



University of Bradford

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Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA) mission is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. To this end, QAA carries out institutional audits of higher education institutions.

In England and Northern Ireland, QAA conducts institutional audits on behalf of the higher education sector, to provide public information about the maintenance of academic standards and assurance of the quality of learning opportunities provided for students. It also operates under contract to the Higher Education Funding Council in England (HEFCE) and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland to provide evidence to meet their statutory obligations to assure the quality and standards of academic programmes for which they disburse public funding. The audit method was developed in partnership with the funding councils and the higher education representative bodies and agreed following consultation with higher education institutions and other interested organisations. The method was endorsed by the Department for Education and Skills (now the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills). It was revised in 2006 following recommendations from the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group, a representative group established to review the structures and processes of quality assurance in England and Northern Ireland, and evaluate the work of QAA.

Institutional audit is an evidence-based process carried out through peer review. It forms part of the Quality Assurance Framework, established in 2002, following revisions to the United Kingdom's (UK) approach to external quality assurance. At the centre of the process is an emphasis on students and their learning.

The aim of the revised institutional audit process is to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges of higher education in England and Northern Ireland have effective means of:

- ensuring that the awards and qualifications in higher education are of an academic standard at least consistent with those referred to in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree awarding bodies in a proper manner
- providing learning opportunities of a quality that enables students, whether on taught or research programmes, to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications
- enhancing the quality of their educational provision, particularly by building on information gained through monitoring, internal and external reviews, and feedback from stakeholders.

Institutional audit results in judgements about the institutions being reviewed. Judgements are made about:

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes
- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research

- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

If the audit includes the institution's collaborative provision the judgements and comments also apply, unless, the audit team considers that any of its judgements or comments in respect of the collaborative provision differ from those in respect of the institution's 'home' provision. Any such differences will be reflected in the form of words used to express a judgement or comment on the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, and about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards.

Explanatory note on the format for the Report and the Annex

The reports of quality audits have to be useful to several audiences. The revised institutional audit process makes a clear distinction between that part of the reporting process aimed at an external audience and that aimed at the institution. There are three elements to the reporting:

- the **summary** of the findings of the report, including the judgements, is intended for the wider public, especially potential students
- the **report** is an overview of the findings of the audit for both lay and external professional audiences
- a separate **annex** provides the detail and explanations behind the findings of the audit and is intended to be of practical use to the institution.

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary and the report, without the annex, are published in hard copy. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website. The institution will receive the summary, report and annex in hard copy (*Institutional audit handbook: England and Northern Ireland 2006* - Annexes B and C refer).

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Bradford (the University) from 3 to 7 December 2007 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 of Bradford offers. The University offers a substantial amount of provision through partnership arrangements and will therefore be subject of a separate collaborative audit. The judgements and comments of this institutional audit therefore do not apply to that provision.

To arrive at its conclusions, the audit team spoke to members of staff throughout the University and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the University manages the academic aspects of its provision.

In institutional audit, the institution's management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are audited. The term 'academic standards' is used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the United Kingdom UK. The term 'quality of learning opportunities' is used to describe the support provided by an institution to enable students to achieve the awards. It is about the provision of appropriate teaching, support and assessment for the students.

Outcomes of the institutional audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the University of Bradford 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 quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Overall, the audit team concluded that the institution's approach to quality enhancement is satisfactory but would benefit from clearer articulation of the University's understanding of quality enhancement and its relationship to assurance, together with a more proactive, systematic approach and strategic focus at the institutional level.

Postgraduate research students

The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for its postgraduate research students met the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, and secured appropriate academic standards and quality of provision for its postgraduate research programmes.

Published information

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.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas as being good practice:

- the partnership approach with the Students' Union
- the strategic and coordinated institutional approach to the development of student engagement and support
- the successful institutional arrangements for widening participation
- the developing use of the balanced scorecard method to align central plans with school plans and with performance management.

