in ensuring that the University's new Assessment Policy was implemented consistently across all schools. This would include a conference on assessment and feedback run by the Centre for Educational Development.

78 A small number of postgraduate research students deliver teaching, mainly laboratory demonstrating and running seminar groups, to undergraduate students (see paragraph 197) as teaching assistants in some schools, mainly in first-year modules. Some are involved in assessing students' work, and in such cases, their assessments are moderated by the staff responsible for the module, although there is no formal University policy on this and decisions are made at school level.

79 A review of general regulations, including Study Regulations, was carried out in 2007-08, partly in response to concerns about the classification of joint degrees. Key areas under review included the University's definition of 'good standing', and the contribution of year-one, two and three work, respectively, which contributes to final degree classifications (to assist with the issue of student retention).

80 The audit team concluded that the University has made good progress in addressing the recommendation in the 2004 QAA audit report, namely, 'to develop further the assessment framework with a view to securing greater commonality of judgement and practice across the University with regard to progression rules and degree classifications', although its initial response was relatively slow and the project remains a work in progress. The Assessment Policy is being rolled out during the current academic year and the Assessment Working Group (see paragraph 62) will review it at the end of the year. In its SWS, the Students' Union suggested that the University should complete the proposed review of the Assessment Policy and embed any best practice that emerges at an institutional level, and ensure targeted improvements in the area of assessment and feedback are conducted in academic units which perform particularly poorly. The audit team would support this suggestion.

81 The audit team noted a number of areas in which assessment procedures vary between schools, including the treatment of students in school progress committees, the discounting of module marks for classification purposes, the discretion given to each heads of school in dealing with minor cases of plagiarism, and the use and moderation of postgraduate research students in assessing undergraduate students' work. In light of the variability of practice in assessment, and students' concerns about the quality and timing of feedback, and given that senior managers acknowledge that assessment and feedback is an issue, the team considers it is advisable for the University to address the variability in education practices at school level, to ensure equity of treatment of all students and of the student experience (see also paragraphs 111, 122 and 211).

Management information - statistics

82 The University uses statistical reporting to inform the development and implementation of strategy and policy relating to its management of academic standards. Its approach is based on the introduction of a new student information system (see below, paragraph 83) and the adoption of a metrics-based approach to performance management at school and university levels.

83 The University has invested resources in the development of a new student information system, Qsis, the roll-out of which was scheduled to start during academic year 2008-09. Major problems were encountered at the start of the roll-out relating both to timing and technical matters, as a result of which significant numbers of students experienced difficulties in registering for their course in 2008-09. The University provided real-time reports to students throughout the registration and enrolment period. However, the Students' Union expressed the view that, while the University had made some attempts to keep students informed about developments throughout the process, these had been largely ineffectual. As a result of the complexity of the project and the scale of the technical failure at enrolment and registration, the implementation phase had to be extended, involving a more gradual transfer from legacy systems to Qsis than had previously been anticipated. The University had a contingency plan, but the problems had major adverse impacts on schools at the start of the academic year.

84 In February 2009, Senate News, an e-zine that is circulated electronically to all members of staff, reported that 'a Sub-Group of the Student Information System Steering Group has been established, chaired by the Registrar and Chief Operating Officer, to systematically manage the project's ongoing implementation. This Sub-Group has formulated a revised Development Plan, focused on the key priorities for the University...and internal and external resources had been fully aligned in support of this plan. The plan is also supported by regular, and timely, communications to all stakeholders, both staff and students'. A revised implementation schedule has now been agreed through to July 2010 and senior staff have been seconded to manage the project to ensure smooth delivery. According to Senate News (Feb 2009), 'senior management and members of Senate (have) commended the Schools, Directorates and students for the commitment, dedication and professionalism they had shown in responding to the significant challenges raised by the implementation of the new system'.

85 The University uses student statistics (on admissions, progression, completion and student achievement) to produce management information, as part of a series of key performance indicators (KPIs), which are discussed at University and school levels, and 'inform the academic planning exercise and help both the schools and the University to prioritise management actions'. Progress against the Corporate Plan is monitored via an agreed set of KPIs, at University and school levels. The audit team noted that many of the KPIs are business-related and do not directly address questions of academic quality and standards as such (see also paragraph 88).

86 University and school KPIs are published annually in a Performance Management Report, which is sent to each head of school and Dean. The University states that the report is aligned with the best practice guidance recommended within the Committee of University Chairmen (CUC) report on Monitoring of Institutional Performance and the Use of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The audit team was able to read the most recent report, and to confirm that it contains standard numerical data for each school, uses a 'traffic-light' system to highlight areas of relative underperformance, and collates the school-level data into University aggregates and school/faculty summaries.

87 School and University targets and performance against them inform revisions of the Academic Plan. Deans review school performance against targets with each head of school on a monthly basis, and the Vice-Chancellor and his senior colleagues visit each school annually to review formally and discuss school performance with staff in each school, and discuss what response or remedial action is appropriate.

88 Schools report on progress towards targets (including recruitment, progression, retention and attainment) each year during the annual Academic Planning exercise. The audit team read the 2009 academic plans for three schools, which included detailed commentary on how each school intends to follow-up on the KPIs in the context of academic planning and resource management, covering staffing, student recruitment, student attainment, programme review and curriculum development, research, finance, new developments and initiatives, and prioritised actions. Each school academic plan is considered by the University Management Board, and informs the University's consideration of academic planning and resource management.

89 One area where the University is committed to improving performance is student retention, particularly at undergraduate level. A report on first-year examinations and degree weighting discussed by the Education Committee in March 2009 noted that 'the University has unacceptably high drop-out rates which compare unfavourably both with our benchmark and with Russell Group comparators'. The audit team was surprised that the Institutional Briefing Paper was silent on the retention problem, given its importance to the University and the attention it is still receiving. Indeed, the team was told by senior managers that 'student retention has absorbed much of our attention over the last few years' (see also paragraph 155).

90 The Briefing Paper stated that 'progression and completion statistics at module and programme levels are considered routinely by Schools and formally during Module Review and Annual Programme Review'. The Supporting Student Attainment subgroup, which reports to the Education Committee, was set up to ensure that the University has effective systems in place for tracking, monitoring and supporting student attainment. The University also uses data on student withdrawals, progression and retention to inform its Widening Participation Policy 2008-2011.

91 In addition, the University uses results from external and internal surveys of the student experience to inform academic planning and management. This is considered in more detail in Section 3 of the annex.

92 The audit team acknowledges that, through the development of Qsis and the adoption of the KPI-based approach to the management of schools, and monitoring of school and University progress against agreed strategy objectives, the University has made significant progress in addressing a recommendation in the 2004 QAA audit report, namely 'that it is desirable to complete the work and training necessary to make fuller statistical data more easily available to schools, faculties and relevant committees to facilitate analysis of student performance across the University'. The team concluded that the University has responded appropriately to the challenges posed by the implementation of the new Qsis system, with a more realistic revised schedule and regular progress reports being given to staff and students. The team also recognises the benefits of the KPI-based school performance monitoring system and the potential impact of this system on academic quality and standards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

Framework for managing the quality of learning opportunities

93 The framework for managing the quality of learning opportunities includes an Education Strategy which is monitored and updated by the Education Committee on a triennial basis 'to ensure that the University's provision keeps pace with the changing environment'. The Education Strategy is underpinned by various policies and strategies, including the Admissions, Assessment and Widening Participation Policies. During 2007-2008, the University developed and approved a Student Employability and Skills Policy 'promotes an integrated approach to skills development'.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

94 The Briefing Paper did not itself distinguish those aspects of the University's approval, monitoring and review procedures that make a particular contribution to the management of the quality of learning opportunities, and the following paragraphs should be read in conjunction with the material in Section 2.

95 The University has a two-stage procedure for the approval of programmes. This requires 'approval in principle' before a programme is developed for consideration by a programme evaluation panel. To obtain first-stage approval, a school is expected to provide evidence that due consideration has been given to a programme's resource requirements. Applications are considered by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students), the Director of Academic and Student Affairs, and the Director of Finance on behalf of the Planning subgroup of (UMB). This subgroup also considers the programme outline and a marketing evaluation. The school documentation that was seen by the audit team was both detailed and thorough, and there was evidence that the Planning subgroup had given careful consideration to the proposal. Following approval in principle, programme proposals are considered by a programme evaluation panel.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

96 As noted previously, overall responsibility for ensuring that the University's policies and regulations reflect the Academic Infrastructure lies with the Education Committee.

