

# University of Salford

February 2008

## Annex to the report

### Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
Outcomes of the institutional audit	3
Institutional approach to quality enhancement	3
Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students	3
Published information	4
Features of good practice	4
Recommendations for action	5
<b>Section 1: Introduction and background</b>	<b>5</b>
The institution and its mission	5
Information base for the audit	6
Developments since the last audit	7
Institutional framework for the management of academic standards and learning opportunities	7
<b>Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards</b>	<b>11</b>
Approval, monitoring and review of award standards	11
External examiners	13
Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points	14
Assessment policies and regulations	15
Management information - statistics	16
<b>Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities</b>	<b>17</b>
Framework for management of learning opportunities	17
External examiners	17
Approval, monitoring and review of programmes	17
Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points	18
Assessment policies	19
Management information - feedback from students	19
Role of students in quality assurance	20

Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities	20
Other modes of study	21
Resources for learning	21
Admissions policy	22
Student support	22
Staff support (including staff development)	23
<b>Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement</b>	<b>24</b>
Management information (including feedback and National Student Survey outcomes)	25
Dissemination of good practice	26
Staff development and reward	26
<b>Section 5: Collaborative arrangements</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Section 7: Published information</b>	<b>33</b>

## Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Salford (the University) from 18 to 22 February 2008 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 University of Salford 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.

In addition to the two judgements above, the audit team also produced commentaries on the University's arrangements for quality enhancement, collaborative provision, postgraduate research students and published information. These can be found in the Report.

### Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University has established a strategic approach to enhancement although it is only recently being classed as such. Institutional priorities in curricular development have been identified and progressed systematically. The Academic Development Fund and the Teaching Quality Enhancement Funding have been used to enable senior management to provide targeted support for strategically important projects. Initiatives such as Vice Chancellor's Scholarships, Learning Technologies Fellows and Professorial Fellows stemmed from strategic decisions to support development organisationally and on an individual level in line with strategic priorities.

In terms of taught students, the responsibility for providing leadership and strategic direction for the enhancement of the learning experience lies with the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching and Learning). For research students, enhancement has been the responsibility of the Director of Graduate Studies under the oversight of the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research). The Pro-Vice Chancellor (Institutional and Student Services) has led the enhancement of the wider student experience.

### Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

Research policy and procedures are determined on behalf of Senate by the Research Committee and Postgraduate Research Award Board chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research) and the Director of Graduate Studies respectively.

All research activity, including postgraduate research programmes, is located in the nine Research Institutes. Postgraduate research students are formally based in Research Institutes and all supervisors are full members of Research Institutes. The Research and Graduate College provides central support and administrative functions for research and postgraduate activities; it includes the Postgraduate Office, which has responsibility for postgraduate research student records and administration. Quality and progression across the postgraduate research student lifecycle are monitored at local level by Research Institutes and at institutional level through the Postgraduate Research Studies Subcommittee and the Postgraduate Research Award Board, both chaired by the Director of Graduate Studies.

## Published information

Overall, the University publishes clear and accessible information for its students in printed form and, increasingly, on its website. Publicity materials from partner colleges that the audit team viewed stated clearly the locus of the University as the appropriate awarding body.

Students whom the audit team met supported the view that the centrally produced pre-entry published and web-based materials were generally comprehensive, helpful and accurate. The team looked at examples of programme specifications for both collaborative and non-collaborative provision and found them to be detailed and useful.

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 range and depth of the Academic Audit Committee's investigations into the effectiveness of the University's policies and procedures, its independence in choosing areas for audit, and its authority and status as a committee of Senate (paragraph 12)
- the University's action to ensure that the Procedures and Policies for Academic Quality Assurance: Programmes and Students (AQA) continues to be a robust and increasingly accessible foundation of its quality framework (paragraph 16)
- the establishment of the Academic Quality and Standards Unit and its continuing work contribute significantly to the effectiveness of the University's management of standards and quality management and that the practice of reviewing the impact and effectiveness of new or significantly revised quality assurance procedures after the initial year is a feature of good practice (paragraph 17)
- the steps the University has taken to improve its overview of interaction with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies at programme, school and faculty level (paragraph 38)
- the increasing range of student-related data and statistical analyses produced by the Academic Quality Standards Unit that are available to the University, faculties and schools to assist in their monitoring, review and planning processes (paragraph 44)
- the robust and thorough processes for the annual review of programmes; their oversight at school, faculty and institutional levels and the commitment to provide institutional-level feedback on the issues identified from overview reports (paragraph 50)
- the introduction and support of student liaison representatives in extending and increasing the effectiveness of the constructive engagement of students in the quality assurance process and quality enhancement (paragraph 61)
- the identification of good practice in the induction of external examiners in one school leading to its adoption at University level (paragraph 91)
- the development and use of the summary guidelines to the affiliation process for partner institutions (paragraph 98)
- the regular updates for members of the Partnership and Collaboration Subcommittee on national issues and debates on higher education collaborative matters (paragraph 101)
- the opportunities available to regional partner staff to access University-led staff development opportunities, particularly where these are encouraged through the appropriate Joint Board of Study (paragraph 104)

- the Graduate Teaching Assistant scheme and its associated training programme (paragraph 122)
- the easily accessible and well laid out 'Student' and 'Staff' Channels on the University website (paragraph 129)
- the regular updating of the AQA and in particular the current review of the AQA as part of a wider University staff communications strategy (paragraph 131).

### **Recommendations for action**

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

The team advises the University to:

- in developing its new Senate committee structure in the Realising our Vision project, the University is strongly advised to retain its robust arrangements for the management of academic quality, including the current high level of professional support (paragraph 24)
- as it develops the focus of its collaborative provision, particularly through increasing the number of partnerships with international institutions and UK employers, and consequently with arrangements that pose a potentially higher risk, and in the light of the emerging outcomes of Realising our Vision, the University has in place adequately robust arrangements to assure the quality of all its future collaborative activities (paragraph 107).

It would be desirable for the University to:

- maintain the independence and thoroughness of its current arrangements for academic audit as carried out by the Academic Audit Committee (paragraph 23)
- extend the development of appropriate data collection and analysis processes relating to postgraduate taught students in the context of plans to develop postgraduate taught provision (paragraph 42)
- encourage the continuing improvements in the consistency of use of the virtual learning environment, especially within programmes of study (paragraph 69)
- develop further its approach to quality enhancement to ensure the dissemination of good and/or effective practice is more systematic and overt (paragraph 94)
- regularly update students studying in partner institutions on their entitlement to the use of University resources for learning and teaching (paragraph 102)
- ensure that a University framework is in place for the pedagogical staff development needs of partners teaching at higher education level with whom the University intends to establish strategic relationships (paragraph 105)
- clarify its entry regulations for postgraduate research doctoral degrees in the light of its current practice regarding entry requirements (paragraph 115).

## **Section 1: Introduction and background**

### **The institution and its mission**

1 The University of Salford traces its origins back to 1896 and the founding of the Royal Technical Institute Salford. The University was granted its Royal Charter in 1967 since when the University has built upon its previous status as a College of Advanced Technology. As well as establishing itself as a University focusing on technology and engineering, it additionally focuses on the promotion of access to educational opportunities and also preparedness for the world of work.

2 In 1996, the University merged with the Salford College of Technology and the Northern College of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Studies to create a multidisciplinary University with over 18,000 students, shifting the balance of disciplines within the University.

3 At the time of the audit the University had a total of 19,306 students; 15,899 undergraduate; 2,999 following postgraduate taught programmes and 408 postgraduate research students. Academically the University is organised into four faculties, each containing a number of schools. Research is located within nine Research Institutes, many of which draw members from more than one school and faculty.

4 The University's Mission, set out in Strategic Framework 2005-15 is to achieve its aim through five goals:

- to become an international leader in sharing knowledge and expertise in successful and innovative partnerships with business and the community
- to produce graduates with the skills, creativity, confidence and adaptability to succeed in the labour market and make a meaningful contribution to society
- to provide a high-quality learning and working experience for all, and ensure that we open up new opportunities for learning for all who can benefit from them
- to sustain and develop selective areas of research excellence with a particular focus on current and emergent 'real world' issues and multidisciplinary perspectives.
- to further the internationalisation of the University through all our activities.

5 The Strategic Framework identifies strategic priorities designed to steer the medium term development (three to five years) and outlines performance indicators to measure progress and effectiveness.

### **Information base for the audit**

6 The University provided the audit team with a briefing paper and access to a wide range of internal and published documents, many of which were available on the intranet. The University also provided the team with audit trails of two recent programme-level reviews including all submitted documentation, the minutes of meetings and consideration by relevant committees and the resultant actions. The team was granted access to the intranet during the briefing and audit visits. In addition, the audit team had access to:

- the report of the previous institutional audit of 2004
- reports of reviews by QAA at the subject level since the previous institutional audit
- reports produced by other relevant bodies (for example, Ofsted and professional, statutory or regulatory bodies)
- the institution's internal documents
- the notes of audit team meetings with staff and students.
- Special review of research degree programmes report.

7 The audit team was particularly grateful to representatives of the Students' Union who produced a student written submission. The submission set out the students' views on the accuracy of information provided to them, the experience of students as learners and their role in quality management.

## Developments since the last audit

8 The Institutional Briefing Paper states that governance has been reviewed and a revised Charter and Statutes submitted to the Privy Council. A review of committee structures is underway with the aim of establishing a more streamlined and effective deliberative structure and clarifying the respective roles of the Senate and its committees and of management and the executive. A revised strategic leadership team was established in September 2006, comprising senior academic managers and the directors of key services.

9 The academic management of the University has been revised through the redefinition of the roles and responsibilities and method of appointment of pro-vice chancellors, executive deans and heads of school. The objective has been to create a more corporate, professional and accountable culture of strategic and operational academic management. A Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic) and a Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) have been advertised with revised responsibilities and portfolios.

10 During 2006-07 proposals for the reorganisation of professional services were drawn up and work begun on changes to their management and organisational structures.

## Institutional framework for the management of academic standards and learning opportunities

11 According to the Institutional Briefing Paper, the University's framework for quality assurance and enhancement comprises 'a set of principles, organisational structures, a policy framework and set of documentation'. The principles underlying the University's framework for quality management, responsibility, equity, externality and enhancement, are unchanged since the previous 2004 audit. In terms of responsibility the recently renewed Charter and Statutes of the University restate the primary role of the Senate as 'responsible for maintaining the academic quality and standards of the University'. At the time of the audit visit that responsibility was discharged centrally through three key Senate committees: the Teaching and Learning Committee; Research Committee; and the Academic Audit Committee. The Teaching and Learning Committee had responsibility for all taught programmes, was chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) and had three subcommittees with quality assurance and standards roles: Teaching and Learning Standards Subcommittee; Admissions Subcommittee; and Partnerships and Collaboration Subcommittee. The Research Committee had responsibility for all research awards and the research environment, was chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research), and had one sub-committee: Postgraduate Research Studies.