Recommendations for action

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

The audit team advises the University to:

- review the use of participants external to the University in programme approval and review, particularly to ensure that at least one appropriate academic external is present at each event
- ensure that its policy of external examiner membership of assessment committees is fully implemented, and that external examiners are fully involved in the business of both assessment committees and boards of examiners; and ensure that all external examiners are made aware of the revised report pro forma, which addresses comparability of academic standards
- put in place appropriate mechanisms and supervision to ensure internal comparability of academic standards
- specify clear minimum requirements for Schools' management of academic quality and standards and reinforce the use of formal reporting systems to demonstrate fulfilment of these requirements

It would be desirable for the University to:

- consider means for the systematic capture and dissemination of good practice across the institution
- ensure consistent representation of postgraduate research students at institutional level.

Reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team investigated the use made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure, which provides a means of describing academic standards in UK higher education. It allows for diversity and innovation within academic programmes offered by higher education. QAA worked with the higher education sector to establish the various parts of the Academic Infrastructure, which are:

- the *Code of practice*
- frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland
- subject benchmark statements
- programme specifications.

The audit found that the University took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

Report

Preface

1 An institutional audit of the University of Bradford (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 3 December 2007. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team was Professor D Bonner, Professor G Gibson, Mr A Hunt, Mr S Pallett, auditors, and Mrs B Ollerenshaw, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mr M Cott, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The University obtained its Royal Charter in 1966, having developed from the Bradford Institute of Technology, founded in 1957. The Institute succeeded Bradford Technical College, which had roots in the mid-nineteenth century Bradford Schools of Weaving, Design and Building. This background of vocational education has had a major influence on the University's mission, which is encapsulated in the motto 'Making Knowledge Work', which is part of the University's corporate visual identity.

4 The University's mission statement focuses on delivering vocationally relevant courses, on producing research of international quality that contributes to wealth creation, social cohesion and the quality of life, and on its contribution to the city of Bradford and the region around it.

5 The University is organised into seven schools and one administrative unit (Corporate Services). In 2006-07, it had a total of 11,288 students: 8,644 undergraduates, 2,079 taught postgraduates and 565 postgraduate research students. The institution had 3,298 members of staff, of whom 536 were full-time teaching and research staff and 1,315 were part-time hourly paid teaching staff.

6 The last institutional audit took place in November 2003 and resulted in a judgement of broad confidence in the University's management of the quality and standards of its academic programmes. The report contained a number of recommendations, of which the one essential recommendation was swiftly addressed. The present audit team found that not all of the other recommendations had been as fully addressed, and the recommendations made in this report reflect this.

7 In March 2006, an audit of collaborative provision was undertaken by QAA, which resulted in judgements of broad confidence in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards, and the quality of learning opportunities offered through collaborative arrangements. Since the last institutional audit, QAA has also conducted four other reviews of University of Bradford provision. These all resulted in positive outcomes.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

8 The University maintains academic standards through a system of shared responsibilities between school and institutional level bodies, monitored by the Academic Policy Committee. Consistency of operation is monitored in schools by associate deans, learning and teaching, and at institutional level by the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching. They are supported by the Academic Standards Support Unit, where a named individual is assigned to work with each school.

9 The University assures the standards of its awards through a well-defined set of processes and guidelines, described in the Quality Assurance Handbook, for the approval, review and monitoring of programmes. These processes are conducted with thoroughness and require

demonstration of the provision's alignment with relevant subject benchmarks, FHEQ, and any other relevant external reference points. Programme specifications are produced as part of the documentation for programme approval and periodic review.

10 The University considers that its processes for course approval and review include an appropriate level of externality, which brings an independent specialist view. However, the audit team identified a number of factors which, taken together, have the potential to compromise the independent external view. The University is therefore advised to review the use of participants external to the University in programme approval and review, particularly to ensure that at least one appropriate academic external is present at each event.