97 The QAA Review of research degree programmes carried out in July 2006 confirmed that the University's procedures for postgraduate research students met the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

98 A register of links with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) is maintained by the Academic Affairs Office, with a schedule of past and future accreditation procedures. Schools are responsible for managing the relationships with accrediting bodies. Programme specifications require the listing of accrediting bodies and their reports are reviewed as part of the Annual Programme Review (APR) and the Educational Enhancement Process. Requirements relating to programme curricula are dealt with at school level by a programme committee or school education committee, with any changes in a programme specification being reported and approved in the normal way through the University's Courses and Regulations Group. PSRB reports received by schools are copied to Academic Affairs. University-level requirements, for example, needing additional resources or changes to regulations, are directed to the appropriate University Committee or manager by Academic Affairs. The audit team saw evidence in one instance that this system was working well.

Management information - feedback from students

99 This section focuses on the use made by the institution of management information in assuring the quality of student learning opportunities, particularly through the collection and use of feedback from internal surveys and from external surveys such as the National Student Survey (NSS). Students also provide the University with feedback on their views and experiences through the student representative and staff-student consultative committee (SSCC) system, which is described in paragraph 116.

100 The University is committed to collecting and using student feedback, and this is embedded in the Education Strategy, which states that 'the University will develop its student feedback systems so that student views inform the learning experience, ensuring that it is truly student-centred'. Student views are collected at school level mainly through module feedback, and at University level through student experience surveys.

101 The University's requirements for the collection and use of student feedback at school level are published in the Directorate of Academic and Student Affairs (DASA) Policies & Procedures Manual. Heads of schools whom the audit team met, confirmed that these procedures are followed in their schools using electronic and printed questionnaires. There is currently no agreed institutional questionnaire, but a sample teacher questionnaire and core questions are available in the DASA Manual, to inform the design of school questionnaires.

102 According to the DASA Manual, the teacher in charge of the module is responsible for analysing the questionnaires, and the head of school has the right to see all evaluation questionnaires and the analysis of them. The Report on Annual Programme Review for Academic Year 2007-2008, presented to the March 2009 meeting of the Education Committee, noted that 'most Schools took into account student views from module reviews, SSCCs, informal discussions, and teaching evaluations'.

103 Heads of school are expected to ensure that there is a system in place for providing students with feedback on the action taken as a result of their comments. The audit team was informed that this usually happens through student representatives reporting back to their peers through the SSCC process. The University will no doubt wish to explore more robust and systematic ways of ensuring that students receive timely and accurate feedback on the action taken, as a result of their comments in module feedback.

104 The University is aware that current policy on student evaluation of teaching dates from 1995; does not reflect the *Code of practice*; and will have to be updated. In 2007, it set up a working party, the Evaluation of Teaching Group, to explore the production of a centralised electronic system for student evaluation of teaching. Pilot testing of an online questionnaire was scheduled for 2007-08, but the test was put back to the first semester of 2008-09 because of the implementation problems with Qsis (see paragraphs 83 and 84). The Evaluation of Teaching Group reported back to the Education Committee during 2008-09, and at the time of the audit, was designing a set of core questions that could be supplemented by school or subject-specific ones as appropriate.

105 Module Review Reports are expected to be included as part of the evidence base within Annual Programme Review (APR). The Report on Annual Programme Review for Academic Year 2006-2007, which was considered by the March 2008 meeting of the Education Committee, noted that 'in some schools it was unclear who had carried out the annual programme review and how student views had been taken into account'. The audit team was able to read the APR documents for selected schools, which confirmed that module feedback had been taken into account in them.

106 The University collects feedback from its students on their experiences through three sector-wide surveys: the NSS, for final-year undergraduates; the International Student Barometer (ISB) for undergraduate and postgraduate students, and PRES (Postgraduate Research Experience Survey), which is covered in Section 6 of this annex, for postgraduate research students.

107 The use of NSS results, in particular, is both systematic and strategic. The results, analysed by school, are discussed by the University Operating Board and the Education Committee, and are included in the key performance indicators (KPIs) that inform decision-making at university and school level. Results are sent to each head of school for discussion in school management boards and school-level follow-up, which is reviewed later in the year by the Centre for Educational Development (CED). Results are also sent to directorates to inform decision-making and follow-up. Benchmarking the University's NSS results against those from other Russell Group Universities provided external confirmation of the importance of highlighting the need to improve its system for providing students with feedback on submitted work.

108 Feedback on the experience of undergraduate students is collected directly through two bespoke internal surveys covering first and second-year students respectively. Response rates on both surveys are reasonable, at around 30 per cent. Results and detailed reports from each, which include school-level summary tables as well as follow-up action plans, are widely disseminated. Reports are discussed by the University Operating Board and the Education Committee. At the time of the audit, plans were being discussed for a survey of the views of taught postgraduate students.

109 Student views on non-academic aspects of the student experience, particularly on the Students' Union, accommodation, sports facilities, childcare, and Welcome Centre, were collected through the 2008 Queen's University Student Survey. That survey was commissioned by the Student Plus Directorate (see paragraph 23) and carried out by external consultants, based on face-to-face interviews with 414 students. Results from the survey were used to inform improvements of facilities and services (see also paragraph 151).

110 The audit team formed the view that the ways in which the University makes effective use of feedback from students which is collected at institutional level, is a feature of good practice. The team saw evidence that the University's approach to learning, teaching and assessment is often informed by student feedback, particularly that which is collected at University level. There is, however, scope for adopting a more systematic way of 'closing the loop' in terms of reporting back to student on what changes were introduced as a result of their feedback, given the fact that, according to the Briefing Paper, only some school handbooks include information on responses to feedback.

111 As part of the recommendation for the University to address the variability in education practices at school level, to ensure equity of treatment of all students and of the student experience (see paragraph 81), the audit team would encourage the University to take steps to ensure that the collection, analysis and use of students' views on teaching is fully and consistently embedded in all schools, and that effective ways are introduced to inform all students about responses to the feedback they have given to the University.

Role of students in quality assurance

112 The University's commitment to including students in its quality assurance processes is contained in its Student Charter, which states that students 'can expect the University to provide positions for student representatives on relevant University committees, boards, working groups, forums and reviews; provide opportunities for you and your student representatives to give feedback to the school and University on your experience as a student, including participation in appropriate quality assurance and enhancement procedures; (and) provide information on action taken in response to feedback received from students'. The commitment is echoed in the University's Education Strategy and reinforced in Section 12 of the DASA Policies and Procedures Manual.

113 Students' Union (SU) officers, elected from students by students, play important roles in representing the views of students on University committees and in discussions with senior staff. The setting of the SU within Queen's University, as a division of the Directorate of Student Plus, is unusual, but that does not appear to inhibit Union officers working with and for the student body. The SU is headed by the full-time elected President, supported by other elected sabbatical officers, including one with responsibility for equality and diversity. The views and interests of mature students are addressed through the SU Mature Students' Society, those of postgraduate students are addressed through the Postgraduate Association, and a new SU Vice-President Equality and Diversity post has been established to help meet the needs of international students.

114 The audit team was told by officers of the SU that they have regular, informal meetings with the Vice-Chancellor and Registrar, and formal meetings once a month with the Director of Academic and Student Affairs and fortnightly with the Director of Student Plus.

115 The IBP stated that 'student representation occurs at all levels from schools through to core University committees, such as Academic Council'. This was confirmed to the audit team in meetings with the Vice-Chancellor, officers from the SU and students. The SU has a representative on virtually all key University committees including Senate, Planning and Finance, Research Committee, Education Committee, etc. The Students' Union is also invited to join committee subgroups and ad hoc working groups as required. There is, however, no student representation on the UMB, University Operating Board (UOB) or the Capital Projects Group.

116 Each school has a student representative on Academic Board which acts, in effect, as an institutional SSCC. In some schools, the student representative on Academic Board is elected, in others they are selected by academic staff in a school. Some schools also have student reps on their management board, and in some schools student representatives are allowed to attend staff meetings.

117 Schools are required to have their own SSCC, and are expected to follow the procedures published in Section 12.1 of the DASA Policies and Procedures Manual. Each SSCC is expected to meet at least twice in each semester, and to include undergraduate and postgraduate students, who must be elected by their peers, with elections organised by the school. Training for student representatives is offered by the Learning Development Services.

118 The SU advised the audit team, both through its student written submission and in meetings, that not all schools met all of the University's requirements for SSCCs. Variability in practice included the timing of elections; consultation with the SU Vice-President (Education); postgraduate representation (although some schools have a separate postgraduate SSCC);

sending a list of SSCC members to DASA and the SU; posting the names and email addresses of course representatives on school notice boards; circulating minutes of meetings to all members, and providing access to the minutes through school websites. The SU noted in its written submission that 'in all the areas researched in preparing for this submission the area of student representation at school level is certainly the University's weakest'.