12 The Academic Audit Committee acts as 'an independent check on the effectiveness of policies and procedures' and is currently chaired by a senior academic. The 2004 audit had identified the establishment of the Committee and its work as a feature of good practice and the Institutional Briefing Paper claimed that the Committee 'has continued to have a significant impact upon the University and has been strengthened since 2004'. The audit team was told that part of that strengthening was an improved link to the Strategic Leadership Team, to ensure that recommendations arising from its audits and requiring institutional-level action were implemented. The Academic Audit Committee had been very active producing 16 reports on a wide range of areas in a three-year period. It is ultimately responsible for deciding which areas to audit but draws upon suggestions from committees such as the Teaching and Learning Committee. Its reports are submitted directly to Senate and copied to the Strategic Leadership Team so it can formulate a management response to the findings of the audit. The team considered that the Academic Audit Committee's activity had been a strong feature of the University's developing approach to quality management. In particular, the team considered that the range and depth of the Committee's investigations into the effectiveness of the University's policies and procedures, its independence in choosing areas for audit, and its authority and status as a committee of Senate all amounted to a continuing feature of good practice.

13 The University's policy framework for quality assurance and enhancement is set by The Strategic Framework 2005-2015 and additionally, for taught programmes, by the Teaching and Learning Strategy 2006-2009. The University's desired decentralised relationship between the centre and the faculties and schools is summed up in the Framework's statements that 'Use of the term 'framework' rather than 'plan' is deliberate, because detailed objectives are not laid down' and responsibility for ensuring the 'strength and quality of our ongoing business of teaching and learning, research and academic enterprise' rests with schools, faculties and support services. Responsibility for implementation of academic policy at faculty and school level is reiterated in the Teaching and Learning Strategy 2006-2009, which has 'education for capability' as its aim and says little about the assurance of standards and quality.

14 Operational responsibility for the quality and standards of academic programmes is devolved to the schools with each faculty responsible for its constituent schools. Given that the maximum number of schools in a faculty is four and the minimum two, the audit team was interested in the respective roles of faculties and schools in quality management. The team accepted the proffered explanation that in review and monitoring the faculty could provide an additional element of 'externality' and allow comparisons to be made between very different schools but considered that there may be elements of duplication in quality management at the two levels, for example, in the production of overview reports. Despite the obvious efforts expended in quality management and a strong central framework of procedures, the student written submission and some of the student representatives, whom the audit team met, asserted that there were inconsistencies in practice between and within schools in areas directly affecting the student experience. The team was assured by senior members of staff that greater consistency of practice and clarity of reporting lines were being achieved by the horizontal networks, at faculty and school level respectively, of the Associate Dean (Teaching) and Associate Head (Teaching). The Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) and associate deans had regular fortnightly meetings and also, less frequently, met the Associate Head (Teaching) to discuss significant new developments and their operation at school level. The team also heard that planned changes in the committee structure (see below) would promote a greater focus on enhancement and would be a positive move in ensuring greater equivalence of the student learning experience. On this evidence and the more positive responses of other student groups that the team met, the team took the view that the University had identified problems of inconsistency in practice and was adopting a progressive approach to tackling them.

15 Structures, policies and procedures are described in a single, annually updated handbook, Procedures and Policies for Academic Quality Assurance: Programmes and Students (AQA). The AQA, which also incorporates the academic regulations for both taught and research programmes, is a comprehensive and, at over five hundred pages, substantial document, also available online. It sets out in detail the rationale and procedures for the approval, periodic review and re-approval of programmes, and their annual monitoring; and the periodic review of schools, research institutes and faculties. The audit confirmed that there is an established process for the regular review and revision of procedures and that the impact and effectiveness of new or significantly revised procedures is reviewed after the initial year.

16 In recognition of the need to make its procedures as understandable and accessible as possible the University was undertaking a project, 'Rethinking the AQA' which was gauging staff perceptions and use of the handbook and website with a view to developing and implementing a new approach to communicating information to staff about quality and standards. The audit team was told that the project, which started in March 2007, was progressing more slowly than originally intended, partly because of changes to support structures, and was not simply a revision of the handbook but should be viewed as part of a wider strategy to improve communication with staff. Notwithstanding the extended timescale of the project, the team recognised the importance of the AQA in underpinning the University's approach to quality assurance and for the future security of arrangements for quality management during the proposed structural changes in which understanding and operation of those arrangements

among staff at school and programme level would be key components. The team therefore considered that the University's action to ensure that the AQA continues to be a robust and increasingly accessible foundation of its quality framework was an example of good practice.

17 A significant structural change since the 2004 audit was the establishment of the Academic Quality and Standards Unit which had played an important role in the development of quality assurance processes and procedures. The Academic Quality and Standards Unit and the Education Development Unit are currently the executive arms of the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching and Learning). Academic Division organises the regular review and revision of the AQA. Academic Division and Academic Quality and Standards Unit jointly oversees engagement with the Academic Infrastructure, produces an overview of external examiner reports, leads on the analysis and dissemination of student data, and 'owns' the institutional Student Experience Survey. The audit team concluded that the establishment of the Academic Quality and Standards Unit and its continuing work contribute significantly to the effectiveness of the University's management of standards and quality management and that the practice of reviewing the impact and effectiveness of new or significantly revised quality assurance procedures after the initial year is a feature of good practice.

18 The University has taken a cautious approach to collaborative arrangements and has relatively limited provision primarily in the local region. However, a new 'collaboration and partnership framework' that may seek more overseas partnerships was being discussed at the time of the audit visit. The AQA includes the University's Procedures on Partnership and Collaboration, which, according to the Institutional Briefing Paper, 'are designed to ensure that the University has approved and has oversight of all activities undertaken in its name...and state unequivocally that overall responsibility for the academic standards of all its programmes offered in collaboration remains with the University'. The University separates processes for partner approval and programme approval. Ongoing responsibility for quality assurance at operational level lies with schools with institutional oversight provided through the Partnership and Collaboration Subcommittee. Partnership programmes operate through joint boards of studies but otherwise quality assurance procedures are in line with those for Salford-based programmes. In general, the procedures and processes for partner and programme approval, and management and monitoring of collaborative provision are robust and appropriate for the current level and nature of the University's partnerships.

19 Central oversight of the University's arrangements for postgraduate research students is provided by the Director of Graduate Studies while Research Institutes are responsible for individual students. These arrangements were subject in 2006 to a QAA Special review of research degree programmes. The review deemed the 'institution's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree programme provision was appropriate and satisfactory' and noted as good practice user-friendly summary information to research degree programmes students and the provision of a personal tutor for each research degree programme student outside the supervisory team. The Special review also identified areas for consideration, which, with one exception, have been considered and acted upon by the Postgraduate Research Studies Subcommittee. One recommendation relating to admissions criteria had been rejected and was the focus of enquiry by the audit team in its meetings with relevant staff (see paragraph 115 below).

20 At the time of the audit, the University's committees and support services described above were in the process of review and reorganisation resulting from implementation of 'Realising our Vision', a major programme of change in governance, strategic leadership, academic management and the professional services. The Realising our Vision programme, which was being co-chaired by the Registrar and Secretary and the Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts, Media and Social Sciences, had considerable implications for the future governance and management of academic quality, standards and enhancement. Of most interest to the audit team were changes, underway or proposed, to the committee structures, senior academic management roles and the

professional support services. According to the Institutional Briefing Paper, these changes were 'intended to establish "a more streamlined and effective deliberative structure" and clarifying 'the respective roles of the Senate and its committees and of management and the executive.'" A revised strategic leadership team comprising senior academic managers and the directors of key services had been established, there was a redefinition of the roles and responsibilities and method of appointment of pro vice-chancellors, executive deans and heads of school, and the professional services were being re-organised. The co-chairs of the Realising our Vision programme had summed up the need for change as follows: 'While the current unwieldy scheme has paradoxically overseen reasonably robust quality assurance processes and procedures, there is a consensus that many of these are overly bureaucratic in operation and that the translation of quality assurance into enhancement at Salford is not optimised'.

21 In the Realising our Vision proposals submitted to the Senate in November 2007, the current structure of committees and subcommittees would be replaced by a flatter structure of four major Senate committees. As far as the audit team could ascertain from the papers available to it and from meetings with staff members, three of these new committees would be directly concerned with different aspects of the Senate's responsibilities for academic quality, standards and enhancement, with each member of a newly structured Pro-Vice Chancellor team chairing one of them. Senior staff members told the team that the considerable workload of the Teaching and Learning Committee and its subcommittees would be divided between two of the four new committees: the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee, concentrating on pedagogy and learning, will be chaired by a new post of Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic) while the Academic Portfolio and Partnerships Committee, concerned with curricular development, partnerships and collaborative arrangements, would probably be chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Enterprise and Regional Affairs. Research governance would be the responsibility of the Research Committee, chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor Research and Innovation. It is expected that the membership of these three new committees will reflect the skills needed to undertake their roles and that they will develop their own approaches to deal efficiently with their business areas. The fourth proposed Senate committee is a new Academic Governance Committee, to be chaired by an independent elected member of Senate and 'charged with monitoring and reviewing and enhancing the processes of academic governance'; this would include taking on the audit function of the Academic Audit Committee. Realising our Vision also includes a reorganisation of support services, which, among other things, is intended to rationalise professional support for quality assurance and enhancement and provide each Pro-Vice Chancellor with a 'private office'. One of the effects of these proposals will be to redistribute the functions of the existing Academic Quality and Standards Unit (and Education Development Unit) with the former's roles probably distributed between areas headed by the Registrar and Secretary, and the proposed private office of the new Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic).

22 An Academic Governance Working Group, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, had been set up to test the practicability and security of the proposed future arrangements for academic governance of quality, standards and enhancement. In particular, the working group was testing whether the proposed new committee structure would be capable of managing the required business, overseeing the mapping of AQA processes and procedures against the new and continuing structures, and assessing whether it would be feasible to put the revised arrangements in place by the start of the academic year 2008-09. The working group was expected to report on these matters to the Senate in March 2008 (after the audit visit). Referring to the work of this group in his foreword to the Institutional Briefing Paper, the Vice-Chancellor stated that: 'In its first stages, which will be completed this academic year, the aim is to ensure that the integrity of our current policies and procedures will be fully safeguarded by the new arrangements for their organisation and management.' This declared aim was clearly of considerable interest to the audit team in considering the changes to the current arrangements for quality management as described in the Institutional Briefing Paper.

23 The audit team concurred with the University's view that it had developed and had in place robust quality assurance procedures. However, the team was conscious of its need to comment also on the likely future arrangements for quality management and therefore wished to investigate whether the extensive changes proposed in *Realising our Vision* represented a significant degree of risk to their future operation. In particular, while recognising the University's wish to reduce the administrative load of a complex committee structure, the team was interested to understand how the heavy quality assurance workload of the existing structure of committees and subcommittees would be managed or significantly reduced by the streamlined, flat structure proposed by *Realising our Vision*. Another concern was how the strong features of the existing structures embodied, for example, in the work of the Academic Quality and Standards Unit and the Academic Audit Committee, would be affected by the envisaged changes. In addition, the Teaching and Learning Standards Subcommittee, a subcommittee that would also be disbanded in the *Realising our Vision* schedule, currently co-ordinated the working groups that carried out a range of useful reviews of the quality framework and recommended changes in practice; for example of annual programme review and relationships with public, statutory and regulatory bodies. The team was told that the existing Teaching and Learning Committee had already reduced its meeting lengths by a process of prioritising ('starring') essential items for discussion and that the new committees would be responsible for ensuring that their workloads were appropriately managed but did not detect any current moves to reduce the overall workload significantly. Given its positive view of the work and position of the Academic Audit Committee described above (see paragraph 12 above) the team was also interested in ongoing discussions about the future position of the University's internal academic audit function and considered it desirable that the University maintains the independence and thoroughness of its current arrangements for academic audit as carried out by the Academic Audit Committee.

