



Institutional audit

Ashridge

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Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and the quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes

Institutional audit: report

- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research
- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

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

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

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

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

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website.

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Ashridge from 11 to 15 April 2011 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 Ashridge offers.

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

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

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Ashridge's approach is for quality assurance and quality enhancement to be combined, with processes designed so that they achieve both objectives simultaneously. It has a widespread culture of enhancement at all levels and is taking deliberate and effective steps to identify areas for development and initiate activities to improve the quality of learning opportunities for its students.

Postgraduate research students

The audit team found that Ashridge has put into place effective procedures for the management of the research degree programme that it delivers as a collaborative partner of Middlesex University and these meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Published information

The audit team found that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information Ashridge 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 'feedback-hungry' culture and responsiveness to matters raised by students
- the contribution of the consultancy and scholarly activities of academic staff to the enrichment of the curriculum and the learning experience of students
- the quality of the virtual learning environment for the delivery of learning and student support for the Masters in Management
- the ethos of reflective practice that characterises the Ashridge learning experience.

Recommendations for action

The audit team recommends that Ashridge considers further action in some areas.

The team advises Ashridge to:

- keep under review the operation, terms of reference and membership of central committees responsible for the management of quality and standards
- continue to harmonise the assessment regulations across its programmes.

It would be desirable for Ashridge to:

- all sources of information required in programme annual monitoring should be given formal consideration
- review the arrangements for oversight and recording of provision in line with the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

Reference points

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

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

The audit found that Ashridge generally took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. It is desirable that Ashridge keep under review its engagement with the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

Report

1 An Institutional audit of Ashridge was undertaken during the week commencing 11 April 2011. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on Ashridge's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team comprised Professor Elizabeth Barnes, Dr Caroline Mills, Dr Michael Edwards, Dr Richard Latto and Ms Sabiha Teladia, auditors, and Ms Denise Cooper, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr Adam Biscoe, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3 Ashridge is an independent, self-financing institution established in its present form in 1959. It has the legal status of a charitable educational trust and is based in the historically important Ashridge House and surrounding estate, which dates back to a thirteenth-century monastic foundation. It was awarded taught degree awarding powers by the Privy Council in 2008. Its doctoral degrees are validated by Middlesex University. In addition to the postgraduate higher education programmes for post-experience students, referred to internally as qualification programmes, Ashridge runs a large number of short courses and offers extensive consulting activities and management-oriented research.

4 All Ashridge students are postgraduate and post-experience. At the time of the audit there were 397 students registered on qualification programmes, of which seven per cent were full-time and 93 per cent part-time. There were 12 students registered on part-time doctorates. About 50 of the faculty are involved in the qualification programmes. Ashridge's programmes are accredited by three professional, statutory and regulatory bodies: the Association of MBAs (for its MBA programmes), the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (for business and management programmes) and the European Quality Improvement System (for its complete provision).

5 The Ashridge Strategy Plan 2010-2015 outlines the mission of the institution: 'to be a school for working professionals in middle and senior management to ensure that they are successful, as individuals, teams or organisations'. It aims to be genuinely global in both its faculty and its client base and is committed to sustainability in both its educational offerings and in the way it works. It also has a highly focused research strategy, which concentrates on improving the practice of management, informing teaching and learning and contributing to net revenue.

6 Ashridge does not currently engage in any collaborative provision in which it awards degrees for programmes delivered by other institutions. The Strategy Plan 2010-2015, however, envisages the institution working more closely with and increasing the number of its partner organisations.

7 The organisational structures for the management of qualification programmes have been recently revised. All programmes are now managed directly by the qualifications 'business unit', with key personnel (in particular programme directors and support staff) reporting directly to the Director of Qualification Programmes, who provides academic and management coordination and oversight. Central to the management of programmes are live action tables which record decisions and the actions needed and taken as a result. These are used in programme management meetings and a summary is reviewed annually by the Quality Committee. The Registry is now fully centralised in order to achieve further consistency in the management of student records and assessment processes. A shell

Ashridge Qualification Programme Framework has been created, with which all programmes will eventually have to comply. The Academic Regulations have been fully revised to incorporate these changes.