119 In terms of reporting mechanisms, the President of the Students' Union presents a report to the Academic Board on behalf of the Students' Union Executive. In addition, a report is collated by Academic Affairs detailing issues raised by SSCC representatives prior to a meeting of Academic Board. Student representatives usually report back to their fellow students on the outcome of discussions at SSCC meetings either by email or by using the school SSCC notice-board where there is one.

120 The SWS noted that there appears to be no monitoring of school SSCCs at the institutional level even though, according to its own Policy and Procedures Manual, DASA is responsible for monitoring the functioning of SSCCs.

121 Students' views are also heard formally through student representation on educational enhancement process panels, and in APR where 'preferably, at least one student member of the relevant Staff Student Consultative Committee should be present at the review meeting', although that does not always appear to happen in practice.

122 The audit team concludes that the University has clear, transparent and broadly effective arrangements for student representation on committees at different levels of the organisation, although there is evidence of variations in practice in terms of how SSCCs are operated in different schools. As part of the recommendation that the University addresses the variability in education practices at school level, to ensure equity of treatment of all students and of the student experience (see paragraph 81), the team would encourage the University takes steps to ensure that every school meets the University's published requirements for the SSCC system, and that an effective system is put in place to ensure that outcomes of SSCC meetings are reported back to the general student body in a timely and accessible manner.

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities

123 The University reviewed its policy on research informed teaching in 2007 and approved a definition encompassing: students learning about others' research; students learning to do research; students learning in research mode, and staff engaging in pedagogic research. There is no longer a separate research policy, but the process to achieve all these goals is well embedded in the University's Education Strategy 2008-2011.

124 The University has three Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) (see paragraph 23), which have a strong emphasis on broad-based pedagogical research that is potentially useful across all disciplines. The University has a number of media for disseminating the results of this research across schools, including seminars at head of school away days, workshops and day-long dissemination events open to all staff, and the twice-yearly Reflections newsletter published by the Centre for Educational Development in DASA.

125 In its meetings with students, the audit team heard several examples of staff research informing and inspiring their teaching at all levels and providing students with access to equipment used primarily for research. Students clearly felt that their programmes were well embedded in a research-active university.

Other modes of study

126 The University's provision includes programmes delivered in part-time, work-based and flexible, distributed and distance-learning modes. The audit team found that the University was sensitive both to the needs of students in these categories and to a strategic need to increase its volume of work in some, and possibly all, of these areas. Having examined the evidence provided by the University's documentation, the team concluded that its arrangements for maintaining the quality of students' learning opportunities in these modes were effective.

127 The most extensive part-time provision is in the School of Education but it also exists in a number of other schools, for example, in the School of Nursing and Midwifery. At the same time, the University offers franchised and validated part-time programmes. These are considered in more detail in Section 5.

128 Approval of open learning (extra-mural) courses is managed locally by the School of Education and does not require a programme evaluation meeting (PEM) validation panel. However, approval of collaborative, distance-learning provision, for example, in the Schools of Education and Mathematics and Physics, requires panels to employ enhanced criteria in respect of learning resources (for details, see paragraph 133 below). The audit team was satisfied that these levels of scrutiny were appropriate, but the University might wish to consider amending the DASA Policies and Procedures Manual to extend the use of the enhanced criteria to all distance-learning provision. The audit team found evidence of the University's recognition that part-time students have particular needs in, for example, a recent article in the CED newsletter on supporting part-time students, and a recommendation from the Supporting Student Attainment subgroup that the Education Committee should identify a champion with lead responsibility for reviewing the support mechanisms for part-time students.

129 The University is considering expanding its e-learning and distributed and distance-learning provision. At present, approximately 67 per cent of undergraduate modules and 61 per cent of postgraduate modules involve some form of e-learning in conjunction with traditional media and methods, but e-learning is increasingly used on study or work placements and, in the School of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences, a Postgraduate Certificate in Medical Education, a joint award with the Irish College of General Practitioners, is delivered online, although students must attend four one-day workshops in Dublin each year. An e-Learning and Distance Learning Policy Group was established in December 2008, and asked to oversee the development and implementation of an e-Learning and Distance Learning Policy which, following an internal e-learning benchmarking exercise, was out for consultation with schools at the time of the audit. The draft Policy states that the University sees e-learning as having the potential to enhance learning, and teaching and therefore largely occurring in the context of blended learning, for example, integrated with traditional media and methods. It envisages a substantial increase in the rate of e-learning development and embedding over a three-year action plan. The Group's membership includes representatives of the Students' Union, as well as schools, Information Services, Academic Affairs and CED.

130 The Briefing Paper stated that over 5,000 students per year undertake work placements.

131 The audit team was given sight of a Work-based and Placement Learning University Policy, which the University drew up in December 2008. At the time of the audit, it had yet to be disseminated, but is intended to supersede the Placement Learning: University Policy and Framework for the Approval of Work-Based Learning created just after the previous audit in 2005. The new document lays down the operational roles and responsibilities for the University, the host placement provider and the student, and has sections on procedures for approval of placements, pre-placement and pre-departure preparation, student support and monitoring, and assessment.

Resources for learning

132 The Briefing Paper stated that the University's strategy is continually to improve its formal teaching space and its informal learning accommodation, (eg the 'learning café'), and to this end, the Information Services and Estates Directorate works to the University's Estates Strategy and Information Services Strategy and Action Plan 2006-2009. Senate has approved a Capital Development Plan 2008-2013, including circa £127 million currently approved and fully funded projects, along with 14 additional priority developments costing an estimated £86.45 million. The Teaching Accommodation Steering Group, whose membership includes the President of the SU, reviews and adapts a rolling plan for centrally booked teaching space. Its Terms of Reference include the provision of strategic oversight of the timetabling function in relation to the management of both centrally booked and school general teaching accommodation, and the provision of a smooth interface between academic timetabling needs and the business opportunities presented by the availability of space outside core teaching time.

133 When new programme proposals are scrutinised at a PEM, a key consideration is the resources needed to support the programme. In the case of flexible and distributed methods of study within collaborative provision, such as distance-learning or e-learning, the written submission must include for scrutiny and evaluation details of the: educational and pedagogical rationale; quality assurance arrangements; design of the learning materials; facilities for supporting interaction between students; systems of communication; results of piloting of the learning and assessment materials; and assessment methods. External examiners' reports on taught undergraduate programmes ask for comments on the programme's delivery, while those on taught postgraduate programmes ask how the provision within the programme reflects its education aims and learning outcomes. The audit team found examples of such comments by external examiners, for example, on the budget for a fourth-year module in the Environmental Planning pathway of the BSc Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering degree in 2007-08.

134 The Information Services Strategy is a response to such challenges as the demand for more flexible access to resources as new technologies emerge and learning paradigms change. The Information Services Action Plan focuses on the new library (see below), but includes among its 23 target areas the further development of Queen's Online and the University website; e-resource development; digitisation and digital asset management; enhancing and extending the University network; development of telephony systems, and improving document production.

135 A Students' Union, Have Your Say survey found that a clear majority of the more than 370 students who responded to questions about the Library and information technology resources felt that these services generally met their needs as learners. The SWS suggested that there was some dissatisfaction with Library opening hours, but the students whom the audit team met were critical of neither the level nor the nature of learning resource provision. The new Library, planned to replace some existing library provision and to cater for 24,000 students, with 2,000 library seats, wireless access throughout and enhanced opening hours, including 24-hour access in the weeks before examinations, opens on 7 September 2009.

136 The audit team was satisfied that the University's management of learning resources was coherent, strategic and effective, and that it incorporated due reflection on, and action in respect of, feedback from both internal and external stakeholders.

Admissions policy

137 The University's supervision of admissions policies and practice is informed by the University's Admissions Policy which is, in turn, aligned with the University's Marketing and Recruitment Strategic Plan, and underpins the Education Strategy. The Education Strategy states that 'the University will select and recruit an appropriately qualified and diverse student body which has the potential to excel in, contribute to, and benefit from, the particular education the University offers'. Overall responsibility for institutional policy relating to admissions rests with the Education Committee.

138 The Admissions Policy, which is published in the DASA Policy and Procedures Manual, documents clearly institutional processes, requirements and expectations, including the division of responsibilities between the University and its schools. Academic Council was advised in July 2008 that the Admissions Policy had been updated. The updated Policy takes into account progress made in relation to the development of entry profiles, the introduction of the UK Clinical Aptitude Test (UKCAT) and benchmarks for decision turnaround. The Admissions Policy Review Group will continue in 2008-09, and will consider the development of a postgraduate admissions policy and the continued monitoring of decision turnaround benchmarks.