24 Notwithstanding the remaining uncertainty about future arrangements, the audit team noted the measured approach being taken by the Vice-Chancellor's working group on academic governance and the work it was undertaking to assess the feasibility of an autumn 2008 target for the transition to the new arrangements. However, at the time of the audit, the proposals that the working group would submit to Senate had not been completed and the team was therefore unable to assess the extent of the proposed changes. The team's view was that while understandably seeking to reduce any over-bureaucratic quality assurance procedures and to focus more effectively on quality enhancement, the University will also clearly wish to ensure that the robustness of its internal framework for assuring quality and standards and the elements of good practice displayed by its existing structures are protected during its programme of change. Therefore, the team took the view that in developing its new Senate committee structure in the *Realising our Vision* project, the University is strongly advised to retain its robust arrangements for the management of academic quality, including the current high level of professional support.

## **Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards**

### **Approval, monitoring and review of award standards**

25 The University's procedures for programme approval and monitoring, and periodic review and re-approval are described in detail in the AQA and take appropriate account of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of Practice), Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review* published by QAA. The procedures were revised in 2005-06 as part of the University's routine process of regular review and according to the Briefing Paper the subsequent modifications, introduced in the academic year 2006-07, 'strengthened independence and externality, emphasised the academic judgements made against the Academic Infrastructure in approval and re-approval, strengthened the student voice within periodic review, added student involvement at re-approval and removed some duplication'.

26 Programme approval is a two-stage process: stage 1 is outline institutional approval by the Teaching and Learning Committee, following prior approval at school and faculty level; stage 2 involves a detailed approval process at faculty level on behalf of Senate by a faculty Programme Approval and Review Subcommittee. The committees play an important institutional role because they also conduct periodic reviews of programmes (see below); each includes at least one external adviser and is chaired by a senior member of staff from another faculty, who is trained for the role. The AQA stipulates that the external advisor 'must be able to comment with authority on academic standards within higher education and be familiar with the QAA's Academic Infrastructure'; and the Programme Approval and Review Subcommittee has to confirm 'adequate engagement with the relevant subject benchmark statements and *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*'. The operation of the Programme Approval and Review Subcommittees in their first year was discussed at a meeting of all relevant parties in July 2007, an example of the University's good practice of reviewing major changes to its procedures after one year. (See also paragraph 13 above) The review confirmed that the new procedures were operating well while suggesting minor amendments and noting the need for continued centralised support for the coordinated operation of the Programme Approval and Review Subcommittees. Given the projected changes to the professional and administrative services envisaged in *Realising our Vision*, including the disestablishment of the Academic Quality and Standards Unit, the audit team questioned how the change proposals were taking account of the support needs of Programme Approval and Review Subcommittees. There was some uncertainty among the staff members whom the team met about the future location and nature of that support, but the team was told that it was 'inconceivable' that appropriate support for the committees would not be provided. The team took the view that in developing and implementing its *Realising our Vision* proposals, the University would wish to clarify as soon as possible the arrangements for continuing support for its key quality assurance processes and would be advised to continue the currently high level of professional service support (see also paragraphs 20 above).

27 The procedures for periodic programme review and re-approval at intervals of not more than five years were also recently revised and aligned with those for programme approval. A review process within the relevant school results in a reflective analysis, updated programme specifications and any other supporting documentation; these are submitted to the faculty Programme Approval and Review Subcommittee, which, with external subject specialist input, conducts the re-approval process and produces a report of its findings. The Academic Quality and Standards Unit has recently drafted a useful overview report of periodic programme review and re-approvals in 2006-07 for the Teaching and Learning Committee. From the sample of re-approvals available to it the audit team was able to confirm the thoroughness of the process and to support comments noted in the overview report about the rigour of the reflective analyses undertaken by programme teams. Beyond the programme level, there are also fully documented procedures for the periodic review of research institutes, schools and faculties. In a five-year cycle, the faculty is reviewed in the fifth year after reviews of its constituent schools and research institutes in the first four. The team had access to several school review reports and was able to confirm that the process, which involves external advisers and is akin to a subject review process, was both comprehensive and rigorous.

28 Each programme or group of closely related programmes is expected to produce an annual programme review report at the end of the session for approval at school level or by joint boards of study in the case of collaborative programmes. The audit team saw evidence of a comprehensive system of annual programme review reporting, scrutiny and feedback. Schools produce summary reports, which are reviewed in each faculty by the Associate Dean (Teaching), who also reviews a sample (and often all) Annual programme review reports and produces a summary report for the Teaching and Learning Committee. In addition, overviews of annual programme reviews from collaborative provision and postgraduate taught programmes, which are also reviewed in their home schools and faculties, are produced for the Committee, by the Chair of the Partnerships and Collaborations Subcommittee and the Director of Graduate Studies

respectively to consider generic issues. The Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) produces an institutional overview of the operation of the annual programme review process and of issues arising. Each of the central services provides a response to relevant issues raised by the annual programme review overviews.

29 The audit team was able to confirm a well-documented process of comprehensive programme reporting, well supported for undergraduate programmes by centrally produced statistical data. Reports are progressively overviewed and considered at different levels in the committee structure and a range of institutional responses results. The team noted a record of the University's strong action in response to previously identified deficiencies in the standard of reports and the quality of data available to programme teams. However, there were concerns among senior staff that issues of student dissatisfaction with variations in their learning experience, as evidenced by the results of the National Student Survey and highlighted in the student written submission, had not been picked up more effectively through the annual programme review process. An annual programme review working group had reported the preliminary results of a review to consider, *inter alia*, the effectiveness of the method of review and its refocusing as 'monitoring and enhancement'. The review, which involved widespread consultation, noted problems arising from the late submission of external examiners' reports and current deficiencies in the provision of centrally-produced data available to postgraduate taught programme teams. Its recommendations included action to allow the annual programme review process to start and complete earlier and the need for the central production of postgraduate taught statistics. The team noted once again the University's careful, inclusive and comprehensive approach to reviewing its key mechanisms for quality assurance. The team considered that the University's thorough processes for the annual review of its programmes, their management at school, faculty and institutional-levels and the commitment to provide institutional level feedback on the issues identified from overview reports amounted to a feature of good practice.

### External examiners

30 The 2004 QAA audit report advised the University to 'implement its developing plans for greater institutional oversight of external examiner processes...' The report also noted that the University did not require external examiners to comment specifically upon the achievements of students in partner institutions. The Institutional Briefing Paper describes various steps that the University has taken to address these issues including University-level induction events for new external examiners, the scrutiny of examiners' reports at University level by the Academic Quality and Standards Unit (alongside established overview reports for postgraduate taught and collaborative provision) and strengthened external examining processes in collaborative provision (see also paragraph 91 below). However, although external examiners are responsible to Senate, their selection against institutional criteria and appointment remains the responsibility of faculties. The audit team enquired about the institutional oversight of appointments and was assured that the Assessment Office maintained a central register of examiner appointments and a 'watching brief', and would be consulted by faculty administrators if there were any concerns about appointments. It was less clear to the team how the University would monitor the balance of appointments across all faculties, for example from particular institutions or types of institutions, a factor that the University may wish to consider in developing its new structures through *Realising our Vision*.

31 The AQA includes a Code of Practice on the External Examiner System for all taught programmes, which was aligned with the relevant section of the *Code of practice*. Appointments are made to a module or to a group of modules delivered on a number of programmes. External examiners' reports are considered at programme, school, faculty and institutional level, and summarised in annual programme review and overview reports. Within schools, the Associate Heads (Teaching) have considerable responsibility for ensuring identification of actions with programme teams. The Associate Deans (Teaching) have a similar faculty role *vis-à-vis* schools. The Academic Quality and Standards Unit produces overview reports for the Teaching and Learning Committee for all taught programmes, and as with annual programme review, there are

separate overview reports by the Director of Graduate Studies for postgraduate taught programmes and by the Chair of the Partnerships and Collaboration Subcommittee of the Teaching and Learning Committee for collaborative programmes. An exception procedure exists: if an external examiner responds 'no' to any of the key 'standards' questions, the Academic Quality and Standards Unit investigates and briefs the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) and the cases are summarised in the Academic Quality and Standards Unit annual overview reports. The 2006-07 overview pointed out a continuing problem of obtaining timely reports from external examiners with less than half reporting by the due date in mid-August and 40 out of 272 still not submitted by the time the overview was produced in early December. However, the overview suggested that regular contact with non-reporting examiners over the autumn had led to some improvement over the previous year. As reported above, the problem of late reports had also affected the annual programme review process and a more systematic means of receiving and internally distributing of external examiners' reports in electronic format had been recommended by the annual programme review working group.

32 According to the Institutional Briefing Paper 'from autumn 2007, external examiners' reports will be shared with student representatives in line with advice to the sector'. Given statements in the student written submission about disparity of practice among schools and faculties in relation to the student representation system the audit team asked undergraduate students, whom it met during the audit visit, whether they had seen external examiners' reports or knew if they were available to their representatives. The team noted generally affirmative responses that reports were made available at student-staff meetings.

33 The University views its use of external examiners and their reports as 'thorough and robust'. Based on its examination of the University's own Code of Practice on the External Examiner System for all taught programmes and samples of external examiners' reports and of the overview reports produced at school, faculty and institutional level, the audit team was able to confirm this view and that the University makes strong and scrupulous use of independent external examiners.

### **Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points**

34 The University claims to have a 'systematic approach to the development and revision of the academic infrastructure' with lead responsibility for oversight lying with the Academic Quality and Standards Unit. The Academic Quality and Standards Unit's role has developed strongly and proactively as is reflected in previous references to appropriate use and incorporation of the infrastructure. The FHEQ is specifically addressed during taught programme approval and re-approval processes. Revisions to periodic programme review procedures included a new duty on the external member(s) of the panel to confirm that the programme reflects its position in the FHEQ and to comment on the engagement of the programme team with any subject benchmark statement.

35 The University engages proactively with the *Code of practice* and undertakes a template-driven process of mapping the precepts in each section against the University's practice and noting any actions required. Each template has a named, 'responsible' individual and is approved by the relevant committee. For example, following the publication of the revised *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* the mapping of University procedures was reviewed and updated and formally considered by the Partnerships and Collaboration Subcommittee.

36 From the programme documentation available to it, the audit team was able to confirm the University's view in its Institutional Briefing Paper that programme (and module) specifications are embedded, but also agreed with the conclusion that they are used primarily as tools in programme approval and re-approval and are 'not at present primarily student facing'. Nor are they available on the University's website, an accessibility issue that the University will wish to consider (see also paragraph 130 below). However, the University had set up a working group to review programme and module specifications, including their intended audiences.

37 Faculties are encouraged, but not required, to combine approval and review by professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies with internal processes. The University centrally records professional, statutory and regulatory bodies' approvals. It has recently reviewed interactions with these professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and produced a useful report, following which various changes have been proposed including an annual reminder to faculties about their responsibilities in relation to the bodies and forthcoming approval visits and an annual review of their reports by the Academic Quality and Standards Unit. The latter, in draft form during the audit visit, provides helpful summaries of accreditation visits, their findings, and recurring themes of good practice and issues for attention.