8 External input into the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities is incorporated in these processes through the role of external examiners and the effective use made of their reports; the contribution of external members to panels for programme validation and periodic review; and the appointment of external members within the committee structure. Boards of studies, which are joint student-faculty bodies at programme level, provide a formal mechanism for student feedback.

9 The Final Report of Ashridge's application for taught degree awarding powers noted that the limited extent of faculty in external roles in higher education remained a weakness for the institution. In response to this there has been a substantial increase in the proportion of the faculty who are now involved in external roles relating to the management of academic standards and quality.

10 Reviewing these structures and processes, the audit found that Ashridge has developed an effective structure for the management of the academic standards and quality of its qualification programmes since obtaining degree awarding powers in 2008. However, it did find examples where this effectiveness was dependent on the personal contact that is possible in a relatively small institution. The membership of subcommittees is determined by Academic Board, which takes into account ability to contribute and balance between the various Ashridge activities. This, however, is not explicit in the Academic Regulations or clear in practice. The audit team concluded that it is advisable to keep the operation, terms of reference and membership of the central committees responsible for the management of quality and standards under review. It will also be necessary to clarify and formalise some of the other procedures, which are currently dependent on the institution's small scale for their effective operation.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

11 Programme approval involves complementary processes for business approval and academic validation. The Ashridge Management Committee is responsible for giving business approval. The audit team had access to documentation for all programme approvals and modifications since the granting of degree awarding powers, and was able to confirm that procedures are comprehensive and robustly followed.

12 There are plans for Ashridge faculty to deliver modules from qualification programmes at other locations, including overseas. The audit team was told that there was no formal checklist for approving a location of delivery, but that there was tacit knowledge of the requirements that must be met.

13 Programme directors are required to produce a programme annual review report reporting on achievements during the year, challenges facing the programme, use made of stakeholder feedback (including students and external examiners), changes and enhancements made during the year and planned, and priorities for the year ahead. This review is supported by a 'live action table', which lists issues arising out of boards of studies, programme management meetings, assessment boards and external examiner annual reports, and records the actions taken to resolve them. The audit team considered that receipt and discussion of the annual review reports and the live action tables at programme level could be more formally recorded in minutes of meetings. The team also noted that annual review reports included minimal commentary on statistical information relating to student demographic profiles or performance.

14 The Academic Board has delegated responsibility for programme periodic review and revalidation to the Quality Committee. The periodic review panel includes two external members and can include a former or current student. The audit team had access to the documentation for the three periodic reviews conducted since 2008 and was able to confirm that their conduct was thorough.

15 Procedures in support of the external examiner system are described in the Ashridge Academic Regulations. External examiners report directly to assessment boards and via an annual report. From the minutes of programme management meetings, the audit team confirmed formal receipt and discussion of external examiners' reports at programme level in some instances, though not all. The team was able to confirm that historically external examiners' annual reports had been shared with students on some programmes but not all; however, the team was informed about moves that will make this standard practice.

16 The Quality Committee receives all external examiners' annual reports, as well as programme directors' formal responses. In the academic year 2010-11, the external examiners' reports were consolidated in an Academic Review Report received by the Quality Committee. The audit team considered that the move towards consolidating review activity within an annual cycle, culminating in the production of an Academic Standards Report, would assist the Academic Board in maintaining oversight of programme standards and assuring itself that provision remains in good academic health.

17 Overall, the audit team considered that Ashridge's external examining procedures are effective in their contribution to maintaining the standards and enhancing the quality of the taught course provision. Nevertheless, the team considered that there could be further clarification of the manner in which external examiners' reports are formally received, used to inform annual monitoring at programme level, and shared with students. Given this, and the team's finding that receipt of annual review reports and live action tables by programme management meetings is not always apparent in the minutes, and the lack of a standard set of statistical data for review at programme level, it is desirable that all sources of information required in programme annual monitoring should be given formal consideration.

18 The audit team saw that Ashridge makes effective use of and engages constructively with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points in its management of academic standards and its management and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities.

19 The institution's assessment policies and regulations are laid out in the Ashridge Academic Regulations. An exercise to harmonise assessment regulations across programmes since the achievement of degree awarding powers has led to greater consistency. The development of the Ashridge Qualification Programme Framework has the potential to further embed consistent approaches to assessment within and across programmes.