139 Admissions targets for individual schools are set on an annual basis by the University Management Board, taking into account the University's overall admissions target, and are embedded within the Academic Plan of each school. Entry requirements and 'asking grades' are reviewed annually by a subgroup of the University Management Board, in conjunction with the Admissions and Access Service, as part of the academic planning process.

140 The University operates a centralised undergraduate Admissions and Access Service, within the Directorate of Academic and Student Affairs, for all programmes, except Nursing and Midwifery, based on a University admissions portal. The audit team was told by senior managers of the University that the centralised admissions office fits with the Schwartz recommendations and will help with introduction of a new points-based system for international students.

141 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Education and Students, works with the Director of DASA and other directorates in determining target numbers and entry requirements, and has authority to change requirements as part of the planning process for undergraduate and taught postgraduate student numbers. Operational responsibility for undergraduate admissions rests with the Head of Admissions working with academic selectors in each school, who make decisions on entry conditions.

142 Academic selectors, who are appointed by the relevant head of school, are responsible for reviewing and advising on entrance requirements, and confirming grades required for programmes within a school; advising on selection procedures; liaising with the Admissions and Access Service in relation to non-standard applicants and those who are borderline; providing detailed and up-to-date course information to prospective students, and organising school open days and follow-up visits.

143 At the time of the audit visit, the University was developing a postgraduate admissions policy to guide schools. Currently the postgraduate admissions process is administered via DASA, although schools select the students who are offered places.

144 The University's Admissions Policy requires 'detailed information on entrance qualifications, asking grades and associated admissions procedures for individual undergraduate programmes' to be provided to prospective students. The main sources of information are printed undergraduate prospectus, the online prospectus, school brochures and leaflets, University and departmental websites, the prospective student portal, and from July 2008, UCAS Entry Profiles.

145 Relevant management information, including undergraduate applications, postgraduate taught student recruitment, international student recruitment, socio-economic classification of full-time entrants, undergraduate student intake, undergraduate average tariff entry points, and postgraduate research student recruitment - is included in the key performance indicator dataset provided annually to schools (see paragraphs 85 to 88).

146 The University's Marketing and Recruitment Strategic Plan 2007-2011 recognises a need to market undergraduate courses, increase the quality of the student intake and to protect key subjects with falling enrolments, particularly in the sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics. Two strategic priorities over the period 2007-2011 are to increase postgraduate student numbers and improve the intake quality of undergraduates, with the intention of securing an institutional average of 400 points, compared with around 360 for the 2008 intake.

147 In terms of widening participation, HESA data shows that the University admits a lower-than-expected number of overseas students, particularly at undergraduate level, and a significantly lower than expected proportion of ethnic minority first-year undergraduate students (2.3 per cent vs 16.2 per cent). The Admissions Policy notes the intent to 'build on current developments and meet the commitments made in the access agreement to increase the number of mature students, students with disabilities and students from lower socio-economic groups'. The University benchmarks its performance in terms of student admissions against the UK average, the Russell Group and the University of Ulster, by socioeconomic classification, low participation neighbourhoods, students registering with Disability Services, numbers entering through access courses, and students registered on part-time courses. The Widening Participation Policy 2008-2011, which is supported by the University's Access Agreement, emphasises the need to raise awareness and aspirations, facilitate entry, and facilitate retention and progression (see paragraphs 74, 79 and 88 to 90 on retention)

148 The audit team concluded that the University has in place appropriate and well-documented procedures for ensuring the consistent implementation of its Admissions Policy.

Student support

149 DASA oversees a number of student-facing administrative and support services, and the Head of Student Welfare is located in the Student Guidance Centre, which provides a one-stop shop for professional guidance and advice. The Learning Development Service supports students with study skills. Student Computing Services at the University and the Training and Assessment Unit offer a range of advice and training courses in information and communications technology skills; a 'Degree Plus' programme helps students build up a portfolio of non-curricula activity, and an International Student Adviser provides support to international students. The Careers, Employability and Skills Unit supports students in gaining work experience and skills, and develops links with graduate recruiters. 'Student Plus' is responsible for commercial services, including childcare provision, the University's Physical Education Centre and accommodation advice. Financial advice is provided by the SU and the Student Fees and Finance Office working together, while pastoral support is provided by the University's chaplains and other religious representatives, the University Health Service, and the Counselling Service. The audit team noted that particular efforts are made to respond to the needs of part-time students by, for example, the Counselling Service, which provides a freephone number for students outside normal office hours to call an external counselling service and, if they wish, be referred back to the Counselling Service the following day.

150 The Information Services Action Plan includes among its target areas several aspects of student support. The Library already has a web page for part-time students, and the University is considering using the current Seamus Heaney Library to house support services for international and postgraduate students when the Library opens in September 2009.

151 A Student Support Forum, a network of staff involved in delivering direct advice, guidance and support to prospective and current students, seeks to improve both student transition into higher education and progression and attainment while studying at the University. The Supporting Student Attainment subgroup, a subgroup of the Education Committee, investigates areas of collaborative work to support all applicants and students, but in particular, students from non-traditional backgrounds, students with disabilities, mature students and international students. Using management information to monitor individual service usage mapped against University student progression data, the subgroup tries to identify trends or gaps in provision and make recommendations accordingly.

152 The Education Strategy 2008-2011 includes the promotion of student-centred approaches which it claims are at the heart of the University's Centre for Educational Development. From September 2008, there has been an increasing emphasis on the academic school as the student's immediate community. Schools integrate their induction programmes with the University's

Welcome Programme. A personal tutor system for first-year students was introduced in September 2008, devised in consultation with the SU. It is intended that it be extended progressively to all students. DASA holds regular meetings with school managers and directors of education, and its three territorial teams are designed to facilitate its communications and interaction with schools and other directorates. Disability Services support a Disability Adviser in each school, and the Careers, Employability and Skills Unit of DASA has close links with each school's Career Liaison Adviser. The Centre for Educational Development works with schools to implement personal development planning (PDP), which students manage through Queen's Online. The University has created an Employability and Skills Policy 2008-2011, as part of which all schools must promote and accredit PDP as a core element of every student's academic experience, and link employability and skills development and integration to careers education, information and guidance activities. The audit team noted that all schools had PDP schemes running for level 1 students at least in 2007-08.

153 The SU is unusual in that it is a formal part of the University, and the support it gives students is, therefore, an element in the University's provision. That support includes the Student Advice Centre and Enterprise SU, an enterprise and employability unit. The SU Management Board is developing a three-year Strategic Plan, reflecting the Union's desire to be at the forefront of delivering the student experience, and the anticipated change in the student population over the next three years resulting from the University's internationalisation and postgraduate objectives. A recent Student Survey (see paragraphs 77 and 109), revealed that 87 per cent of students had used the SU's facilities and 75 per cent had used the personal development opportunities.

154 Each month, the University's senior management reviews a set of key student-related performance indicators, which help to contextualise and motivate what the audit team was informed is a continuous effort by the University to support its students in attaining their academic and life-goals. An area of concern to the University is its recognition that fewer students with disabilities apply for its academic courses than it would wish. Its Policy on Disability asserts a commitment to equality of opportunity for all students, but identifies a responsibility to encourage an increase in the proportion of students with disabilities who apply and are admitted to the University, to a level that is more reflective of the proportion of people with disabilities in the community at large.

155 The audit team was informed by senior managers that the University was concerned about retention of undergraduates at all levels. The team found clear evidence of a concerted, strategic effort to address the problem through a number of initiatives, including the establishment in November 2007 of a Students at Risk Working Group, which meets monthly, reviews students deemed to be 'at risk', identifies appropriate support for them and reports to both the Education Committee and the University Operating Board. Various measures designed to tackle the issue of retention have been implemented. The team found further evidence of the University's engagement with this, and other aspects of student support, in a number of internal University publications covering, for example, PDP, Personal Tutoring, Degree Plus, supporting first-year student learning in laboratory practicals, and supporting part-time students, as well as a paper on retention scheduled for consideration by the Education Committee in March 2009.

156 The audit team's scrutiny of the documentation with which it was provided and meetings with staff and students led it to the conclusion that the University's arrangements for student support, and supervision of those arrangements, were effective and implemented consistently.