38 The audit team took the view that the University was proactive, systematic and effective in its engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points and that the steps it has taken to improve its overview of interaction with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies at programme, school and faculty level was a feature of good practice.

### **Assessment policies and regulations**

39 According to the Institutional Briefing Paper 'All matters to do with the academic regulations concerning the assessment of students, academic credit, student progression and awards are laid down by the University' The Institutional Briefing Paper adds that 'In the interests of equity local variation and discretion has been systematically replaced by institution-wide approaches'. The University clearly attempts to develop and adopt University-wide policies and procedures as evidenced by its regulations for taught and research awards and its own Code of Practice: Assessment Policies and Procedures, which was benchmarked against the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, and has followed up particular areas through Academic Audit Committee scrutiny and working groups. Some years ago the University adopted a common marking scheme using the full scale of marks from 1-100 with defined levels of performance and class marking bands. The Degree Classification Review recognised that there may be a legacy of different marking traditions, for which some discretion had been built into the brief for boards of examiners.

40 The University followed up the recommendation (desirable) in the previous audit report to make the links between learning outcomes and assessment explicit for students and the Institutional Briefing Paper cites the conclusions of the Academic Audit Committee report in June 2007 on Local implementation of modification and verification of assessments as evidence of progress. However, one of the problems identified by the Academic Audit Committee was that 'It is not always clear how schools plan systematically for appropriate (for example, linked to learning outcomes) modes of assessment and their subsequent modifications. The audit team asked academic staff with management roles in faculties and schools about this statement and was told that the Academic Audit Committee report had brought the issue into sharper focus and that the linkage between assessment and learning outcomes, and its expression in programme specifications was now a particular point of Programme Approval and Review Subcommittees' attention during programme approval.

41 The 2004 audit report noted that 'Feedback to students on their assessed work is variable and would benefit from the adoption of a structured response to justify the grade awarded and to indicate to students how they might improve on their performance in future submissions'. Concerns about variable feedback persist. The current audit team noted from the student written submission and from its meeting with student representatives considerable concerns about perceived inconsistencies in timeliness and quality of feedback on assessment. The Academic Audit Committee had audited the area and its September 2006 report reached a judgement of 'limited confidence in the compliance with or the effectiveness of the documentation and procedures relating to feedback on student assessments at the School level' and made a series of recommendations for enhancement. These included the needs to 'increase awareness of the Policy on provision of feedback on assessed work on taught programmes' and for 'compliance

checking following the approval of any new policies'. According to the Institutional Briefing Paper, which recognised that the University had identified 'inappropriately wide variation in practice in the time taken to provide feedback on assessment', the Academic Audit Committee report led to improved practice which, in relation to promptness of feedback, was reflected in higher satisfaction ratings in the 2007 National Student Survey. While recognising this apparent improvement the team also noted the strength of student representatives' feelings on these matters and took the view that this was an example of where clear policies and procedures at the institutional level had not always been consistently implemented within the schools. The University has already taken steps to improve consistency and has made clear its concern increasingly to concentrate on quality enhancement and the student experience. It will therefore wish to ensure that it continues to improve the consistency and promptness of feedback to students on assessment.

### **Management information - statistics**

42 The 2004 QAA Audit included an advisable recommendation for the University to 'continue to develop its management information systems to ensure that progression and completion data for all types and groups of students of the University are standardised to facilitate consistent interpretation and to inform strategic planning'. This recommendation resulted primarily from the University's difficulties in providing programme teams with accurate and reliable data for analysis of, for example, progression and completion, but according to the Institutional Briefing Paper, these difficulties have now been largely overcome. The audit team was able to confirm that for undergraduate programmes there is an increasing range of data and statistical analyses available to faculties and schools to assist in their monitoring, review and planning processes. These data sets and accompanying analyses are produced by the Academic Quality and Standards Unit, which includes a data analyst. The main sets: undergraduate entry qualifications/entry standards; undergraduate continuation and progression; first-degree classification, are sent directly by the Unit to schools and are also considered by the Teaching and Learning Standards Subcommittee before being submitted to the Teaching and Learning and Senate. The Academic Quality and Standards Unit also piloted and now produces, for all schools, summary reports with key data in a wide range of areas to support monitoring and planning processes. The team was told by academic staff that centrally produced management information had improved considerably in recent years and was considered trustworthy. However, this was not the case with postgraduate taught programmes, where the data sets provided to undergraduate programmes is not yet available. In view of the University's plan to develop its postgraduate provision, the team considered it desirable that it extends the development of appropriate data collection and analysis processes relating to postgraduate taught provision.

43 There are also interesting examples of other overview reports to the Teaching and Learning Standards Subcommittee, retention analyses and benchmarking analyses. The University's management information also includes the data derived from the National Student Survey and its own Student Experience Survey. The Institutional Briefing Paper claims that 'the ways in which information is analysed internally, the accessibility of the statistics produced with colour-coding, graphs, tables, charts and commentaries, and the extensive use of benchmark information provide the University with effective tools in the management of academic standards and learning opportunities. The Academic Quality and Standards Unit has recently piloted and is now mainstreaming a form of 'exception reporting' in the determined tracking of withdrawing, repeating and progressing students.

44 In the view of the audit team the Institutional Briefing Paper was justified in stating that 'Over the last few years there has been a growing acknowledgement that data quality has improved...' The team took the view that the production, analysis and use of statistical management information were now strengths especially in the drive for consistency and explanation of justified inconsistency. Schools and programmes now have reliable and accessible data and accompanying analyses to support their planning and their annual monitoring and

periodic review processes. The tracking of different groups and types of students has been improved and there is intelligent use of benchmarking as a management tool. At the institutional level, management information is enabling the University to monitor its strategic intentions through its key performance indicators although the Institutional Briefing Paper acknowledges that the development of key performance indicators has been relatively slow. The team took the view that the increasing range of student-related data and statistical analyses produced by the Academic Quality and Standards Unit that are available to the University, faculties and schools to assist in their monitoring, review and planning processes was a feature of good practice.

### **Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities**

#### **Framework for management of learning opportunities**

45 The framework of management of learning opportunities is closely allied to that for the management of academic standards. It consists of the system of external examiners, who are asked to comment on the resources applied to the programmes as well as the feedback given to students, as well as the processes for programme approval, monitoring and review. Thus comments about learning opportunities will arise in all the reports considered by the Teaching and Learning, Teaching and Learning Standards Subcommittee, Programme Approval and Review Subcommittees, programme staff-student committees, school and faculty councils. All of this is subordinate to the Learning and Teaching Strategy, which describes the overall aims of the curricula.

46 The complete system for the management of both academic standards and learning opportunities is in the annually updated handbook, the AQA.

#### **External examiners**

47 External examiners in addition to their role in the management of standards are expected to report on the provision of learning opportunities. The audit team saw examples in overview reports of comments about physical resources as well as staff resources. They also have commented on the quality of feedback given by staff to students as part of the assessment process. External examiner reports form part of the annual programme review process and are expected to be considered by the staff-student committee. Examination by the team of staff-student committee minutes and annual programme review reports show that the reports of external examiners into topics such as feedback, physical and staff resources are considered in these meetings and reports. This has indicated that external examiners and their reports have contributed to the institutional management of the learning opportunities offered to students.

#### **Approval, monitoring and review of programmes**

48 Approval of new programmes leading to University awards takes place in two stages, Outline Approval, the responsibility of the Teaching and Learning Committee, acting on the advice of the faculty Programme Approval and Review Subcommittee: and Detailed Approval, the responsibility of faculty programme approval and review subcommittees. In the Outline stage finance, staffing, information services and estates requirements are considered at University level and must be satisfied before Detailed Approval can be given. In addition the proposed new programme must be explicitly aligned with the University's Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes. Detailed Approval by the Programme Approval and Review Subcommittee will involve the consideration of programme content, module specifications, teaching, learning and assessment strategies as well as arrangements for student support and any assessed professional experience.

49 Monitoring and review of programmes is through the processes of annual programme review and Periodic Programme Review and Re-Approval. In addition to these processes schools are required to monitor programme operation on an ongoing basis through school and programme staff-student committees.

50 Annual programme reviews are prepared by programme teams and considered by school councils who seek to identify cross-programme common problems and examples of good practice. A sample of annual programme reviews are sent to the Associate Dean (Teaching), although evidence gathered by the team showed that Associate Deans (Teaching) considered all reviews rather than relying on a sample. In addition to consideration by school councils annual programme reviews will be considered by school staff-student committees. Issues affecting learning opportunities that cannot be dealt with at programme level are referred to schools for the most part, but matters such as the coordination of learning technologies and cross-school programmes will be Faculty matters, while strategic issues will be the concern of the University Strategic Leadership Team. The audit team saw examples of annual programme reviews and was able to assure itself that these reviews were thorough and that actions arising from them were dealt with by schools, faculties, service providers and at institutional level. The robust and thorough processes for the annual review of programmes; their management at school, faculty and institutional levels and the commitment to provide institutional-level feedback on the issues identified from overview reports were considered by the team to be an example of good practice.

51 Programme Review and Re-Approval is carried out at five-yearly intervals, although there is provision for the process to be brought forward if there are plans to modify the programme substantially or as a condition from a previous Periodic Programme Review and Re-Approval. The review is carried out by the faculty Programme Approval and Review Subcommittee which includes an independent external UK-based academic and an internal institutional nominee and may also an external representative from a professional, statutory or regulatory body, industry or other interested community. The basis of the review process is a reflective analysis by the programme team, aided by a series of templates. The audit team saw examples of these analyses and confirmed the care taken in these reflections. On the basis of the reflective analysis and a series of questions in a detailed template the review panel is asked to re-approve a programme. This re-approval may be subject to conditions, which must be implemented before the next academic session, or recommendations, which are advisory to schools and programme teams. In all cases, the actions following a setting of conditions have to be approved by the Programme Approval and Review Subcommittee chair, who may consult the external adviser and other panel members, before re-approval of the programme is confirmed. Following a decision to propose recommendations the response from programme teams and schools are reported to faculties. The team saw examples of the Periodic Programme Review and Re-Approval process and was able to confirm that this process was thorough and capable of assuring the current and future quality of learning opportunities offered in programmes.

52 In addition to the annual and periodic review of programmes, there is a scheme of school and faculty review, which takes place on a five-yearly basis. These reviews, which have memberships that are completely external to the school (school review) and faculty (faculty review), consider the school or faculty strategic plans, management schemes and its exercise of the duties imposed on it as a result of the requirements of annual programme reviews, Periodic Programme Review and Re-Approval and programme approvals. The audit team examined the documents of a series of recent reviews and concluded that the processes were thorough and helped the assurance of quality of the learning opportunities offered to students. They also noted that the time spent on preparation for these reviews and the reviews themselves was substantial and that the burden on senior staff in providing the internal externality, that is a feature of the review scheme, is heavy.

### **Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points**

53 All programmes are placed in their appropriate positions within the FHEQ with the programme approval and review procedures, making explicit references to the FHEQ. In addition, the internal procedures of programme design and review are mapped against the appropriate parts of the Academic Infrastructure including the use of subject benchmark statements and the relevant sections of the *Code of practice*.