11 All taught programmes are subject to annual monitoring. Monitoring of home provision was devolved to schools with effect from 2005-06. This change was welcomed by schools, but has led to variation in the approach to annual monitoring between schools, and in the nature of the annual monitoring reports from schools to the Academic Policy Committee.

12 The University has its own Code of Practice for external examiners which contextualises the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*, published by QAA, and addresses all facets of the University's relationship with its external examiners for taught courses. External examiners' reports are considered and responded to at both school and institutional levels. The University has effective mechanisms for the follow-up of issues raised by external examiners.

13 External examiners' reports seen by the audit team were variable in their quality; while most were satisfactory, some, through their brevity, were barely adequate. It was not evident that there were processes in place to follow up such shortcomings. The team also noted that a high proportion of external examiner reports are submitted late. However, a new approach had recently been introduced that would result in the University terminating the contract of an external examiner who failed to submit a report. Nonetheless, the University will wish to monitor the situation closely and to consider whether further steps might be needed to ensure the quality and timely submission of reports.

14 The University recently introduced a new pro forma for external examiner reports. The published pro forma, however, did not ask external examiners specifically to comment on the standard of awards or comparability with similar awards elsewhere in the sector. The University was apparently unaware of this omission, and, while there was no evidence that academic standards had been compromised, the University is advised to ensure that all external examiners are made aware of the revised report pro forma, which addresses comparability of academic standards.

15 External examiners are members of boards of examiners where students' progression through stages of the programme and their final awards are determined. They are also members of the assessment committee, where students' module marks are confirmed. However, the audit team found recent evidence demonstrating a lack of involvement of external examiners in both assessment committees and boards of examiners. The University is advised to ensure that its policy of external examiner membership of assessment committees is fully implemented, and that external examiners are fully involved in the business of both assessment committees and boards of examiners.

16 The University generally makes effective use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points as they apply to the management of academic standards. Developments in relation to UK and European external reference points are monitored centrally and schools are informed.

17 The University has comprehensive institution-wide assessment regulations which apply to programmes at both undergraduate and taught postgraduate levels. There are clear administrative regulations relating to assessment which include the checking of marked work, internal moderation arrangements, and double-marking of projects or thesis work. The University continually updates and revises its assessment regulations and guidelines.

18 The audit team found that assessment regulations were being applied effectively. Students met by the team confirmed that they were well informed about assessment requirements, that learning outcomes were specified, but that marking practices differed between schools. The effectiveness of the University's approach to assessment policies and regulations is routinely monitored by the Academic Policy Committee. The team noted that the biannual meeting between the chairs of boards of examiners and the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching was potentially a powerful and timely additional device for monitoring assessment procedures, and the University may wish to consider the benefits of routine reports from these meetings to the Academic Policy Committee.

19 The report of the last institutional audit advised the University without delay to progress work to define assessment levels to ensure consistent standards across the University. The present audit team noted that marking and grading criteria have been introduced in a few areas of the University, but that there was little progress evident on institutional criteria. The team heard that the University regards grading as the province of subject areas and that course approval and review teams are responsible for a consistent approach to assessment, although reports provided little evidence of this activity. While the team found no evidence that standards had been compromised as a result of a lack of an institutional set of grading criteria, it was concerned about the potential risk to standards. The University is advised to put in place appropriate mechanisms and oversight to ensure internal comparability of academic standards.

20 Student statistics are generated centrally and provided to schools to support the appraisal of academic standards. These data form an integral component of the annual monitoring process. The University's student record system is now an embedded source of management information and an implementation board plans and oversees development and implementation of the system. The audit team formed the view that the University is making progress in its use of management information to support the management of academic standards.

21 The audit team found that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

22 Responsibilities for the management of students' learning opportunities are appropriately located in the University's committee structure. Programme approval, monitoring and review procedures are set out in the Quality Assurance Handbook. The team found that the *Code of practice* had been used systematically to review University policies, regulations and procedures for course development, delivery and review.