Staff support (including staff development)

157 Under the University's staff probation scheme, each newly-appointed member of staff is allocated a three-year mentor, in addition to supervision by their own school probation committee. A probationer is not normally expected to undertake a significant level of administration in their first year but, unless they already hold a qualification recognised as equivalent by the Higher Education Academy, they must enrol on the University's Postgraduate

Certificate in Higher Education Teaching. The Certificate is also available to existing members of staff and the audit team was told that there has been some take-up. In addition, new staff on three-year probation must complete a one-day workshop on 'Supervising Research Students'. The team met some newly appointed staff, who confirmed that they were following all these requirements. Probation for more experienced lecturers or teaching fellows is normally between six months and two years, and academic staff appointed to more senior positions are not usually on probation for more than 12 months. In addition, the Queen's Gender Initiative provides mentoring for female staff throughout the University. At the time of the audit visit, this scheme was being extended to include academic-related, clerical and technical female staff. The team noted, in particular, the depth of support provided by these mentoring schemes, as well as the thoroughness of the scrutiny involved in the probation system.

158 There is an annual programme of Collaborative Provision Group (CPD) workshops for staff with teaching responsibilities, organised under the six areas of the HEA's Higher Education Professional Standards Framework. In addition, the Centre for Educational Development organises workshops for staff who are applying for HEA accreditation. It also provides training for directors of education and personal tutors, and customised staff development sessions for part-time tutors, teaching assistants and demonstrators. The team noted that the December 2008 issue of the Centre for Educational Development (CED) newsletter had articles on PDP, personal tutoring, computer-assisted assessment, supporting first-year student learning in laboratory practicals, supporting part-time students and a CETL(NI) dissemination day. The Information Services Action Plan includes the further development of support for innovation in teaching and the development of information and communications technology knowledge and skills for staff. The team noted, in particular, the breadth of support provided to staff by a range of units within the University, and the way in which the support was sensitive to the evolving needs of schools and individuals within those schools.

159 The University's annual Teaching Awards scheme is open to all staff and is intended to recognise noteworthy examples of traditional methods, as well as innovative approaches. In 2008-09, 10 awards were available, each worth £1,000 for the exclusive use of the winning team or individual for personal or professional development. Award recipients featured in a DVD outlining the aspects of their practice that led to their award, and this was made available for colleagues to view. Where the approach had applicability beyond a recipient's own discipline, they were invited to participate in a dissemination event, such as the CED conference or a higher education forum event. An article about each recipient appeared in the Reflections newsletter, and readers were invited to contact the recipients to discuss their teaching approach. The audit team noted the wide range of academic and non-academic staff eligible for teaching awards.

160 The University expects its staff to perform at a high level in teaching and the management of learning and in terms of their interaction with business and the community. The audit team noted that these expectations are reflected in the appraisal process; in the monthly review of school performance, and in the promotions procedures for all levels of staff. Promotion to professor on the basis of excellence in education, including the management of learning, leadership and performance and development, is a recognised route within the University.

161 Contribution to the community is expected to involve participation in community outreach activities registered on the web-based University Community Outreach Directory. This aspect of the promotions scheme reflects in part one element of the University's mission (see paragraph 7), namely to embrace fully its leadership role in Northern Ireland.

162 The promotions procedure begins at school level, where a group chaired by the head of the school involved and including a school director of education and a director of research, along with the head of, or a professor in, another school, makes recommendations for or against promotion. A University Promotions Committee made up of a Pro-Vice-Chancellor, three deans and three heads of school considers each case and make recommendations to the Central Promotions Committee, which is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. The audit team noted that,

in the interests of staff retention, the University reserves the right to use the academic profiles to promote outside this procedure (Academic Promotions Scheme 2008, Sections 3 and 4). The team concluded that the promotions procedure is thorough, rigorous and fair, and informed by a wish to support staff and retain their commitment to the University and its mission.

163 The audit team's scrutiny of the documentation with which it was provided and meetings with staff at all levels, led it to the conclusion that the University's arrangements for managing the quality of teaching and postgraduate research student supervision through its human resources procedures, and management of those arrangements, were effective and implemented consistently. In the view of the team, the range and degree of staff support and development at all levels, and in all areas of the University's work, is a feature of good practice.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

164 The focus of this section of the annex is taught programmes; research degrees are covered in Section 6.

165 The University has developed its own definition of quality enhancement, as 'the successful outcome of systematic consideration of the quality of student educational experience which identifies opportunities for improvement and acts upon them'. This was adopted by the Education Committee in March 2008. It emphasises a deliberate decision by the University to 'move from a retrospective review of past activities to one more focussed on the future and opportunities for enhancement' and is informed by QAA's definition of enhancement. Each head of school is responsible for quality enhancement within the school, overseen by a dean.

Management information - quality enhancement

166 One of the main vehicles through which this new approach is delivered is the Educational Enhancement Process (EEP) (see also paragraphs 172 and 173), although under the University's new quality assurance procedures consideration and reporting of enhancement are now integral to module review and annual programme review procedures. The EEP operates at school or subject level, was introduced in May 2008 and has an emphasis on the importance of 'external expertise'. It replaced the previous periodic review process, which had an emphasis on monitoring and quality assurance.

167 The EEP process is described in the EEP Handbook. It defines the process 'part of an integrated internal quality enhancement and review process whereby modules are reviewed after they are taught, programmes are reviewed every year and subjects are reviewed every six years [It] is an enhancement process, concerned with the identification of issues and the development of current and future provision, rather than simply an audit of current and past provision'. School preparation for EEP includes writing a reflective statement in which it reflects on past achievements and plans for the future. Central to the process is a one-and-a-half-day panel visit to a school, which includes meetings with staff, students and other stakeholders. An EEP panel is chaired by a senior academic from another school and includes two members of academic staff from other schools, two external members from comparable academic departments in other UK universities, nominated by the relevant head of school, and who have not served as external examiners in the previous three years, at least one student representative from the school's staff-student consultative committee (SSCC), and the School Manager. Internal members are briefed on the process by Academic Affairs, and external members receive a briefing pack with information about the University and EEP. The Panel looks at 'how the School implements University policies and procedures and how this impacts on the achievements and quality of learning opportunities for students [with an emphasis on] the enhancement of provision, on looking forward and on School plans to improve provision and the student experience'. The Panel's report is considered by the appropriate school committee, an Action Plan is agreed within the school, and the Panel Report and Action Plan are considered by a subgroup

of the Education Committee. A decision was made at the March 2009 meeting of the Education Committee to include consideration in the annual planning cycle of how EEP issues have been addressed within a school.

168 Good practice identified through the EEP is disseminated between schools through the Education Committee and through meetings of Directors of Education. There is a 'milestone meeting', roughly a year after an EEP visit, to follow up on actions taken in response to a Panel's report. There is a schedule of EEP reviews in schools over the period 2007 to 2014, four of which had been completed by the time of the audit visit.

169 The audit team was able to study documentation relating to a recent pilot review, which confirmed that the procedures described in the EEP Handbook had been followed. The team also saw the report of the subgroup on Pilot Periodic Reviews to the March 2009 meeting of the Education Committee, which referred to a number of areas of good practice within the school involved and three recommendations. The report also noted a number of issues in periodic review that had not been dealt with fully in the school's response, for which the Committee asked for clarification to be provided.

170 The audit team was not persuaded that, despite its title and the professed focus on the future, the EEP process differs a great deal from the periodic review process which it replaces. The focus on opportunities for enhancement appears, in practice, to have meant a desire to identify and resolve problems, particularly in relation to issues raised in feedback from students. The EEP process also appears to the team to be driven, at least in part, by the quest for efficiency gains, in terms of reducing the administrative burden and duration of review. Furthermore, each school has an EEP review only once every six years, so it is not clear how it can be regarded as a continuous quality enhancement process.

171 Beyond the formal EEP and module and programme review processes, the University's approach to quality enhancement is informed by the various forms of feedback it collects from its students, as outlined earlier in this report (see paragraphs 99 to 110). The approach is also informed by the use of key performance indicators (see paragraphs 85 to 92). Other sections in this report that have a bearing on enhancement include those dealing with resources for learning (see paragraphs 132 to 136), student support (see paragraphs 149 to 156), and staff support (see paragraphs 157 to 163).

172 The University website includes pages on supporting excellence in teaching, which describe a number of initiatives that are designed to assist in achieving the University's commitment in the Education Strategy to the continuous enhancement of teaching. These include the Centre for Educational Development, which 'works with staff...to support the enhancement and development of learning, teaching and assessment (including e-learning)...[and] disseminates good practice in a number of ways'; the Staff Training and Development Unit and the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund, for pump-priming developments and innovation within teaching and learning, and the three CETLs, which are managed by the Centre.