20 The circumstances in which programme-specific assessment regulations are approved lack explicit criteria for approving variation, and variations are not collated in a single document. The audit team concluded that it would be advisable for Ashridge to continue to harmonise the assessment regulations across its programmes.

21 The membership, remit and constitution of assessment boards, and the procedures for the conduct of assessment, are detailed in the Academic Regulations. Assessment boards are normally chaired by the Director of Qualification Programmes, thus ensuring that regulations and procedures are applied consistently. Members of the Quality Team may also

attend to advise the board. The audit team considered that matters such as academic misconduct had been addressed at assessment boards in line with required regulations.

22 Assessment and the award of accreditation of prior learning is currently permitted. For one programme, exemption can be given from attendance requirements, and the audit team considered that the term 'accredited prior attendance' would be more appropriate in this circumstance.

23 Records of students are held on an in-house system for operational management. The audit team heard of work currently underway to improve the reporting and analysis of demographic information. Assessment data is prepared for assessment boards by programme teams, and confirmed results are recorded on the in-house system. There is no standard set of statistical data provided for annual review or periodic review. The degree to which commentary on data is presented during review processes at programme level is not uniform.

24 Ashridge does not engage in any collaborative provision in which it awards degrees for programmes delivered by other institutions. The Strategy Plan 2010-2015 envisages the institution working more closely with and increasing the number of partner organisations. The audit team learnt of one current and two planned future initiatives in this area. These involve working with a supporting organisation, delivery of teaching associated with Ashridge programmes at locations other than Ashridge, and collaboration with institutions delivering programmes recognised as acceptable for meeting the attendance requirements of the Masters in Management. In the light of the growing complexity of these arrangements and the anticipated expansion of provision, the audit team considered it desirable that Ashridge review the arrangements for oversight and recording of collaborative provision in line with the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

25 Overall, the audit team concluded that confidence could be placed in the soundness of Ashridge's current and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards it offers.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

26 Ashridge is an institution which prides itself on encouraging and responding to student feedback. Feedback is collected regularly on an individual and collective basis and plays a major role in the monitoring and updating of programmes. Students stated that there is a culture of undefended learning spaces, in that distinction between faculty and students in the quality assurance of programmes was blurred. Boards of studies are the main forum for collecting feedback. There is no formal induction or training provided to students because of the seniority and maturity of the majority of students and the openness of the institution to feedback. Any student on the programme is welcome to attend the board meetings. The minutes are shared on e-sites for other students to view. The audit team saw examples both at programme and institutional level of issues raised at boards of study being rapidly addressed. The audit team considered that the culture of feedback that exists at Ashridge for both staff and students is a constant and valued feature, where both parties learn from each other. The team concluded that Ashridge's 'feedback-hungry' culture and responsiveness to matters raised by students was a feature of good practice.

27 Student membership on institutional-level committees is limited to the Academic Board. Senior staff told the audit team that this is because there is only one full-time programme of study at Ashridge and so it was difficult to recruit students to central committees. While the team recognised the difficulty of ensuring that part-time students are

able to attend meetings, the team encourages the institution to seek other ways of enabling students to contribute to relevant institutional-level committees.

28 All Ashridge faculty are required to engage in research and/or scholarship, which, in line with the Ashridge strategy, is focused on the development of management and professional practice, specifically through the content of the curriculum and applied learning processes. Six established research centres coordinate and support research activities and dissemination and staff contribution is assessed within their performance review. The impact of the staff's management experience, consultancy and research on the content and delivery of the qualification programmes was highlighted by the students as a key feature within the Ashridge learning experience. The contribution of the consultancy and scholarly activities of academic staff to the enrichment of the curriculum and the learning experiences of students was considered by the team to be a feature of good practice.

29 Most Ashridge qualification programmes are delivered part-time with significant online learning and support. A new online distance-learning programme, the Masters in Management, has recently been developed to replace an existing programme. Online learning is designed to reflect the philosophical approach of other Ashridge programmes, including reflective, interactive and experiential learning and ongoing dialogue with staff and peers. The design of the platform for the new online programme and the delivery of the programme, including, for example, the study care team, the synchronous and asynchronous tutorials and the learning blogs, is informing the future development of all online support for Ashridge programmes. The quality of the virtual learning environment for the Masters in Management was considered by the audit team to be a feature of good practice. Staff development supporting the use and development of online learning is primarily provided by identified experts within the faculty and managed informally. With the envisaged growth and increasing use of technology-enhanced learning, a more systematic approach to staff support and development, including guidelines for the use of it, may be of benefit in the future.