23 The audit team found that approval and review processes were broadly sound and generally contributed effectively to the management of learning opportunities, although reporting of review teams' approval meetings could be made more consistent, effective and transparent. Likewise, the team found that annual monitoring processes were potentially sound and effective but that reporting at school and institutional levels was inconsistent. Overall, the team formed the view from these, and other examples (see paragraph 26), that institutional management of learning opportunities could be strengthened. The University is therefore advised to specify clear minimum requirements for schools' management of academic quality and standards and to reinforce the use of formal reporting systems to demonstrate fulfilment of these requirements.

24 About 70 per cent of the University's programmes are linked to professional, statutory or regulatory bodies. Course approval or review events may be carried out in conjunction with these bodies. When professional body reviews or accreditations are carried out separately, their reports and recommendations are followed up through the University's periodic review process. The Academic Policy Committee receives notifications of professional, statutory or regulatory body accreditations rather than the reports of visits. The University is careful to remain aware of European developments in higher education (the Bologna Process), and is preparing to provide Diploma Supplements electronically from 2007-08 onwards.

25 Student evaluation questionnaires are an essential part of the University's quality assurance processes. The audit team found that many annual monitoring reports did not make full use of the rich information that these surveys could provide. In responding to the recommendation noted above (see paragraph 23), the University will wish to ensure that its internal student evaluation surveys are consistently carried out and used in the annual monitoring and action-planning processes. Results of the National Student Survey are reviewed at institutional level, and the University plans to make greater use of these data at school levels. The team found that student evaluation questionnaires and the data derived from them, made a clear although variable contribution to the management of learning opportunities, and that there was scope for improvements. The team found that students are generally satisfied with their programmes of study.

26 The University values student representation at all levels, including senior committees and working groups, and students believe that these arrangements are effective. Student representatives also sit on school boards and their subcommittees responsible for the quality assurance of programmes. The Students' Union has been closely involved in each school's planning of its student representation arrangements. All schools have staff-student liaison committees, and the University has published a helpful and constructive code of good practice for staff-student liaison. Each year of a programme has two elected student representatives on a staff-student liaison committee. Students generally believe that these committees are well conducted and useful, and the audit team found examples to confirm this, but meetings are sometimes infrequent and responses to student comments can be slow.

27 The University has worked with the Students' Union to develop a partnership approach to quality management and enhancement, and this approach is affirmed and valued on both sides. For example, Students' Union officers meet regularly and frequently with the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching to discuss such matters as the student learning experience, and students are routinely involved by the University in working groups for the planning and development of new capital projects and investments. The audit identified the University's partnership approach with the Students' Union as a feature of good practice.

28 The University aims to provide opportunities for learning in a research-active environment, and has developed some strong collaborative links across schools for this purpose. The audit team found that students at final-year honours level, and in taught postgraduate programmes, engage with research activity, and one school has been commended by a professional body for this. E-learning is particularly emphasised at Bradford. The University is making wider use of its virtual learning environment across all its programmes, including a few which are delivered entirely by distance learning. Many programmes include work-based learning placements in which students are generally well supported.

29 The University is strongly committed to a student-centred approach to resources and services. Support systems are well understood and valued by students, who also confirmed that they have access to sufficient library and information technology resources. The University offers a very high quality of support to its students. The University's strategic and coordinated approach to the development of student engagement and support is identified as a feature of good practice. Admissions policies and practice are clear and effective. The University's successful institutional arrangements for widening participation were also identified as a feature of good practice in this audit.

30 The University generally offers good support to its academic staff, has suitable arrangements in place to support academics new to teaching and offers a range of good-quality staff development opportunities.

31 The audit team found that confidence could reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of learning opportunities.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

32 The University sees quality assurance and enhancement as being interlinked. There are a number of institutional strategies that provide frameworks within which schools can develop their own approach to the enhancement of students' learning opportunities. The latest version of the learning, teaching and assessment strategy incorporates quality assurance alongside enhancement, as do the school learning, teaching and assessment plans for 2006-07.