173 The audit team concluded that, through EEP and the other mechanisms outlined above, the University has made good progress in recent years in developing a more enhancement-led approach to the student experience. This goes some way towards its objective of 'developing an overall strategy', which would be of assistance in determining the University's priorities, and in evaluating the progress it is able to make. Its approach also underpins the University's claim to be a reflective institution with an increasing emphasis on quality enhancement. The team also recognised other, University-level, initiatives that have the potential to enhance the student experience, including recent capital developments, in particular, the new library (see paragraph 135), the restructuring of student services (see paragraph 18), efforts to retain students (see paragraph 147), the development of Qsis (see paragraph 83), and the use of key performance indicators at school and University levels (see paragraph 85-88). Accordingly, the team considers it desirable for the University to develop an institution-wide framework for enhancing the quality

of the student experience which embraces both school-level and University initiatives, in order to maximise the benefits of steps that are already being taken.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

174 The University's portfolio of collaborative provision has expanded in the period since the last audit. The Manual for Academic Affairs identifies five types of collaborative arrangement: Foundation Degrees, articulation, validation, franchising, and joint programmes. The majority of the provision within the portfolio comprises franchise and validation arrangements, and a significant proportion of the University's collaborative provision is delivered within its region.

175 Although the audit team was advised that the University does not have a separate strategy for collaborative provision, the Manual for Academic Affairs sets out the key principles that underpin the University policy for collaborative arrangements and which govern the selection and management of partnerships. In further discussions with staff, it became apparent that the development of the University's portfolio has been, and continues to be, driven by its commitment to internationalisation, and its response to the emphasis placed by the Northern Ireland Department for Employment and Learning on widening participation and collaboration between higher and further education providers. In this latter respect, the University's collaborative arrangements make a significant contribution to its engagement with the Region.

176 The Briefing Paper stated that 'the University exercises full responsibility for the academic standards of all awards granted in its name, including those awarded under collaborative arrangements', and that the Collaborative Provision Group (CPG) discharges this responsibility on behalf of the University. The Briefing Paper also indicated that the 'standard procedures' for quality assurance are applied, with some variations, in the approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision. These variations include the particular roles performed by the CPG, specific arrangements for partner approval, and the chairing of programme evaluation meeting (PEMs) by a nominated representative from this Group rather than the Head of the proposing school. In addition, staff from partner organisations who teach on a University programme must apply to CPG for appointment as 'recognised teachers' and the evidence seen by the team demonstrated that this Group is diligent in the execution of this responsibility.

177 The University's procedures require the appointment of 'University Coordinators' for each collaborative arrangement or programme. University coordinators provide a focus on the development, monitoring and enhancement of the collaborative arrangement at programme level. Although the Guidelines for University Coordinators, (contained within the Manual for Academic Affairs), emphasise their importance in maintaining standards and ensuring ongoing dialogue with the collaborative organisation, their accountability and reporting obligations are not specified in this document. However, they meet on an annual basis with the Chair of CPG, for the purpose of identifying examples of good practice and ideas on enhancing the engagement between the University and its collaborating partners. The Manual requires University coordinators to produce an annual report to the CPG and on further investigation it became apparent that this requirement is fulfilled by the completion by coordinators of the annual programme reports (APRs) for the partnerships for which they are responsible. The audit team considered whether this was appropriate or whether assigning responsibility for the production of the APR to its partner organisations, with the University Coordinators producing a separate and independent report to the CPG, might afford appropriate evidence from collaborative partners to enable this Group to discharge its responsibilities on behalf of the Academic Council.

178 Collaborative provision is subject to the University's standard procedures for module review and APR and, in accordance with these procedures, the scrutiny of APR reports is undertaken by a subgroup of the CPG. The audit team noted that the minutes of the CPG do not provide a record of issues identified through this process, and the summary report is short, focused on process rather than substantive issues, and does not provide details relating to

individual partnerships. The team also noted that, in February 2008, the CPG had considered and approved 'a proposal to streamline the annual reporting of annual review of programmes including collaborative provision' with the effect that a single form would be used for all programmes. While, in discussions with staff, it was explained that the pro forma would be enhanced to ensure the inclusion of additional information, the team recommends that it is advisable that the University considers whether the APR process provides the Collaborative Provision Group and the Education Committee with sufficient evidence of appropriate quality and reliability from schools and collaborative partners, to enable them to discharge their responsibilities on behalf of Academic Council (see also paragraph 41).

179 A recent meeting of CPG noted that the University's Regional Collaborative Provision Group had considered a paper that outlined the findings of an audit of the approaches to collaborative provision adopted by 12 Russell Group Universities. This report had identified examples of good practice for possible adoption by the University. These examples included a 'risk assessment tool...to determine the level of scrutiny required when considering a collaborative proposal'. The tool features in the Manual for Academic Affairs, but not in the University's Protocol for arranging Educational Collaborative Provision with Institutions outside the United Kingdom. Staff explained that the University is at an early stage in considering this change to its procedures, and that its current purpose is to provide guidance on the general questions that should be considered in the development rather than approval of new partnerships. The team considered that the University was exercising appropriate caution in introducing a procedure which could have significant implications for the level of scrutiny applied to the approval of new provision.

180 The University's portfolio includes several articulation arrangements. The report of the 2004 Institutional audit stated that articulation arrangements were subject to 'final approval by the Access and Entrance Sub-Committee' and that 'the development of articulation programmes...are underpinned by formal agreements'. The current procedures delegate responsibility for approving articulation arrangements to CPG. At the time of the present audit, the University Operating Board was considering a proposal which would remove the requirement that there should be a 'validation stage' in the approval of proposed articulation arrangements. Although staff confirmed that the Board paper clarified the extant procedure, the University will no doubt wish to ensure that its procedure for the approval of articulation arrangements retains appropriate measures, to ensure the academic compatibility of a partner's provision and the QUB programme to which students will progress.

181 Although the types of collaborative arrangement listed in the Manual for Academic Affairs include 'programmes leading to a single award made jointly by both, or all participants', no further guidance is provided on the particular issues that will be addressed in approving such arrangements.

182 The University maintains a partnership with Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College. These were described to the audit team as being autonomous, but academically integrated with the University, and the Briefing Paper states that they are 'regarded as having the status of Schools'. The Memoranda of Agreement for these two partnerships are comprehensive and detailed, indicating that the University exercises appropriate oversight of the colleges' provision. The team observed, however, that Stranmillis University College (SUC) itself maintains a number of partnerships which lead to QUB awards. The Memorandum of Agreement for the University College's partnership with Omagh College describes SUC as acting 'under delegated authority from the Academic Council of Queen's University'. The University is not a signatory to the Memorandum and there is no provision for its involvement in arbitration. There are, however, references to University involvement in the appointment of recognised teachers, programme modifications, student registration, the appointment of external examiners, and the approval of publicity. In its discussions with staff, the team was informed that the University monitors the partnership through the receipt of the APR for SUC, and through its periodic review procedure. It was confirmed that there is no University Coordinator for this provision, and that

the only direct evidence which is regularly available to the University is that provided by its external examiner reports. In the absence of a formal accreditation agreement with SUC, the team concluded that, pending the planned merger of SUC with the University, it would be advisable for the University to consider the means by which it might secure a direct involvement in the partnership between SUC and Omagh College.

183 The Charter of the University precludes it from employing staff to teach theology. The undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in this discipline that have been validated by the University, and which are delivered by four independent theological colleges, are managed by the University's Institute of Theology. Although the Institute has the status of, and is subject to the same procedural requirements as, a University school, it employs only two staff. The Chair and the majority of the membership of its Education Committee are drawn from the Colleges, and the Head of the Institute acts as the University Coordinator for all four partnerships.

184 In the light of this information, the audit team concluded that the Institute was unlikely to possess the capacity to manage the University's partnerships in theology. The team also considered whether the Institute's Education Committee has the capacity to oversee the provision on behalf of the University. Although its members undoubtedly possess the academic expertise to provide the University with appropriate advice, the team concluded that the Committee was insufficiently independent of the partner colleges to provide objective assurances of the quality and academic standards of the provision for which it is responsible. Finally, the team sought to establish whether the manner in which the University's quality assurance procedures are applied to its provision in theology provided it with sufficient information for the purposes of discharging its responsibilities. A recent review of the provision led to the production of a single report for the entire provision and, although an APR is completed for each programme, the CPG is reliant on a single overview report for its knowledge of the partnerships. The team noted that the periodic review report had identified some significant issues that might have been identified earlier if there had been provision within the APR and University coordinator arrangements for more detailed and in depth reporting on individual programmes. The team noted, in particular, that the limitations imposed by the University's Charter, the nature of the partnerships in this area and the form of the current Memoranda of Agreement, meant that the University would be unable to discharge its residual obligations to enable students to complete their studies in the event of the termination of one or more of the collaborative arrangements. For the reasons set out in this paragraph, it is advisable for the University to review the memoranda of agreement and current arrangements, including its own structures, for the management of collaborative provision in theology.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

185 In 2008-09, the University had 1,176 postgraduate research students (898 home and 276 international) across its 20 schools. All schools offer a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and Master of Philosophy (MPhil), along with degrees by independent research and publication. In addition, there are a number of professional doctorates.