54 The extent of involvement of professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies in programmes is variable. At one extreme there are programmes where the accreditation of the programme by the appropriate professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies' is essential for the continued operation of the particular programme while for others there is no direct involvement. For many other programmes, professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies involvement is an important part of the background into programme development and review. Initially the relationship between the University and the relevant body is at school level but, more recently, there has been a central register of professional, statutory, and regulatory body involvement in programmes and an overview report is now produced for the Teaching and Learning Standards Subcommittee. The team considered that the professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies involvement was an important part of the assurance of the suitability of the learning opportunities and that it played a significant part in the University's assurance of learning opportunities both at school and University levels (see also paragraph 37 above).

### **Assessment policies**

55 The assessment strategy describes how students are informed of the assessment strategy for each module, as well as how the formal assessments, including placements and professional work, contribute to the award that is being sought. It also describes what students can expect in terms of feedback explicitly related to the grade descriptors for the level of work and when this should be supplied. Student views, as related in the National Student Survey, Salford Student Experience Study, student written submission and in staff-student committee minutes seen by the team indicate that the timeliness of feedback is still an issue for many students and that there are occasions where it is not clear to the student what is expected and how the assessment relates to the learning objectives of the programme. This variability between schools and programmes was confirmed at student meetings.

56 Examination of the University policies, external examiner reports and staff-student committee minutes suggest that the success at enforcing the strategy laid down in the AQA is not yet complete and still requires close monitoring. Some of the local application in practice, outlined in the student written submission, of administrative procedures about handing work in and receiving marked work would appear to be particularly inconvenient to students who are part-time or have commitments such as childcare or employment.

### **Management information - feedback from students**

57 There has been increased confidence by staff in the quality, accuracy and relevance of the management information statistics produced for undergraduate students and their progress. In particular use is made of retention rates, entry qualifications, student achievement and National Student Survey data, while the Salford Student Experience Survey is used with somewhat more caution because of its low response rate. Comparisons are made between schools, with the national results within the relevant JACS codes and a more detailed comparison between the University and a group of sister institutions, including local universities and some similar types of institution with a wider geographical spread. These data have been used to identify areas where the results are exceptional, both positively and negatively, and therefore focusing the efforts of the University in those key directions in order to improve the student experience and the status of the University, often measured in the quantitative parlance of league tables (see also paragraph 44). It should be noted that this confident use of data and quantitative information, both in internal and external comparisons, is not yet as comprehensively available for postgraduate taught programmes. The University may wish to consider how this more comprehensive extension to postgraduate taught programmes can be achieved, especially in view of the heterogeneous nature of the postgraduate taught student population (full and part-time, international with UK degrees, international), and the University's declared intention to increase the number and proportion of postgraduate taught students within its student body.

58 At programme level, there is a system of module evaluative questionnaires with corresponding evaluations at end-of-year and end-of-programme. All are essentially qualitative, with the only quantitative measures being questions on what level of satisfaction the student had with the module (year, programme) and whether it could be recommended to an imaginary friend or colleague who was interested in the programme. Response rates to these questionnaires were reasonable and they form an important part of the monitoring of programmes both during the year and at the annual programme review and Periodic Programme Review and Re-Approval reviews.

59 The response to the Salford Student Experience Survey, a predominantly quantitative survey, was much lower (12 per cent) and was more critical than was expected from the results of the programme evaluation questionnaires. Student comments in the student written submission indicated a level of dissatisfaction with features of the organisation of the programmes, as well as the state of some of the teaching accommodation. These views were also expressed in the National Student Survey data where the response rate was somewhat higher at 50-55 per cent.

60 In the exception monitoring, as with many of the overview reports, the audit team was left with the impression that there was a culture of 'dealing with faults and issues raised' rather than one of overtly looking for good practice as the first aim of the overview, carried out at school, faculty and University level of annual programme reviews, external examiner reports and professional, statutory and regulatory body accreditation visit reports.

### **Role of students in quality assurance**

61 Students are represented at all levels within the University's deliberative committees. In general, sabbatical officers will act as representatives at the higher levels (Senate, Council) while elected representatives will sit on staff-student committees at programme level. In the student written submission, it was recognised that there was a need for an enhanced student representation system, especially at school and faculty board level, and it was agreed to appoint Student Liaison Representatives in all schools. Their function, as well as the enhanced representation, would be to assist in the recruitment of student programme representatives and to involve themselves in ad hoc Student's Union and University initiatives and that they would receive an honorarium for their work. The audit team concluded that the effectiveness of the scheme at undergraduate level was greater in some schools than in others and that some postgraduate students were unaware of the scheme. However, even with these provisos, the team conclude that the student liaison representatives scheme was a feature of good practice in extending and increasing the effectiveness of the constructive engagement of students in the quality assurance process and quality enhancement (see also paragraph 90 below).

62 With the increasing importance of the University Strategic Leadership Team linking the pro-vice chancellors, executive deans and professional service directors it will be useful to investigate how the student experience can be fed into the Team deliberations outside the formal structures of Senate and Council.

### **Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities**

63 The Institutional Briefing Paper regards the appointment of an increasing number of research active staff as a principal method of providing links between research and teaching. Research-active staff are expected to teach both undergraduate and postgraduate taught students and the workload balancing system was seen by the team to be capable of giving school managements information on relative teaching loads within schools so as to ensure contributions by all research-active staff to the teaching commitments of the school. One school, which has its entire staff research-active, builds its third-year curricula around the research activities of its staff. However, most of the research links are through final-year teaching and postgraduate taught projects.

64 Other links appear where the academic staff are involved in pedagogical research, often directly related to their teaching practice. Examples of this leading to peer-reviewed academic literature was seen by the audit team in the proceedings of the Learning and Teaching Conference. Examination of these shows that it involves staff in research that is linked with their teaching activities and this helps to increase the influence of research and scholarship on the student educational experience.

65 In addition to links with both research and pedagogy, the curricula have an emphasis on 'Education for Capability'. This emphasises education for employability, an important factor in the widening participation strategy. Thus placements as integral parts of programmes, as seen in most programmes in the area of health and social care, or as sandwich years, which are options in most curricular areas, play an important part in the curriculum, both in the formal syllabus and the informal personal development that is also a part of higher education. The audit team saw evidence that placements were well planned and that the University and the placement provider maintained contact during placements. Students on placement had access to the academic resources of the University and placement provider, these latter resources often being substantial in the case where the placement was in a hospital setting.

### **Other modes of study**

66 The number of students attending programmes by flexible and distant learning is relatively small. Courses based on flexible and distant learning will have that component of the programme specifically examined by the Programme Approval and Review Subcommittee and the procedures mapped against the *Code of practice* as a guide to sector best practice. Student evaluation of the programme and representation on programme management is expected to be at the same level as for programmes taught by conventional methods. Sample materials are expected to be available for examination by the Programme Approval and Review Subcommittee so that their suitability can be assessed.

### **Resources for learning**

67 Learning resources are organised with integration of library and computing services in the Information Services Division which is responsible for 'the delivery of integration, learning and knowledge services'. Students are provided with a series of induction resources, including face-to-face sessions, online tutorials through the virtual learning environment, as well as through a series of printed guides. Partnership arrangements are made through the libraries of other universities and national libraries so that students can have access to resources when on placements or where there is a need for specialist information. The team saw evidence of the material available through the Information Services Division, both in the library and information and computer technology areas.

68 The Information Services Division is represented on all programme committees through a series of subject specialists so that the availability and suitability of learning resources can be discussed in the normal processes of programme administration and review, as well as in the process of programme approval. They are also represented on all University committees (Senate, Teaching and Learning Committee and Research Committee), Faculty and school committees as well as on Programme Approval and Review Subcommittees, thus ensuring that learning resources are fully considered by all organisations delivering programmes leading to Salford awards.

69 Student comment on the effectiveness of the resources is mixed. The virtual learning environment is seen by some students as an essential part of the teaching and learning of a modern University, while other students see the virtual learning environment and internet as replacing the personal contact between students and academic staff that they see as the essence of higher education. These mixed views of the virtual learning environment were observed by the audit team from student meetings, confirming the observations about the use of it made in the Institutional Briefing Paper. Although an extensive range of programmes in information and

communication technology for educational purposes are run by the Information Services Division, student opinion, confirmed by the team, suggests that there are staff who are not fully confident in integrating the virtual learning environment into their pedagogical practice. The team recommend that it is desirable that the University encourages the continuing improvements in the consistency of use of the virtual learning environment, especially within programmes of study.

70 There is an expectation that the use of the virtual learning environment and web-based resources will increase over the next years. Library and computing facilities on-campus will need to be complemented by excellent facilities off-campus. Although there is a scheme for the rental of laptops (Student-Click) the University may need to specify the information and communication technology equipment that will be needed in the future to be capable of accessing the curricula in the new environment. Otherwise, as noted in student comments, there is the risk that students attracted by the widening participation strategy will fail to gain benefit because of the lack of personal information and communication technology facilities. If that is so, the University may need to extend the Student-Click programme to enable greater than the current 150 rentals to be made.

71 In addition to information and communication technology facilities, the achievement of the curricula is dependent on the provision of sufficient general spaces (lecture theatres, seminar rooms) and specialist facilities (computer rooms, laboratories, clinics, studios). The modernisation of some parts of the University estate has taken longer than expected and the facilities have in some cases become a handicap compared to local competitors in attracting students. It suggests that as the University strategy is to increase the proportion of postgraduate taught students and include more who attend while in professional work, there will be a need to examine what academic spaces will be required, especially if there is a greater emphasis on the virtual learning environment and blended learning.

### **Admissions policy**

72 The University has a tradition of widening access, with high numbers of students entering through Access programmes. In the statistical analysis of student performance seen by the audit team, the performance of students entering programmes is related to entrance qualifications. These data enable the University to tailor pre-entry support to incoming students so as to raise their performance and to reduce the risk of non-achievement of desired qualifications.

73 Induction processes are shared between schools and central services. In addition to activities within schools, these also provide an introduction to the library and computing facilities provided by Information Services Division. The audit team saw examples of such services and considered that they made a positive contribution to the student experience. The processes of induction for undergraduates were extended over much of the first semester, and provided a transition from school and further education college methods of learning to those demanded at University level. Similarly, induction processes leading up to the production of Learning Agreements applied for postgraduate research students, and these were seen by the audit team. However it was not so clear how the induction process for postgraduate taught students without prior experience of the UK higher education system worked, considering the short time between entry and the first semester formal assessments.

### **Student support**

74 Student support is based on the personal tutor as the first point of contact with the provision of specialised services both within and outside the University. The responsibilities of both tutor and student are laid down in the 'Roles and Responsibilities of a Personal Tutor' and a Code of Practice. All are based on the University's general policy on Equality and Diversity, the rights of the student and the need to undertake appropriate professional development in order to carry out the role successfully. It is recognised that the exact way that these general policies will be implemented will vary validly between schools, according to the needs of their students, and that the Code may require adaptation to cater for part-time, distance-learning and postgraduate students.

75 New undergraduates are provided with support from the time they confirm their place at the University. This is in the form of both written material and the student channel on the University website. For students with specific needs there is a process whereby packages of support can be arranged before arrival. The audit team saw examples on the student channel of the website and confirmed the wide range of material of both an academic and non-academic character available to students.