33 Staff described enhancement in a variety of ways and the institution appeared to have some difficulty in articulating its approach to enhancement and how this was managed at institutional level. The audit team therefore found that there was scope for achieving greater clarity about what constitutes enhancement within the University's context.

34 The University stated that it takes an evidence-based approach to change, with the use of pilot projects to test and refine initiatives. Examples of this approach included the implementation of a new software application for students' personal development planning and the review of student engagement. This demonstrated a capacity for a strategic and coordinated institutional approach to enhancing the student experience, although the audit team concluded that this approach could be applied more comprehensively and consistently.

35 The University is intending to develop a quality enhancement strategy. The audit team welcomed this and encourages the University to take this opportunity to articulate more clearly its understanding of enhancement and its relationship to assurance; to identify key enhancement themes; and, building on its own good practice, to develop an overarching and systematic approach to guide implementation.

36 The University has introduced a balanced scorecard method for performance management with a number of the high-level measures related to enhancement which are regularly tracked. These institutional measures have been cascaded to school-level scorecards, which have been helpful in ensuring staff awareness of the University's priorities and plans. The annual balanced scorecard reports contain good-quality information and rigorous analysis. The University's developing use of the balanced scorecard method to align central plans with school plans and with performance management is a feature of good practice.

37 The University collects and assembles data and information from a wide variety of sources and at many levels, which it uses to inform enhancement. The audit team found evidence that in some cases this information was being used effectively to inform enhancement activities, while in other cases this was less evident. The University had recently established a working group to review and rationalise its internal student surveys. The team considered this to be a positive development and encourages the University to take a strategic overview of the data that are required to develop, support and review the emerging institutional approach to quality enhancement.

38 The University has many opportunities to identify and capture both internal and external good practice. There are also numerous occasions when staff can share good practice. Some of these occur in formal situations, while many others occur in less formal situations. The audit team noted this balance between the formal and informal, which builds on the collegiate culture of the institution, but felt that opportunities to capture and disseminate good practice more widely and systematically were being missed.

39 Much of the formal dissemination of good practice is facilitated by the Teaching Quality Enhancement Group, whose work is informed by external developments in the sector as well as internal good practice. The Group runs the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice, accredited by the Higher Education Academy and its learning support seminar series, which directly support staff development and thereby enhancement. The seminars cover a wide range of learning and teaching issues, and are well attended and valued by staff. The

Group's website also provides useful supporting resources that help to achieve a deeper and wider dissemination of good practice. The audit team considered that a more refined analysis of staff attendance at the seminars could help the University to measure the scale and extent of dissemination achieved, as well as their impact on practice.

40 In capturing internal good practice, the Teaching Quality Enhancement Group's involvement on course approval and review teams has provided the Group with the opportunity to learn about local good practice developments in some detail. However, the audit team noted that the recent devolution of annual monitoring to schools was making it harder for the Group to fulfil its role.

41 The University shares good practice across the institution by means of peer interactions, an approach which is likely to be most effective for those staff who are already well engaged with the learning and teaching agenda. It is less clear how good practice is being formally captured in a format and with a level of detail which can be shared more widely. It would therefore be desirable for the University to consider means for the systematic capture and dissemination of good practice across the institution.

42 The audit team found that rewards for learning and teaching had improved in recent years, with staff receiving both performance recognition awards and promotion. The team also noted the University's continuing commitment to review the criteria for promotion. The team considered that the University was making good progress in developing its procedures. In addition, the University's two awards related to learning and teaching have both been realigned with the Higher Education Academy's National Teaching Fellowship Scheme. Staff spoke enthusiastically about the recent changes and the team considered that the awards were well conceived.