The research environment

186 The audit team found the University to have a widely and fully developed research culture appropriate for the recruitment of research students. The University is a member of the Russell Group of research-intensive universities, and it describes itself as 'a broadly-based research-driven university with a dynamic world-class research and education portfolio'. Its schools are 'research-led' and each has one or more of the University's 84 research clusters, each led by a Director of Research. At the time of the audit visit, the University interpreted the results of its 2008 Research Assessment Exercise submission as demonstrating that it was 'in the top 20 universities in the UK...All areas at Queen's had research assessed as world leading, i.e. 4*. 25 of the 38 Units of

Assessment submitted had 50 per cent or more of the research activity recognised as world leading or internationally excellent (4* + 3*).

187 Strategic responsibility for postgraduate research students rests with the Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Postgraduates, who chairs the University Research Committee. Its membership includes the Deans, three heads of school, six directors of research drawn from each of the 'faculty' groupings, the Chair of the University Ethics Committee and the President and Vice-President (Education) of the Students' Union, and it receives reports from the University Research Ethics Committee, the Research Governance Steering Group and the Regulations subgroup, which considers and recommends to the Committee the approval of any new professional doctorate and collaborative programmes. The Research Committee appoints external examiners, and is responsible for overseeing the University's arrangements for assuring the quality and standards of research degree programmes and all aspects of University policy, regulations and training for postgraduate research students. The QUB Policy Statement on Provision for Research Students states that the University undertakes to ensure that research students are provided with information about the resources and facilities available to them, that the necessary resources and facilities are available, and that students have the appropriate funding to complete their research degree.

188 The primary responsibility for day-to-day decisions concerning postgraduate research students is devolved to schools. Each school has its own school postgraduate research committee, chaired by the head of school and including academic staff, at least one director of research, and two postgraduate research students. It is responsible for the admission of research students; the appointment of supervisors and internal examiners; the nomination to the Research Committee of external examiners; decisions about differentiation, and monitoring of progress. Each school also has its own research ethics committee. The team also noted that Academic Council had been asked by the University Research Ethics Committee to draw up a policy on the ethical approval of research.

189 School postgraduate research committees report to the central Postgraduate Office, whose responsibilities include the administration of postgraduate research students' enrolment and registration; skills training and performance monitoring; the training of supervisors, and the regulatory framework and awards for research degrees. The Office liaises closely with the Admissions Office, which administers the admissions process for postgraduate research students, with the Finance Directorate in the administration of postgraduate awards, with the Student Records and Examinations Office regarding examinations and student progress and with the Marketing, Recruitment and Communications Directorate in the postgraduate marketing activities for the University. The audit team noted that, in September 2006, the UK GRAD Programme had rated the University's 'Grad School' the best in the UK.

190 The Postgraduate Advisory Board (PAB), which includes a representative from each school, is a vehicle for discussion of issues relating to postgraduate research student provision, including informal consultation prior to bringing proposals for changes in policy or regulations to Research Committee and dissemination of good practice (for example, revision of regulations relating to reapplications for admission).

Selection, admission and induction of students.

191 All applications for research degree registration are considered by at least two members of the relevant school's staff. The normal minimum requirement for admission is an upper second class honours degree or equivalent, and there must be at least one appropriate supervisor with relevant knowledge of the proposed field of research. Once recruited, new students are invited to induction events organised by groups of cognate schools. The 2006 QAA special Review 'noted some developmental areas which the University had identified, e.g. the review of induction material', but a full Postgraduate Research Welcome and Induction Programme was run in October 2008, involving a reception in the Great Hall and subsequent faculty induction

days. The audit team met some international students, who informed them that they had received a week's useful induction programme.

192 Full-time students are expected to complete and submit their theses within three years (part-time students within six years). A personal development planning (PDP) Handbook is issued to students explaining what PDP involves, and their supervisors, the Postgraduate Office and the Careers and Counselling Services are expected to assist students in its use. The audit team noted that none of the postgraduate research students it met had used the PDP, but the Postgraduate Office is reporting to Research Committee in 2009-10 on ways in which engagement with the PDP can be strengthened.

Supervision

193 Each head of school has overall responsibility for staff and students in their school, but may delegate day-to-day responsibility for research student matters to a head of postgraduate research or postgraduate tutor; the responsibilities of supervisors and students are set down in the University's publication, Notes of Guidance for Supervisors and the Postgraduate Research Student Handbook. Every student has a principal supervisor; a second supervisor is normally appointed, and a third supervisor may, exceptionally, be appointed where a student's research is interdisciplinary. At least one supervisor must have successfully supervised a PhD thesis to completion, either individually or as part of a supervisory team, and at least one member of the supervisory team must be currently engaged in research in the relevant discipline(s). A supervisor may not normally be the principal supervisor for more than six full-time research students, or equivalent, at any one time. The division of responsibilities between the supervisors in the team may vary, depending on circumstances, but the principal supervisor always has overall responsibility and the second supervisor normally has a supporting role. The principal supervisor normally meets a full-time student at least six times a year, and the second supervisor twice a year. The audit team met a number of postgraduate research students, all of whom had two supervisors, whom they met regularly, on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis.

194 All new members of academic staff on a three-year probationary period must complete a one-day supervisors' training course before qualifying to be a principal supervisor. The course is normally offered by the Postgraduate Office on four different occasions, during an academic year. The 2006 QAA Review of postgraduate research degree programmes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, noted that the University had identified refresher training for supervisors as an area for development; the audit team noted that the University had employed an external consultant to offer a two-day refresher programme to existing supervisors in February 2009, and members of the Postgraduate Advisory Body had been invited to attend the February sessions and to report their opinions on the appropriateness of this training as a model for regular support training for staff in the future.

Development of research and other skills

195 The Postgraduate Skills Training Programme (PSTP) aims to support research students in developing a range of professional skills in order to complete their PhD and increase their employability. Before students register for any of the formal training courses, they are advised to complete an online Skills Analysis Checklist, which allows them to map their own skills against the skills areas outlined in the Research Councils' Joint Skills Statement. The University believes that the identification of training needs should be student-led, with guidance from the principal supervisor, but schools may require specific training, and supervisors can gain access to their students' training record through Queen's Online. The PSTP consists of formal training courses in transferable skills coordinated centrally by the Postgraduate Office; subject-specific training coordinated by schools, and developmental opportunities, which include attending and/or presenting at a conference or seminar, journal publication, organising an event, teaching or demonstrating. The University has not designated any element of the training provided centrally

as compulsory, but it expects students to undertake a 30-day Postgraduate Skills Training Programme (20 days formal training in subject-specific and transferable skills, and 10 days formal and informal developmental training, at least 10 days of which must be followed per year). Employability-related skills training is the responsibility of a Senior Careers Adviser, while a Senior Counsellor offers personal-effectiveness skills training. The students whom the audit team met, confirmed that they had completed, or were in the process of completing, the stipulated training requirements, and two students had taken advantage of careers advice.

196 The effectiveness of the PSTP is monitored through a continuous process of evaluation using feedback forms and focus groups with students, supervisors and employers; such feedback is used to regularly revise and update areas of the training programme. In the view of the audit team, the University is particularly aware of the need to decide how best to provide for its part-time postgraduate research students. The training courses coordinated by the Postgraduate Office are open to all students, but are scheduled during office hours, Monday to Friday, so some part-time students are likely to find it difficult to attend. The PAB has been discussing the training needs of part-time students since 2008 and has established a part-time student experience enhancement group responsible for devising an action plan.

197 Students who undertake teaching or demonstrating are required to undergo training before beginning such work. According to the Notes of Guidance for Supervisors, schools normally set a limit on the amount of teaching and demonstrating that a student may do, in order not to hinder the progress of their research. However, after meeting a range of staff, and postgraduate research students themselves, the audit team concluded that there is currently a range of different practices across the schools. In the interests, not only of postgraduate research students, but also of the undergraduate student body, the team recommends that it is desirable that the University clarifies further and standardises across schools both the training the University requires of those postgraduate research students who teach, demonstrate and/or contribute to the assessment of undergraduate students, and the limits it imposes on the extent of such activities.