30 The physical environment provides internal and external space for personal time and reflection, and this is a key feature of the teaching and learning strategy. The centre provides an extensive range of resources, supported by the library staff. The virtual learning environment supports the learning experiences of students both on and off campus, and the full-time MBA students are all provided with tablet computers to facilitate access in all of their learning activities. The uniqueness of this learning experience is reinforced by the personal and individualised support that is provided by academic and support staff. The ethos of reflective practice that characterises the Ashridge learning experience is a feature of good practice.

31 Programme admissions are managed by the programme director within a set of admissions principles established by the Academic Board. Specific requirements are confirmed as part of the approval of programmes process, but all applicants are required to have professional and practice-based experience of typically three to five years. Applicants are provided with support prior to entry, for example the opportunity to attend sessions such as the 'MBA in a day', or a discussion with careers staff to ensure that career aspirations match the selected programme. Central oversight and preparation of staff for their roles in admissions are managed informally and currently this is sufficient, but with expansion this may require review.

32 Some qualification programmes include a requirement for five days' attendance on a related Ashridge course. This may be acquired through attendance at Ashridge or through attendance of an Ashridge course delivered off campus, including overseas, or with a collaborating organisation. One such arrangement exists with a Danish organisation, where participants can attend an equivalent programme to the taught elements of the first module

of the Ashridge Masters in Executive Coaching. This has been termed both as accreditation of prior learning and as accreditation of prior attendance. Clarification and consistency in the terminology for these arrangements is required.

33 Faculty are required to have practical experience, high-level teaching skills and a strong base of research and/or scholarship. They are positively encouraged to seek out learning opportunities to support proficiency in their job and to facilitate their personal and professional growth. Full details of all human resources policies and procedures, contractual responsibilities and entitlements, and staff development information are provided through the Staff Handbook and Staff Operations Manual. There is provision for appropriate learning and development opportunities and these are managed and overseen through the performance review and development meetings. Individual support is offered to staff both financially and in allocated time. More broadly, development is facilitated through Learning Bites and faculty interest groups.

34 Teaching skills are assessed during the interview process, and an induction package including a mentor is in place for all newly appointed faculty, including associates. Peer review of teaching is patchy and, although there have been attempts to establish some consistency in practice, this has not yet been achieved. Reinforcement and strengthening of this process could enhance the dissemination and development of practice.

35 The audit team concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of Ashridge's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

36 Ashridge's strategy is for quality assurance and quality enhancement to be combined in an integrated approach to quality management, with processes designed so that they achieve both objectives simultaneously. This approach includes institutional processes that promote improvement at programme level and transfer of good practice, and institutional enhancement initiatives. Ashridge describes itself as having a culture of continuous improvement among faculty and staff that the formal institutional processes reinforce in order to drive forward enhancement of the student learning experience. Enhancement is therefore seen as embedded in activities and processes at all levels. Scorecards and live action tables and minutes of programme management meetings, confirmed that, although there was some variability, there was generally very active engagement with enhancement at individual and programme level, resulting in effective improvement of the quality of learning opportunities available to students. There were also examples of central committees initiating enhancements either independently or in response to suggestions from programme level. As well as internally driven initiatives, there was a strong general awareness of and responsiveness to external demands from Ashridge's corporate client group.

37 In summary, there was good evidence of a widespread culture of enhancement at all levels and that Ashridge was taking deliberate and effective steps to identify areas for development and initiate activities to improve the quality of learning opportunities for its students.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

38 At the time of the audit, Ashridge did not have any collaborative arrangements for the delivery of higher education programmes.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

39 Currently, there is one research degree programme, which is a cohort-based taught doctorate for part-time students leading to the DProf degree of Middlesex University. It consists of four assessed modules and a research thesis, and at the time of the audit had 12 students enrolled. In terms of the responsibilities of Ashridge, the programme is quality-assured in the same way as other Ashridge qualification programmes.

40 Selection of students for the doctoral programme is made after formal interview based on both academic record and professional experience. Progress through the doctorate is governed by an assessment board with representatives of the Ashridge programme team, Middlesex University link faculty and a programme external examiner. Final theses are examined by internal and external examiners with an independent chair from Middlesex University. These procedures were clear, rigorous and well understood by both faculty and students.