43 Overall, the audit team concluded that the institution's approach to quality enhancement is satisfactory but would benefit from clearer articulation of University's understanding of quality enhancement and its relationship to quality assurance, together with a more proactive, systematic approach and strategic focus at the institutional level.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

44 The University of Bradford will be subject to a separate audit of its collaborative provision.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

45 The Research Degrees Committee monitors the quality assurance and enhancement of postgraduate research provision. There are three University codes of practice that align well with the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*. The Committee recently undertook a review of the management of research programmes at school level and found that, while there was reasonable alignment with the codes, there was diversity of practice across the University. The audit team also found variation in practice and supports the move to achieve greater consistency in the practice of supporting and supervising postgraduate students at school level.

46 The research environment for postgraduate research students is fostered at school level. Schools have developed mechanisms to embed this research culture through seminars, email networks and guest speakers. The role of the Graduate School in supporting and/or extending the research environment was less clear. The University may wish to clarify the role of the Graduate School in this regard and to consider the most appropriate mechanisms for providing an enhanced research environment for postgraduate research students that fosters interdisciplinarity.

47 The University has rigorous processes in place for the selection of research students. Although there is some variation in practice within schools, the audit team found that the process worked as intended.

48 Generic postgraduate induction takes place in the Graduate School and is supplemented by specific induction related to the area of research by supervisors or within schools. Research students are supervised by at least two supervisors who have received training related to this role. Students valued this induction and spoke positively of their supervision. The audit team considered these arrangements to be appropriate.

49 The monitoring and review of progress of research students, and associated arrangements for transfer of registrations from MPhil to PhD are done through a variety of mechanisms. The University's review of postgraduate research provision revealed some variation in practice across schools, citing some which operated transparent and structured processes while acknowledging that others had less robust systems. The audit team concurred with the recommendation made by that review that the University should seek to ensure a consistent approach, and welcomed the efforts to spread good practice by the Academic Standards Support Unit.

50 The Graduate School has responsibility for both the Economic and Social Research Council accredited Social Sciences Research Training Programme and short courses for research. The audit team found that there have been ongoing difficulties with regard to the resourcing of this programme, resulting in significant student dissatisfaction. These difficulties were also identified by an internal review of the Graduate School, which reported in February 2006. There have been a number of positive developments with regard to the management position and governance of the Graduate School, which were welcomed by staff and which the University will need to keep under review.

51 The audit team found there were over 30 short courses available that addressed a broad range of research skill requirements, many of which were also available during a spring training week specifically to meet the needs of part-time and external students. The team considered that these short courses were well constructed and filled a broad range of student training requirements, which were supplemented with appropriate training from students' home schools.

52 At school level, the Director of Postgraduate Research has the responsibility to ensure that feedback mechanisms are in place including appropriate representation. It was clear to the audit team that, although there were opportunities for feedback, there was considerable variation in the mechanism and place where the postgraduate student voice was represented within schools. The team encourages the University to develop more consistent policy and guidance in this area.

53 At University level, the Postgraduate Research Forum was created to bring together students to share experience and identify generic problems. The audit team found that there was confusion about the existence and role of the Postgraduate Research Forum and it was not clear that the Forum had a formal voice. It would be desirable for the University to ensure consistent representation of postgraduate research students at institutional level.

54 Research degrees are examined by an internal and external examiner and are approved by the Research Degrees Committee. Following the oral examination, a joint final report and recommendation is sent to the Research Degrees Committee for formal approval. The audit team was satisfied that the Research Degrees Committee was undertaking its responsibilities for these matters.

55 Complaints by research students are dealt with by the school's Director of Postgraduate Research or, if they wish to discuss the matter outside of their school, they are advised to contact the Graduate School. This process was understood within schools and is made clear to students at induction and in handbooks. The audit team was confident that this reflected actual practice and that the process was sound.

56 Research students can appeal to the Research Degrees Committee following an unsatisfactory report during the programme or failure at the end on a variety of grounds. The audit team found that no cases had been considered in the last five years and was content that arrangements to deal with issues as they arise were working satisfactorily.

57 Overall, the audit team considered that the University's arrangements for the management of the quality and standards of its postgraduate research provision were effective and aligned to the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Section 7: Published information

58 The University has adequate systems in place to ensure the accuracy and completeness of published documents. Responsibility lies with the Head of Marketing and Communications, who in turn reports to the Director of Academic Administration.