Progress and review arrangements

198 All students must agree a research plan with their supervisors at the outset of their research, and must attend courses and undertake research as specified in the plan. Progress thereafter is monitored through regular supervisions, initial review and subsequent annual progress monitoring. A supervisor who has concerns about a student's progress must bring this to the immediate attention of both the student and the relevant head of school. All research students are included in the University-wide annual Progress Monitoring Exercise. Students cannot re-register for a new academic year unless their progress has been deemed satisfactory. Schools report annually on their analysis of, and reflection upon, centrally provided data, such as numbers of applications, suspensions, withdrawals, submissions and completions, and the timing of differentiations, and these reports are then summarised and presented to the PAB and the Research Committee, which also receives a summary of examiners' reports.

199 MPhil/PhD students are initially 'undifferentiated' but at 'differentiation', normally within nine months of initial registration, if they are full-time, students can be upgraded to PhD. The relevant head of school appoints a suitable differentiation panel for each student, normally comprising at least three members, the majority of whom are independent of the supervisory team. This panel considers the student's suitability to proceed to PhD registration on the basis of the student's written submission, research plan and training record, and an interview, and forwards its recommendations to the school postgraduate research committee. Students can only make two (or, exceptionally, three) attempts at differentiation.

Assessment

200 School postgraduate research committees appoint at least one internal examiner; they also nominate to Research Committee the name of at least one external examiner who must not have been a member of staff or a student of the University, or have links with the student that could be perceived to influence his/her judgement. Where a candidate is a member of teaching staff, or in any other case where personal interest might be involved, a second external examiner is appointed, and the two external examiners must each come from different institutions. No supervisor may be appointed as an examiner. This had to be clarified at the time of the audit visit, since the Postgraduate Research Students Handbook appeared to allow a supervisor to become an examiner and there was some confusion among staff concerning this. The oral examination is chaired by an independent director of research, who is in attendance only for the purpose of monitoring the conduct of the examination, and who completes and submits a standard report to the Student Administrative and Systems Office. One of the student's supervisors attends the oral examination, but the student has the right to request that the supervisor not be present. Examiners are expected to take cognisance of the guidance provided in the FHEQ, and if they cannot reach agreement, the University appoints an additional external examiner, whose decision is final. The audit team was satisfied that oral examinations are managed with an appropriate degree of rigour. It also found evidence to confirm that the PAB responsibly considers an annual summary of the salient issues raised in examiners' reports.

Appeals

201 A student who is dissatisfied with the outcome of the progress monitoring exercise, differentiation or examination, may appeal to the University Postgraduate Appeals Committee. The appeals procedure is set out in full in the core regulations for the degrees of PhD and MPhil, which are published on the web.

202 A recent (unsuccessful) appeal from a research student, which went to the University's Board of Visitors for consideration resulted in the Board commenting to the University that it was 'regrettable that there was no written schedule of supervision'. The Research Committee has consequently decided that all of the component parts of the University's Institutional Code of Practice become a requirement, rather than simply a guide to best practice, and that a record of all meetings, at which the student was able to raise issues with the supervisor, that is, to discuss progress, should be kept, and these arrangements would be facilitated by the new Qsis.

Feedback mechanisms

203 One mechanism by which the University monitors and reflects on its postgraduate research student provision and the performance of its students is through the Postgraduate Office's annual review of research degree programmes. The audit team scrutinised the review for the academic year 2006-2007, as it had been reported to the University Research Committee in May 2008, and found that the Office had compiled a set of quantitative data for each school, covering key processes concerning the administration of postgraduate research students, (for example, admission, differentiation and requests for temporary withdrawal. Schools had been asked to reflect on these data and provide complementary qualitative information concerning the performance of their postgraduate research students and research degree programmes. The report noted that many schools had developed and delivered their own training programmes, which added significantly to students' formal training hours, and enhanced the overall postgraduate student experience.

204 Schools arrange student representation on school committees; for example, staff-student consultative committees, School postgraduate research committees, School boards, postgraduate education and teaching committees), and the University participates in surveys of student views. The audit team saw evidence that the University is responsive to students' views. For example, the University responded to concerns expressed by postgraduate, in particular, international

students, by encouraging and supporting the establishment of a Postgraduate Students' Association and student-led website. Both the Research Committee and the PAB have considered the results of PRES 2007 and PRES 2008, and the team was assured that their responses will feed into the Postgraduate Strategy due to be completed in June 2009. The postgraduate research students whom the team met expressed satisfaction, both with the work of the Association and with the extent of postgraduate research student representation on committees.

205 The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and quality of provision for postgraduate research programmes met the expectations of the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, that it made use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points, and that it was committed to improving its provision wherever possible.

Section 7: Published information

206 The University publishes a wide range of information in hard copy and electronic format. The Directorate of Academic and Student Affairs (DASA) supplies successful applicants with a welcome pack of information including a guide to enrolment, and registration, a guide for new students, the Student Charter, and a campus map. From January 2009, in addition to a printed prospectus, applicants to the University will have access to an informative and well-designed Prospective Student Portal for obtaining web-based information. This was prepared in the Directorate of Marketing, Recruitment and Communications by the Publications and Website Unit, and is managed by the Marketing Unit. It registers potential applicants and so should provide a valuable marketing tool in the future. Schools also produce a wide variety of promotional material for prospective students, and handbooks and other literature for current students, in both hard copy and on the web.

207 Programme specifications produced by schools and approved by the Congress and Regulations Group (CRG) are available to staff and students on Queens Online. The audit team found that the completeness of these varied between programmes, but the University is aware of this and they are currently being audited by the CRG to be discussed by the Education Committee later in the year. A new template has been developed for use on Qsis, which will have an interface to allow public access to programme specifications in 2009-10.

Methods used to ensure the accuracy of published information

208 The production of core University publications, such as the Calendar, including the University's General Regulations, prospectuses and the Annual Report, is the responsibility of the Publications and Website Unit in the Directorate of Marketing, Communication and Recruitment (MCR). It also conducts research to ensure that students' needs are being met, and provides schools with some core material for including in handbooks and other school literature. The contacts across the University who supply the material for these documents are responsible for ensuring that the information is current and accurate.

209 DASA is responsible for the accuracy and completeness of the General Regulations published in the University Calendar after they have been approved by the CRG and the Education Committee. The audit team found these to be clearly written. The team noted that here, as elsewhere, the current document still refers to faculties.

210 The University Website Board oversees the University's website, with the Website Manager in the Directorate of Information Services having overall responsibility for the website. The accuracy of information on the Unistats website is monitored by the Planning Office and the Centre for Educational Development. The audit team found that the information about the University that was publicly available complied with the requirements specified by HEFCE in Annex F of HEFCE 06/45.

211 Schools are responsible for the accuracy and completeness of their own promotional and recruitment literature and for programme and module handbooks. There are no University prescribed procedures for the structure of these handbooks and practice varies, but in some cases, school directors of education sign-off documents. There is no central overview of internal publications of this kind. Schools are also responsible for their own web pages. The audit team scrutinised six handbooks and found a considerable variability in their coverage. On plagiarism, for example, the material varied from full accounts in clear language with examples, to brief definitions and general reference to, or reproduction of, the University Regulations. There was no mention of plagiarism in the International Students Handbook, although international students also receive school handbooks. Only one handbook gave an account of the consequences, and these were slightly at variance with the University's regulations. The use of the centrally supplied core material for handbooks, although potentially useful, also varied substantially between schools. Checking the completeness and helpfulness of student handbooks is not part of the Annual Programme Review process. The recommendation for the University to address the variability in education practices at school level, to ensure equity of treatment of all students and of the student experience (see paragraph 81), is relevant to this aspect of University provision.

212 The memoranda of agreement with collaborative partners require them to obtain approval for all their published information that refers to the University. Schools, through their University Coordinators, are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of this material. The Publications Office also has a general responsibility, but there is no formal central overview of material produced by collaborating institutions.

213 Schools are responsible for producing programme specifications and, after approval by the CRG, may make minor changes if they do not affect learning outcomes or assessment. Major changes are referred to the CRG for approval. The University is aware that there is some inconsistency in the way these are completed, and is taking steps to address this (see paragraphs 16 and 34).

Students' experience of published information

214 In meetings with the audit team, students confirmed the view in the SWS that the core publicity material and prospectuses, both printed and on the University's website, are an accurate account of the University and reflected their subsequent experience as students. All categories of students the team met, also reported that the material they received at induction was helpful and informative.

215 The survey in the SWS found considerable variation in the quality and quantity of the information published by schools, with a significant proportion of students reporting that they had not received a course handbook at all. Discussions that the audit team had with other students did not confirm this and they were generally happy with the material they received from schools. Students also confirmed that they were fully aware of where to find information on, for example, assessment regulations and appeals procedures.

216 Overall, the audit team found that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards, but felt that more could be done to improve the consistency and completeness of school handbooks.

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