Bath Spa University

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Preface

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

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

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

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

- ensuring that the awards and qualifications in higher education are of an academic standard at least consistent with those referred to in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree awarding bodies in a proper manner

- providing learning opportunities of a quality that enables students, whether on taught or research programmes, to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications

- enhancing the quality of their educational provision, particularly by building on information gained through monitoring, internal and external reviews, and feedback from stakeholders.

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

- the confidence that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of awards

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

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

- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research

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

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

Explanatory note on the format for the Report and the Annex

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

- the **summary** of the findings of the report, including the judgements, is intended for the wider public, especially potential students

- the **report** is an overview of the findings of the audit for both lay and external professional audiences

- a separate **annex** provides the detail and explanations behind the findings of the audit and is intended to be of practical use to the institution.

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

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Bath Spa University (the University) from 3 to 7 March 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.

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

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

Outcomes of the institutional audit

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

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

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Overall, the audit team found that the University's institutional approach to quality enhancement was informed by clear strategic direction and was leading to systematic improvements in learning opportunities.

Postgraduate research students

Overall, the audit team found that the arrangements for postgraduate research students were appropriate and satisfactory and met the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

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

- the use of external members on school boards contributing to the enhancement of the student experience

- the way in which the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning has been integrated into the institution's strategies to enhance learning opportunities

- the robust review mechanisms for collaborative provision

- the quality of information provided by the Graduate School for postgraduate research students and supervisors.

Recommendations for action

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

It would be desirable for the University to:

- articulate the institution's strategy for the operation and development of assessment practice

- ensure effective and consistent analysis of module evaluations and student data in annual subject reports

- consider more formal and consistent arrangements to ensure student engagement in quality assurance at subject level

- make explicit reference to student representation in the memorandum of cooperation with partner institutions and ensure that partner institutions are represented on the new Student Representatives Committee

- ensure that public information for applicants to collaborative provision published on the websites of its partner colleges makes clear the relationship between the University and the partner, the location of study and the progression and transfer requirements from Foundation Degrees to honours level study.

Reference points

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

- Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education

- frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland

- subject benchmark statements

- programme specifications.

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

Report

Preface

1   An institutional audit of Bath Spa University (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 3 March 2008. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2   The audit team was Dr P Brunt, Dr S Hardy, Dr S Hargreaves, Professor A Holmes, auditors, and Mrs L Thussu, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mr M Cott, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3   The University's mission is 'to be an outstanding and distinctive university institution that provides degree courses of the highest quality, informed by a culture of scholarship, expertise and teaching excellence'. Bath Spa University College was granted degree awarding powers in 1992 and university title in 2005. The University awards both undergraduate and taught postgraduate degrees and has an arrangement with the University of the West of England, Bristol for the award of research degrees.

4   In 2007-08, the University had a total student population of 5,510 full-time equivalents. The majority of these students are on full-time courses, of which about 15 per cent are taught postgraduates, mostly studying postgraduate certificate in education courses. The largest proportion of students are on programmes in the creative and performing arts or on teacher training courses, reflecting the institution's historic origins. More recently, programmes have been introduced in the humanities, social science and science disciplines. The University has a postgraduate research student population of about 70, and of these 80 per cent are part-time. At the time of the audit, the University had 584 full-time equivalent students studying for its awards, mainly on Foundation Degrees, at nine partner further education colleges, all within close geographical proximity.

5   There are approximately 270 full-time academic and 270 full-time equivalent support staff with a significant number of part-time academic teaching staff, particularly on the creative courses. Teaching falls within the remit of seven subject-based schools. In addition, the Graduate School is responsible for the management of the University's research programmes and the School for Development and Participation for the University's collaborative provision.

6   The last audit in 2003 found that broad confidence could be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The present audit team found that the institution had addressed all of the recommendations from the audit.

7   Since the last audit, two key strategic posts have been created, a Dean of Academic Development with responsibility for 'linking quality assurance with strategic planning and for enhancement' and, more recently, a Head of Quality Management. A further significant development since the last audit is the University's successful bid for a Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning in the creative arts subjects. The resulting £5 million investment has enabled major purchases of equipment and related facilities in digital technologies for the arts.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

8   Formal responsibility for determining and assuring academic standards rests with the Academic Board, which delegates responsibility to a number of subcommittees whose remit and membership is clearly articulated in the University's Quality and Standards A-Z, located on the University website. Key subcommittees for the management of academic quality and standards are the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, Learning and Teaching Committee, Higher

Degrees (Taught) Committee, Higher Degrees (Research) Committee, Modular Scheme Committee, school boards and examination boards. The minutes of the Academic Board and its subcommittees' meetings, together with other documentation, provided the audit team with considerable evidence of the effectiveness of the University's policies and procedures for setting, maintaining and assuring academic standards.