59 The Academic Policy Committee, through its quality assurance processes, ensures that key information about programmes is accurate and complete and no information on new courses may be published until the first phase of course approval has been granted. Students can express their views on the value of published information through staff-student liaison committees and evaluation questionnaires, which are covered by annual monitoring and reported to the Academic Policy Committee.

60 Students who met with the audit team felt that the written pre-arrival information and the material provided for them post-arrival about their programmes and their modules supplied to them was fair and accurate. They found the provision of information on the virtual learning environment highly variable. The minimum institutional requirement was a presence for every module, although schools could set a higher minimum.

61 The University regulates internal information about programmes by setting a minimum standard, while leaving schools free to decide how best to do this. There is a database for modules that ensures consistent information, and a template for programme specifications, as well as guidance notes. Programme specifications for all programmes are available on the University's website. The University's module outlines were considered by the audit team to be rather minimal, but the students valued the fuller module guides supplied to them.

62 The institution has decided to respond to HEFCE's requirement that external examiners' reports be shared with student representatives by continuing its approach of including the review of the reports and the schools' responses in the annual monitoring process, where student representatives are involved.

63 There is a comprehensive quality assurance handbook available online which sets out clearly the University's procedures and processes. The University also has codes of good practice, which are easily accessible from one webpage and are arranged to show clearly to which sections of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, they relate.

64 The University intends to link appropriate sections of the University website to the new Unistats website, which went live in November 2007, and work on this was due to commence in early 2008.

65 The University operates a publication scheme under the Freedom of Information Act and has a web page link to publicly available data. The audit team's broad overall impression was of an institution which is very open about information.

66 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.

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

67 The audit team identified the following areas as being good practice:

- the partnership approach with the Students' Union (paragraph 27)
- the strategic and coordinated institutional approach to the development of student engagement and support (paragraph 29)
- the successful institutional arrangements for widening participation (paragraph 29)
- the developing use of the balanced scorecard method to align central plans with school plans and with performance management (paragraph 36).

Recommendations for action

68 The audit team recommends that the University consider further action in some areas. Recommendations for action that are advisable:

- review the use of participants external to the University in programme approval and review, particularly to ensure that at least one appropriate academic external is present at each event (paragraph 10)
- ensure that its policy of external examiner membership of assessment committees is fully implemented, and that external examiners are fully involved in the business of both assessment committees and boards of examiners; and ensure that all external examiners are made aware of the revised report pro forma, which addresses comparability of academic standards (paragraphs 14, 15)
- put in place appropriate mechanisms and supervision to ensure internal comparability of academic standards (paragraph 19)
- specify clear minimum requirements for schools' management of academic quality and standards and to reinforce the use of formal reporting systems to demonstrate fulfilment of these requirements (paragraph 23).

Recommendations for action that are desirable:

- consider means for the systematic capture and dissemination of good practice across the institution (paragraph 41)
- ensure consistent representation of postgraduate research students at institutional level (paragraph 53).

Appendix

The University of Bradford's response to the institutional report

The University welcomes the audit team's judgements of confidence in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. The University is particularly pleased to note recognition of the strength of its partnership with the Students' Union, its commitment to widening participation and the enhancement of student engagement and support. We will continue to build on these features of good practice.

The University continuously reflects on its policies, procedures and practices as a means of enhancing the student experience and monitoring the integrity of its awards; the audit team's recommendations will form part of that continuous review process. In May 2008 an Action Plan will be presented to the Academic Policy Committee, which will track the progress of the work done in response to the report. Several of the team's recommendations will be incorporated into pre-existing initiatives, such as the review of the management of postgraduate research programmes, and APC's overview of the revised annual monitoring process. The role of the external examiner will be the subject of a separate, dedicated review.

The report is the result of a mutually cooperative audit process and has made a useful and constructive contribution to the University's management of quality assurance and enhancement.