76 Central services have been reorganised and have links with and proximity to the advice services offered by the Students' Union. Details of the business of the Students' Union advice centre record substantial increases (>50 per cent and usually >100 per cent between 2005-06 and 2006-07) in the number of enquiries on academic matters (personal mitigating circumstances, appeals, complaints, academic unfair means). From the student meetings, the audit team was assured that the academic regulations, procedures for appeals, complaints and mitigating circumstances were presented to students in programme handbooks and that they were aware of what they had to do in a range of circumstances. Additional support has been given about academic misconduct, including the introduction of the Plato online tutorial package, and increased use of purely formative assessment in the induction and early stages of postgraduate taught programmes was described to the team and is welcomed.

77 The extent of personal professional development in the student experience varies in different schools. In some, where personal professional development is linked with assessment and integrated into the formation process prior to professional registration, it formed an important part of the programme, although some student liaison representatives were not convinced that students were fully aware of what was included in personal professional development and how it could help them in gaining employment. In other schools, personal professional development had an effect in the first year of the programme but did not feature in the assessment for the programme in later years due to the competition for curricular time with other subjects. The audit team came to the conclusion that personal professional development as a separate item was of varying importance but that personal development, often in the form of the carrying out of, and preparing for, placements as well as the programme of training and assessment for research students, was an important part of programmes, whether overt or not.

### **Staff support (including staff development)**

78 The University regards the quality of the teaching and learning support staff as central to the quality of the student learning experience, and this is confirmed by the students. Thus there is an appointment procedure for all teaching staff, which includes in most cases a presentation as well as an interview. Staff with less than five years higher education teaching experience are expected to undertake the accredited Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice and Research with a remission of teaching responsibilities. Accreditation of prior experiential learning is used to reduce the time spent on the programme for staff who have some experience of higher education teaching. The team confirmed that this initial teacher education was in place and that it was made available to part-time and sessional academic staff.

79 The University has an aim to increase the number and proportion of staff that are research-active. For existing staff, the proportion of time allocated for research can be determined by an analysis of research output, made by Research Institute Directors as part of appraisal. Schemes such as the Vice Chancellor's Research Scholarship provide the facility to award allocations of time and resource to staff wishing to become research-active. These approaches are aimed especially at schools where research has not been as large a part of academic activity as in others. These were shown to be having an effect.

80 There is an extensive staff development scheme covering the needs and interests of academic and learning support staff at all levels. Major parts include programmes on management, learning and teaching practice, information and communications technology, quality assurance, the student experience and research supervisory practice. Analysis of the

programme shows that the programme is allied to the strategic aims of the University. However, there is evidence that not all staff that could benefit from the programmes have used them, as shown by the varying levels of confidence and fluency in the use of information and communication technology tools, as witnessed in the student submission.

81 The staff development effort is backed by a programme of research and education in pedagogy which publishes a peer-reviewed conference annual volume, the Learning and Teaching Conference. Examination of the proceedings shows that it involves staff in research that is linked with their teaching activities and this helps to increase the influence of research and scholarship on the student educational experience.

## **Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement**

82 The University expresses, in the briefing paper, its view that it has 'an established and strategic approach' to enhancement, which has been systematically taken forward over a number of years. It goes on to explain that it is putting effort into generation of an understanding of enhancement as 'deliberate planned actions' and is exploring how far its current practices meet this definition and how greater awareness of this definition can further improve the effectiveness of what the University does. The audit team was told in meetings that as quality assurance mechanisms are now considered robust, more focus could be directed toward enhancement.

83 The University has identified a number of areas for enhancement activity: the curricula, the broader student experience and the research student experience. Priorities are then taken forward within these areas. Responsibility for the enhancement of the learning experience, at the time of the audit, rested with the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) The Pro-Vice Chancellor (Institutional and Student Services) has led the enhancement of the wider student experience and the Director of Graduate Studies was responsible for the enhancement of the research student experience. The Learning and Teaching strategy 2006-2009 outlines particular priorities and these have been taken forward, typically, through curricular development projects led by the Education Development Unit. In addition, the Academic Quality and Standards Unit has sought to ensure practice at the University is informed by external developments.

84 The change process that the University is currently engaged in, while as yet not completed, sees a new Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic) taking responsibility for enhancement of the student experience, and chairing a new Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee. At the time of the audit, the detailed responsibilities and support for this post were still to be decided when the appointee takes up their post. The Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee had yet to be approved and to have terms of reference agreed by Senate. A draft set of terms of reference were seen by the audit team and while these included a remit for enhancement of the student experience, it was unclear how this remit would be carried out, as the Education Development Unit will no longer exist in the proposed new structures and the Academic Quality and Standards Unit will also disappear. The team was assured in meetings that their functions had been fully mapped into the new structure, but as yet little detail on implementation was available to the team as to where responsibility for enhancement, as previously carried out by these two units, would be taken forward in the future (see paragraph 24 above).

### **External examiners**

85 In their reports, external examiners are asked to identify good practice. This is then summarised in the annual external examiners overview report produced by the Academic Quality and Standards Unit. In the reports seen by the audit team, the systematic identification of good practice was patchy. The University may wish to encourage its external examiners to make greater use of this part of their report form and may wish to highlight this in its induction of new external examiners. (See also paragraph 91 below)

### **Approval, monitoring and review of programmes**

86 The University's Internal Review scheme, embracing annual programme review, periodic programme review and the periodic review of schools, Research Institutes and faculties has, as one of its features, the identification of good, interesting or innovative practice. The University highlights annual programme review as a positive mechanism for sharing good practice, especially across schools, but also across faculties and throughout the University. The audit team was able to see examples of good practice drawn out in faculty summary reports, overview reports of collaborative provision and of postgraduate provision. These reports were discussed at the Teaching and Learning Committee, but the team was unclear from the minutes and discussions with staff, how the Teaching and Learning Committee systematically encouraged enhancement as a result of identified good practice, University-wide.

### **Academic Infrastructure and other reference points**

87 The Academic Quality and Standards Unit provides support to working groups by gathering information on sector practice. This might include information from QAA, from the Higher Education Academy and from other universities. In reports from working groups seen by the audit team, there was evidence that external reference points had informed their deliberations.

### **Management information (including feedback and National Student Survey outcomes)**

88 The Academic Quality and Standards Unit produces statistical analyses which are circulated to academic units. These have exploited external sources of data to provide information that will assist in the monitoring and benchmarking of academic quality and standards. In developing these reports as a more proactive tool, in autumn 2007, the Academic Quality and Standards Unit produced exception reports for each school which used data from external sources like the National Student Survey, to present performance against previous years, the sector and specific institutions of interest. An institutional commentary draws out strengths and weaknesses, and identifies targeted actions. In the exception reports read by the audit team, much useful information was made available to schools (see paragraph 44 above). Staff met by the team confirmed the usefulness of these reports. However, responses by schools to these reports had not been completed by the time of the audit visit and the team was unable to see how areas of good practice are to be disseminated more widely, nor how schools are to respond to identified weaknesses.

### **Links between research and scholarly activity and the enhancement of learning opportunities**

89 The University is committed to appointing research-active academic staff. In the briefing paper, examples of research staff influencing the curriculum, especially at final-year undergraduate level, are given. It goes on to explain that the most common way research and scholarly activity feed into the curricula is through providing case-studies. The audit team was able to see examples where such activity had influenced the curricula but were unable to find any systematic approach linking research staff and learning opportunities.

### **Role of students in quality enhancement**

90 The University has recently introduced the role of student liaison representatives. They are appointed to act as a bridge and to further develop partnership between programme level representation and the University and the Students' Union. They are allocated to schools and at the time of the audit, 12 of 17 such posts had been appointed. The audit team was told in meetings of the success of this role in enhancing the student environment and contributing to identification of good practice for dissemination. The team came to the view that the role of student liaison representative had the potential to further contribute to enhancement of the student experience, and was an example of good practice (see also paragraph 61 above).

## **Dissemination of good practice**

91 One of the main ways the University seeks to identify good practice is through its committee structures and the institutional level overview reports that are commissioned by and brought to these committees, particularly the Teaching and Learning Committee and Academic Audit Committee. The audit team was able to see many examples of individual good practice being identified in these reports. As an example, the overview of external examiners' reports highlighted that external examiners had commended the induction workshops held in one school. This good practice has been disseminated and built into the University-wide workshops for external examiners. The team concluded that this example was a feature of good practice.

92 However, the systematic dissemination of good practice was less clear to the audit team and in meetings some staff expressed the view that enhancement, at present, happened in an ad-hoc way. The team was told of regular meetings between the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) and the Associate Heads (Teaching). Staff told the team these meetings focused on fixing errors and sharing concerns. It was agreed by the team that these meetings could be developed further as a dissemination point for enhancement and action on good practice.

## **Staff development and reward**

93 The University has put in place schemes to encourage staff development in line with its strategic aims. It has a long-established Academic Development Fund which, with Teaching Quality Enhancement Funding, has been used by senior staff to support strategically important projects. Further initiatives include the Vice Chancellor's Scholarships, Learning Technologies Fellowships and Professorial fellows. The Vice Chancellor's Research Scholarship Scheme is aimed at increasing the number of Research Assessment Exercise returnable staff in the next five years and carries an award of £2,000 and a 20 per cent workload allocation for research for a period of two years. Learning technologies fellowships are available for a fixed term of two years, on a part-time (0.5 full-time equivalent) basis. There is one post for each faculty. Learning technology fellows provide academic leadership with respect to learning technologies within schools and faculties. Professorial fellowships are awarded to those staff who have made exceptional contributions to the work of the University in the areas of teaching innovation and development. These fellowships were available between 2002 to 2005 and are of permanent duration, carrying a professorial salary. From discussions in meetings and documents seen by the audit team, the team took the view that these initiatives were examples of deliberate steps to meet specific University strategic aims.

94 The University has a number of mechanisms for identifying good practice. There is some evidence of deliberate steps being taken to meet strategic aims. However, there is little clear evidence of systematic dissemination of good practice, University-wide, and there is a lack of clarity of future responsibility for quality enhancement activities, particularly in the yet-to-be agreed committee structures. The audit team is of the opinion that it is desirable that the University develops further its approach to quality enhancement to ensure the dissemination of good and/or effective practice is more systematic and overt.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

### **The institution's approach to the management of collaborative provision**

95 At the time of the audit, the University was engaged in limited curriculum partnership work, a reflection of its largely cautious approach to collaborative activities within both the UK and further afield. The Briefing Paper explained that this approach was designed 'to ensure sound quality assurance'. In summary, the University franchises Foundation Degrees (FDs) rather than full undergraduate programmes and does not validate programmes it has not itself developed. According to its collaborative provision register, some 240 full-time and 307 part-time students

are currently enrolled on collaborative programmes, with approximately an additional 112 full-time and 41 part-time students anticipated on programmes expected to commence in 2007-08. The bulk of these students is drawn from 23 UK institutions, some of whom were described as 'feeder colleges', mainly in the Greater Manchester area, with a small number of overseas institutions, which contributed some 58 students. The University's involvement in the Greater Manchester Strategic Alliance (GMSA), and its development into the GMSA Lifelong Learning Network, and the University's major role in their establishment, have emphasised its regional contribution, and commitment to widening participation, working with both higher and further education institutions, particularly through FDs, to meet both employer and learner needs.