41 Each cohort of students is split into dissertation study groups. Supervisors of these groups are appointed by the programme director and approved by both institutions. The learning experience provided by the dissertation study groups is supplemented by activities involving the whole cohort, these activities being valued by students. Some research students have teaching responsibilities on both qualification programmes and non-award-bearing courses. In all cases they will have had the same training and preparation as would other teachers carrying out those duties who were not candidates for doctoral degrees.

42 Research students provide feedback on their experience through the programme board of studies in the same way as for students on taught degree programmes. Students confirmed the value placed on the board of studies additional to the informal feedback provided at all stages through the dissertation study groups and from the programme director. It was concluded that this was an example of Ashridge's 'feedback-hungry' culture and responsiveness to matters raised by students and was a feature of good practice.

43 The facilities and entitlements of research students from both Ashridge and Middlesex University are clearly set out and students use these, supplemented by facilities provided by employers and other academic institutions.

44 The research student handbook provides comprehensive information about procedures for dealing with suspected plagiarism, complaints and academic appeals. The audit team found these to be appropriate and clear to both faculty and students.

45 Research students are not automatically represented on either the Research Committee or the Research Ethics Sub-Committee, although a student can be nominated to the Research Committee by the Academic Board. Currently, there are no students on the Research Committee. This lack of research student membership on central committees contributed to the recommendation that Ashridge keep under review the operation, terms of reference and membership of central committees responsible for the management of quality and standards.

46 Overall, the audit team found that Ashridge had put into place effective procedures for the management of the research degree programme that it delivers as a collaborative partner of Middlesex University and that these meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Section 7: Published information

47 Ashridge publishes a range of documentation for prospective and enrolled students, including a prospectus and a programme-specific student handbook. The handbooks are comprehensive documents providing information on academic guidance, procedures on appeals and boards of studies. The handbooks provide clear guidance on studying at Ashridge and students refer to them for many reasons during their programme of study, including information regarding the availability of support services for students. Programme-level documentation is usually published on the programmes' e-sharing site. The audit team concluded that information available for students and material published for applicants is comprehensive, and noted that 96 per cent of respondents to the student written submission survey considered that the prospectus material was accurate.

48 The audit team found that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information Ashridge publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

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

- the 'feedback-hungry' culture and responsiveness to matters raised by students (paragraph 26)
- the contribution of the consultancy and scholarly activities of academic staff to the enrichment of the curriculum and the learning experience of students (paragraph 28)
- the quality of the virtual learning environment for the delivery of learning and student support for the Masters in Management (paragraph 29)
- the ethos of reflective practice that characterises the Ashridge learning experience (paragraph 30).

Recommendations for action

51 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- keep under review the operation, terms of reference and membership of central committees responsible for the management of quality and standards (paragraph 10)
- continue to harmonise the assessment regulations across its programmes (paragraph 20).

52 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- all sources of information required in programme annual monitoring should be given formal consideration (paragraph 17)
- review the arrangements for oversight and recording of provision in line with the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* (paragraph 24).

Appendix

Ashridge's response to the Institutional audit report

Ashridge welcomes the publication of this Institutional audit report and the judgement that confidence can be placed in the soundness of its present and likely future management of both the academic standards of awards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

Ashridge is pleased to note the many positive features included in the audit report, including those specifically identified as features of good practice:

- the 'feedback hungry' culture and responsiveness to students through both formal and informal mechanisms
- the positive impact of faculty's scholarship and consultancy on learning and the student experience, linked to Ashridge's leading role in executive development
- the innovative virtual learning environment and student support approach for the new work-based Masters in Management
- a distinctive approach to learning designed for postgraduate, post-experience students, which is characterised by an ethos of reflective practice.

Ashridge appreciates the professionalism of the audit team and the care taken to understand Ashridge's distinctive nature and that of its students. In line with its strong culture of seeking and acting upon feedback, Ashridge has already started the process of acting upon the recommendations in the report and other comments that can be a basis for further improvement.

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The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Southgate House

Southgate Street

Gloucester

GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000

Fax 01452 557070

Email comms@qaa.ac.uk

Web www.qaa.ac.uk