### **Approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision**

96 According to the Briefing Paper, the University's quality assurance arrangements for collaborative provision are designed to ensure that the University has 'approved and has oversight of all activities undertaken in its name' and that it has 'overall responsibility' for the academic standards of all programmes offered in partnership. All proposals for new partnerships are considered by the Partnership and Collaboration Subcommittee, which reports to the Teaching and Learning Committee. For institutions that do not have degree awarding powers, the University distinguishes between arrangements for the approval of a partner, for which there is a specific section on collaborative activities in the AQA, and those for the approval, re-approval and monitoring of collaborative programmes that reflect in principle those arrangements in place for the quality assurance of the University's own campus provision.

97 Partner approval, known as affiliation, relates to the appropriate unit or sub-unit of the proposed partner and is considered following a formal request from a prospective partner, Partnership and Collaboration Subcommittee, and an Affiliation Panel it appoints following its approval in principle to proceed to the panel stage, receives detailed information on the proposed partner. The Affiliation Panel is chaired by a senior academic (for example, an ADT or a Head of School), includes representatives of the Teaching and Learning or Research Committee as well as representatives of the relevant school. The Partnership and Collaboration Subcommittee receives a report and recommendations from the Panel (whose members will have visited the institution and met with staff and students) and the outcomes of due diligence checks and, if satisfied, recommends to Senate and Council that the Vice-Chancellor signs a standard affiliation agreement, which is time-restricted. The audit team noted the affiliation template and scrutinised reports of affiliation events. These appear to have been thorough and received due consideration from the Partnership and Collaboration Subcommittee which formally approves any conditions of approval (more recently including the formal establishment of a joint board of study) and involvement of relevant partner staff in University staff development programmes. Approval in principle to offer a new or existing programme with a partner must be sought in advance from Faculty and then via the Teaching and Learning Committee, with the formal approval resulting from a successful outcome of the usual Programme Approval and Review Subcommittee arrangements.

98 Programme review/re-approval follows the usual University Programme Approval and Review Subcommittee processes described in section three above. The audit team concluded that these arrangements were followed in some detail and that the University invests considerable effort in both the approval and re-approval of a partner programme and the consideration of the appropriateness of institutions, with whom to partner. The team noted the helpful guidelines 'to the affiliation process for partner institutions' which was warmly welcomed by partner college representatives whom the team met. These guidelines present a useful summary of definitions and the key elements of the approval, monitoring and review processes of collaborative activities and additionally summarise the roles of the schools and the joint boards of study. The small number of collaborations with institutions that have degree awarding powers are managed through a formal agreement (rather than an affiliation) identifying a lead institution and specifying the detailed responsibilities of partners. The team concluded that the development and use of the summary Guidelines to the affiliation process for partner institutions is a feature of good practice.

99 According to the Briefing Paper, all collaborative programmes are managed and monitored by arrangements that mirror those in place for Salford based programmes but through the mechanism of the joint boards of study. The joint boards of study, which includes student representation, reports to the appropriate school and faculty boards on their overseeing the operation and organisation of the programme. A joint boards of study is appointed for each collaborative programme with representation from all partners delivering the programme. The joint boards of study recommends the appointment of external examiners to the faculty executive, considers a draft annual programme review and in particular the outcomes of student module and other evaluation questionnaires. In its report of its review of joint boards of study, in May 2006, the Academic Audit Committee expressed broad confidence that they were an 'effective mechanism' to ensure the proper operation of collaborative programmes, but noted that a small minority of collaborative programme teams had not yet established a joint board. The annual monitoring arrangements are designed to ensure that each partner produces an annual programme review and that the review process is able to distinguish between the delivery of the same programme by a number of partners (including the University). Similarly, external examiner reports are considered by the joint boards of study. The external examiners' report form was redesigned to assist externals in bringing collaborative issues to the attention of the University. However, further revisions are in place to make more direct the requirement on Externals to report specifically on collaborative provision.

### **Partnerships and Collaboration Subcommittee**

100 While the review and monitoring of collaborative provision follows the usual University procedures via school and faculty scrutiny, the Partnership and Collaboration Subcommittee has institutional oversight for the overall quality assurance arrangements for collaborative provision. Reporting, under current arrangements to the Senate's Teaching and Learning Committee, the Partnership and Collaboration Subcommittee considers applications for affiliation arrangements and reports from affiliation panels, advising the Teaching and Learning Committee, and thereby Senate and Council as appropriate, on issues relating to collaborative provision. Additionally, joint boards of study minutes are monitored against set terms of reference and a template agenda through Partnerships and Collaborations Subcommittee's Secretary and it is thereby alerted to any issues that may emerge through minutes. The Partnership and Collaboration Subcommittee provides an annual review of annual programme reviews and external examiners' reports to the Teaching and Learning Committee, highlighting issues of process, good practice and matters requiring attention. For example, the 2005-06 report noted that the most effective annual programme reviews were those that had demonstrated joint preparation and cited a number of examples of annual programme reviews largely or exclusively prepared by one or other partner which led to only a partial view of the programme. Indeed, recent versions of the annual programme review collaborative proforma requested information on the contribution of the partners to the preparation of the review.

101 Although the audit team saw examples of external examiner reports relating specifically to collaborative provision and to cohorts studying at partners, the Partnership and Collaboration Subcommittee report expressed concern that 'few of the External Examiners reports made express reference to collaborative aspects of the programmes they were overseeing'. Academic Division advises the Partnership and Collaboration Subcommittee on the University's continuing observance with the *Code of practice Section 2: Collaborative provision*, while the other elements of the academic infrastructure are mapped during the programme approval process. The Partnership and Collaboration Subcommittee appeared to be well informed about collaborative activity across the University, the audit team concluding that the Teaching and Learning Committee should have every confidence in the appropriateness and the quality of the advice it receives from the Partnership and Collaboration Subcommittee. In particular, the team noted that members of the Partnership and Collaboration Subcommittee were regularly made aware of collaborative issues by receiving comprehensive updates and reports of conferences attended by

University staff on collaborative provision matters and summaries of QAA reports on collaborative provision, including overseas activities. The team agreed that this is a feature of good practice (see also paragraph 104 below).

### **Students and collaborative provision**

102 The student record system records all students registered on collaborative arrangements leading to Salford awards, although the Briefing Paper explains that University affords full access to all University facilities only to those students for whom it draws down funding directly, with access by other students being governed by the specific details of the Affiliation Agreement. In discussion with staff, the audit team learned that this differentiation of entitlement for UK collaborations arose largely as a result of licensing arrangements governing access to University based materials. While there was differential entitlement to all University facilities for students, depending on the nature of the funding agreement with the partner, the University ensured that there was equality of access by all students studying at an individual partner by requiring as a condition of affiliation that the partner provide appropriate/additional resources to remove any disparity. Students from partner colleges whom the audit team met, appeared to be unclear about their entitlement to Salford facilities. The team formed the view that it is desirable that the University regularly updates students studying in partner institutions on their entitlement to the use of University resources for learning and teaching.

103 Students at partner institutions were aware that they were subject to the disciplinary code of the partner, but to the academic regulations of the University with whom they were registered, as well as being College-registered students. The partner's students related on the whole to the partner institution staff, although attested to the presence of University academic and professional staff, including a library representative, visiting the partner programme at the beginning of the academic session. They appeared to be well aware of progression opportunities to the University. While the University expects modules and programmes to be evaluated by partner institution students (via module evaluation questionnaires) and for the resulting views to be fed into annual monitoring in the normal way, especially via the joint boards of study minutes, no arrangements are currently in place for the University to benefit from learning of the views of partner institution students' via the Student Experience Survey, which was not administered to students studying at partner institutions. There also appeared to be no arrangements in place for formal liaison between the Students Union and formal student bodies at partner institutions, although usual National Union of Students reciprocal arrangements were in place.

### **Partner institution staff**

104 The University sees staff development as being 'an important part of the relationship' between the University and its partners. Arrangements for this, including new staff appointments, are overseen by the joint boards of study, and the annual programme reviews seen by the audit team attested to the monitoring of staff appointments through this process. The Briefing Paper observed that partner institution staff have access to a number of University-led staff development opportunities. Partner representatives and University staff who worked closely with partners confirmed these arrangements, and explained that there had been considerable involvement with a variety of school-led staff development days, and that some of their partner colleagues had participated in the Education in a Changing Environment Conference and in activities designed specifically for staff teaching foundation degrees. The audit team found that in most cases partner staff were aware of the staff development opportunities available at the University and that a number participated in such events, particularly where these were facilitated by the joint boards of study. The team concurred that the opportunities available to regional partner staff to access University-led staff development opportunities, particularly where these are encouraged through the appropriate joint boards of study is a feature of good practice (see also paragraph 101 above).

105 Of particular value to the strength of the partnership was the role of the University link tutor as the first point of contact between the partner team and the University. Staff reported that the link tutor was involved at various stages through the academic year in a role that was primarily supportive of partner institution staff. However, particularly as the scope of partnerships overseas increase and as UK partnerships become increasingly strategic, the audit team agreed that it is desirable that the University ensures that a framework is in place for the pedagogical staff development needs of partners teaching at higher education with whom the University intends to establish strategic relationships.

### **Future collaborative activity**

106 The Briefing Paper indicated that as part of its ongoing strategic review, the University is currently considering the purposes, scale and scope of its collaborative activities with a view to focusing partnership working through the development of a range of partnership models, both in the UK and overseas, and embracing community and business partners as well as education institutions within a new framework. As part of this review, the International Strategy Committee and the International Relations office, and more recently Enterprise and Development, have developed proposals for consideration by the Strategic Leadership Team on the development of an international strategy, an element of which is the extension and strengthening of overseas partnerships involving a range of mutually supportive activities, including staff development, English support, progression agreements, joint programmes, Erasmus/student exchange opportunities, jointly developed modules, staff exchanges, guest lectures etc. The team understood that the Strategic Leadership Team, following consideration of a paper from Enterprise and Development, is currently progressing this review with the intention of having the main elements of a partnership framework in place by the summer of 2008. The outcome of this wide ranging review is likely to result in the development of a fewer number of more strategic partnerships in the UK with an increase in the scale of overseas partnerships.

107 The future developments envisaged suggest both a more strategic approach to partnerships and the development of activities which potentially present the University with higher levels of risk than currently experienced through its current more limited partnership arrangements. The audit team broadly concurs with the University's view that its arrangements for the quality assurance of its current provision are 'robust' and are 'well fitted to the nature and extent' of its current collaborative activities. The team recommends that it is advisable that as the University develops the focus of its collaborative provision, particularly through increasing the number of partnerships with international institutions and UK employers, and consequently with arrangements that pose a potentially higher risk, and in the light of the emerging outcomes of Realising our Vision, the University has in place adequately robust arrangements to assure the quality of all its future collaborative activities.

## **Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students**

108 On behalf of Senate, research policy and procedures are determined by the Research Committee, chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research) and the Postgraduate Research Students sub-committee, chaired by the Director of Graduate Studies. The Research Handbook provides a guide to the University's research structures, policies and procedures; regulatory matters are to be found in the AQA. A more accessible version of regulations, policies and procedures is provided by the Code of Practice for the Conduct of Research Degrees.

109 In 2007-08, the University has 278 full-time and 130 part-time research students. As part of its expansion plans the University expects to expand its postgraduate research numbers with increases in international students, but also part-time students from local companies engaging in doctoral study as part of continuing professional development.

110 All research students are based in one of the nine Research Institutes. Their supervisors must be full members of that research institute. There is a Research and Graduate College, which provides central support and administrative functions for research (and postgraduate) activities. It includes the Postgraduate Office which maintains student records and additionally provides administrative support.

111 Each research student is entitled to a minimum level of facilities and support. This Service Level Agreement specifies what support materials a postgraduate research will have available to them, ranging from desk space and information technology provision through to photocopying allowances. Agreements differ according to needs but must satisfy minimum standards of provision for postgraduate research students. Students seen by the audit team confirmed these arrangements worked well and Service Level Agreements seen by the audit team were comprehensive and appropriate.

112 The University has invested in improving postgraduate research student facilities. Student survey results and discussions with students indicate that students have a positive attitude to, and view of, their research environment.

### **QAA Report on review of research degrees programmes**

113 In spring 2006 the QAA carried out a review of research degree provision. The review concluded provision at the University was appropriate and satisfactory. It identified examples of good practice and identified areas for further consideration. These related to entry requirements, number of trained staff involved in admissions decisions, minimum frequency of meetings between a student and their supervisory team and record-keeping, feedback mechanisms, and indicative times for the appeals process. An action plan was drawn up to investigate and react to these recommendations. The action plan has been a major agenda item for both the Postgraduate Research Studies Subcommittee and Research Committee. In the latter four cases, the University has accepted the recommendations and taken positive action, or is awaiting reports. The first recommendation was not accepted by the University.

114 In this case of entry requirements the review was concerned that the University's entry requirements allow admission to doctoral degrees with a bachelor's degree with honours alone. The University, in its consideration of this issue, took advice from the Research and Graduate College and the Careers Service, both of which were concerned that increasing this entry requirement might have a detrimental effect on recruitment from non-traditional applicants. Interestingly though, one paper states that 'if students are never admitted with a Third class honours degree, eliminating this class would have minimal effect'. In contrast, entry practices, as reported in a draft Academic Audit Committee report on postgraduate research students for Senate, suggest that the first degree result is only considered less important if the candidate also has a master's degree. Otherwise at least an Upper Second class degree is required. In discussions with staff, this approach was confirmed and expanded to explain that applicants were expected to have at least an Upper Second class degree or prior learning or experience (both of which are already allowed for in the regulations).

115 As a result of these discussions and its consideration of the documentation available to it, the team concluded that it would be desirable for the University to clarify its entry regulations for postgraduate research doctoral degrees (see also paragraph 19 above).

### **Selection, admission, induction and supervision of research students**

116 Research Institutes are responsible for selection and admission of postgraduate research students. Research Institutes may supplement the scrutiny of the application but as a minimum must use the Official University form. Offers are issued by the Postgraduate Office. Incoming students are provided with introductory information from the Research and Graduate College

before arrival and participate in a programme of induction events both at University and Research Institute level. Students met by the audit team confirmed the usefulness of pre-entry information and their induction programmes.

117 Research students are supported by a supervisory team and a personal tutor who is independent of the supervisory team. Supervisors must be research-active and are annually assessed by the Research Institute Director. New supervisors are provided with training by the Research and Graduate College and the Education Development Unit. Staff confirmed to the audit team the usefulness of these arrangements.

118 All supervisors are provided with a 'Supervisor in a Box' index card file, which gives easy access to key elements of the Research Award Regulations. It is duplicated on the University's intranet as 'Supervisor out of the Box'. The audit team felt this was a helpful aide-memoire.

119 Students confirmed their satisfaction with supervisory and support arrangements, a view shared by the audit team.

### **Progress and review arrangements**

120 Progression of postgraduate research students is monitored locally by Research Institutes and at University level by the Postgraduate Research Award Board. The formal progression points are the learning agreement, an agreement written over the first three months of study and made between the student and the Research Institute, the annual progress report produced by the supervisor, the postgraduate research annual self-evaluation produced by the student, interim/transfer assessment, internal evaluation and submission. Completion of all progression points is mandatory for continuation. The focus of scrutiny at progression points is the learning agreement. Research Institutes check progress against identified targets and postgraduate research students are able to reflect upon their continuing development. The University is currently developing a personal development plan framework for the postgraduate research student lifecycle, a development the audit team would encourage. Students seen by the audit team were complementary about these arrangements and the team found them appropriate.

### **Development of research and other skills**

121 Research Institutes are responsible for providing appropriate levels of research methodology and analysis training for their postgraduate research students. This training typically takes the form of modules and stand-alone sessions run as part of Doctoral Training programmes. In some cases these are externally accredited. A formal record of training is kept and monitored by the Postgraduate Research Award Board. General and transferable skills training is offered by the Salford Postgraduate Research Training programme (SPoRT). This programme is reviewed annually as part of the Director of Graduate Studies report.

122 As part of career development, postgraduate research students can gain teaching experience in schools. All research students who are involved in teaching will undergo appropriate training in higher education teaching before they start to teach. The University also runs a Graduate Teaching Assistantship scheme in which students are paid a full stipend in return for undertaking an agreed level of teaching, over and above their studies. In the region of 16 such stipends are available annually for which Research Institutes bid. The scheme is supported by a University-wide development programme. Students on the scheme were enthusiastic about both the scheme and its support training as offered by the Education Development Unit and SPoRT. The Graduate Teaching Assistantship policy and teaching programme are seen as strengths by the University and the audit team concurs with this view and identified the Graduate Teaching Assistant scheme its associated training programme as a feature of good practice.

## Feedback arrangements

123 Postgraduate research students are required to produce an annual self-evaluation report. This encourages reflection on the student's own progression, as well as consideration of their supervisory arrangements and research facilities. Such reports are considered by the Research Institute Director, feed into the Research Institute annual report and the Director of Graduate Studies annual report. Postgraduate research students can also give feedback through their personal tutor if it is not appropriate to approach their supervisor(s). Postgraduate research students state that these arrangements work well, a view shared by the audit team.

## The assessment of research students

124 The University's procedures are set out in the Research Award Regulations. These regulations also define the various awards available. Guidance on submission, the viva voce and presentation can also be found in the regulations. When a student gives notice of intention to present a thesis, Faculty Board is responsible for appointing a board of examiners based on proposals from the Research Institute. The Board comprises at least two examiners, one of whom must be external to the University. Any internal examiner cannot be part of the supervisory team. An independent chair, chosen from an internal pool of independent chairs and maintained by the Postgraduate Office, is also appointed. After examination of the candidate, the examiners provide a joint examiners report to the Postgraduate Research Award Board, which then determines the award. The audit team considered these arrangements to be satisfactory.

## Representations, complaints and appeals arrangements for research students

125 postgraduate research students are represented at all levels of the University. At University level, research students are represented on the Postgraduate Research Studies subcommittee. The Committee of Salford Postgraduate Associations represents postgraduate research (and postgraduate taught) views to the University typically through the Director of Graduate Studies. Students are also represented on Research Institute Boards. Postgraduate research students met by the audit team and student surveys indicated students are happy with these arrangements.

126 The formal University procedures in place apply also to postgraduate research academic appeals and complaints. However, few appeals are made by postgraduate research students. The students that the audit team met indicated they were happy with the procedures available to them and the audit team was of the view that the arrangements were appropriate.

## Section 7: Published information

127 The audit team noted a wide range of impressively produced published information, and had the opportunity to sample a variety of materials available to students at the beginning and during their programme. An increasing amount of information to the public, applicants, partners and students is available in web-based form, which the University feels to be the 'most important single source of information' for its many audiences. According to the Briefing Paper, responsibility for ensuring the 'accuracy, currency and completeness' of the externally published information lies with Enterprise and Development, although responsibility for checking the accuracy of programme information lies with the schools. For example, the academic content of prospectus entries is signed off by schools, but will undergo further proofing and checking by Enterprise and Development prior to publication. In discussions with the Vice-Chancellor, the audit team learned the University was planning to develop the quantity and quality of publications, and to ensure it was increasingly customer-focused. In this regard, the Briefing Paper cited the example of the reorganisation of the prospectus by subject alphabetically rather than by faculty and school, a change appreciated by the students whom the team met. The team noted a suite of pre-entry printed materials that built upon the undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses and which included Enquirers' Newsletter, Applicants' Newsletter, Guide to

Admissions, Money Guides, Events Notifications and International Guides. Although the student written submission did not offer a view on the appropriateness of the publicity material, students whom the team met supported the University's view that the centrally produced pre-entry published and web-based materials were generally comprehensive, helpful and accurate.

128 Publicity materials from partner colleges that the audit team viewed stated clearly the locus of the University as the appropriate awarding body. The Briefing Paper explains that the University 'retains control' of all publicity material for programmes offered off-campus, and that it must be prepared in consultation with the University. The audit team learned that publicity materials were regularly reviewed by the joint boards of study, and that the University, through Enterprise and Development, approved all content referred to the University. It was unclear to the team how publicity materials relating to collaborative provision were approved either in the first instance prior to the establishment of a joint board. In general terms, however, the team felt that the arrangements the University had recently put into place to oversee pre-registration information for both Salford and partner programmes, the Applicant Contact Group, with membership comprising representatives from marketing, admissions, schools/college liaison, International Office, Finance, Accommodation and Registry as regular invitees, were appropriately robust to continue to ensure the accuracy and suitability of published materials.

129 Responsibility for the accuracy and completeness of web-based information lay very much with the academic and professional units under the general oversight of Enterprise and Development. The audit team considered the website to be generally clear and comprehensive, and found the distinct information channels for students and staff particularly impressive, with the search directory being straightforward to navigate and considered it a feature of good practice.

130 The University published online much of the Teaching Quality Information resulting from the Cooke report. Some of the information was variously found within the easily accessible relevant programme sites, but the more generic information was less obviously accessible to the external enquirer only by accessing the Academic Division web page. While the module and programme specifications that the audit team sampled were comprehensive, and students agreed that they were helpful, the team noted that these were currently unavailable via the web. The University indicated that it was commencing a programme of ensuring that its web-based materials were generally more student-focused. The team encourages the University to ensure that the web-based qualitative and quantitative data on teaching quality information, including module and programme specifications, are more directly accessible to the prospective student (see also paragraph 36 above).

131 The audit team made extensive use of the AQA, a comprehensive, annually updated assemblage of documents setting out the University's quality assurance procedures and academic regulations. Staff were generally familiar with them and welcomed the clarity with which the University's arrangements were laid out. The team learned that the future of the AQA was under consideration as part of a review of a University-wide staff communications strategy, possibly involving a greater use of web access to key University documents. The team understood that, pending the outcome of this review, a further edition of AQA would be prepared for 2008-09. The team concluded that the regular updating of the AQA, in particular the current review of the AQA as part of a wider University staff communications strategy, is a feature of good practice.

132 Students whom the audit team met confirmed their understanding of the availability of student regulations, discipline and appeals procedures and expressed themselves as generally content with their access and clarity.

**RG372a 06/08**

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2008

ISBN 978 1 84482 842 5

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education  
Southgate House  
Southgate Street  
Gloucester  
GL1 1UB

Tel 01425 557000

Fax 01452 557070

Email [comms@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:comms@qaa.ac.uk)

All QAA's publications are available on our website [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786