9   The Academic Quality and Standards Committee has a broad remit, which includes developing and monitoring policies and procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review. It is supported by the Academic Office which provides comprehensive guidance and support for staff. The Academic Office also supports the validation and internal review process by checking documentation against University requirements and guidance. The Academic Quality and Standards Committee reviews the documents submitted as part of course planning, approval and review processes. Minor modifications to units are dealt with by school boards.

10   Following the last audit, the University amended its annual monitoring process. The University found that the revised system placed an undue burden on the Academic Quality and Standards Committee and as a result modified the system again in 2007. The current system has resulted in the Committee considering overarching school reports, to which subject reports are appended.

11   The audit team found the University's processes for the development and approval of programmes to be rigorous and clearly articulated. The processes pay due regard to external reference points, such as *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, subject benchmark statements and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies' requirements. The team also found that the University places a significant emphasis on the role of independent external advisers within the process of course planning, approval and review.

12   External examiners are recognised by the University as an essential component in assuring academic standards. The system for appointing external examiners is robust and is consistent with the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*. The roles and responsibilities of external examiners are clearly articulated in the University's External Examiners' handbook.

13   Every undergraduate and postgraduate taught programme has at least one external examiner. External examiners attend examination boards and there is evidence from the minutes of boards that they play an active role in the deliberations on student performance. In addition, external examiners are encouraged to meet with students and there is evidence that this takes place. The University responds appropriately to issues raised by external examiners. External examiners' reports inform annual monitoring at unit level and are also referred to in school annual reports. The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) produces an annual summary of external examiner reports, which highlights strengths and weaknesses. This report is considered by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. The audit team found the University's external examiner system to be both reliable and robust as well as playing a pivotal role in ensuring that academic standards are comparable with those of similar awards offered elsewhere.

14   The University provides guidance for students on assessment in the Undergraduate Modular Scheme Handbook, as well as student and module handbooks. Students confirmed in meetings with the audit team that this information was available. The University has yet to develop an overarching assessment strategy, although intended to consider this as part of the review of the undergraduate modular scheme. To ensure consistency of approach in assessment practice and the management of students' workload, the team recommends that it would be desirable for the University to articulate its strategy for the operation and development of assessment practice.

15   The University collects a wide variety of statistical data on student characteristics and performance and is able to analyse these data in a variety of ways. The audit team noted that when subject teams use these data in their annual reports, there is some inconsistency in the extent of the analysis and there is, therefore, potential for further development in this area to

secure a more consistent level of analysis. At institutional level, data are analysed thoroughly and reported at various committees. Where any discrepancies in student performance have been identified this has led to further investigation and action by the University. The team concluded that the University's use of statistical information makes a positive contribution to the management of academic standards.

16   Overall, the audit team found that confidence can be reasonably placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it offers.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

17   The University has a committee structure to monitor and manage the quality of students' learning opportunities. The Academic Board retains overall strategic responsibility for the monitoring of learning and other quality matters, and operational matters are devolved to its various subcommittees.

18   The Academic Quality and Standards Committee is responsible for ensuring and managing appropriate engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points. It discharges this responsibility by a mapping exercise undertaken by the appropriate administrative department. The audit team noted that the University response to external reference points was both detailed and timely.

19   The Briefing Paper placed significant emphasis on the role of external views and engagement with external stakeholders in the University's quality assurance and enhancement processes. The audit team noted that this engagement went beyond programme approval and review where externals were expected to be fully engaged in the process. In addition, external members are appointed to a number of key University committees, such as Academic Quality and Standards Committee, the Academic Board and school boards. Although the University is not prescriptive in respect of the role or level of engagement with external members and stakeholders, minutes of meetings showed active engagement with external members, with their views and support deliberately being sought. The team found the University's use of external members on school boards contributing to the enhancement of the student experience to be a feature of good practice.

20   Course planning and approval is a two-stage process, comprising, first, outline planning approval by the Vice Chancellor's Group and then the production of a comprehensive student handbook following the design process. The audit team noted that there was extensive support for the staff involved and that considerable emphasis was placed on the use of external expertise to inform curricular design.

21   Annual monitoring is based on a risk assessment process. Unit evaluation is also a key component of annual monitoring and includes student feedback and external examiner comment, which inform the subject report. The head of school produces and presents an overarching school annual monitoring report for consideration by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. The audit team noted some variability in the detail of these reports, but was satisfied that the system appeared to be operating well. The team felt that the lack of programme focus within the annual monitoring process, including the opportunity to consider feedback from students on their whole programmes, should be kept under review.

22   Following consideration of school annual monitoring reports by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) produces reports on quality assurance and enhancement, and on external examiners' reports. The Chair of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee produces for the Academic Board a report on resource matters arising from annual monitoring reports, which informs the Board's advice to the Vice Chancellor on the budget.

23   Periodic review of subjects takes place every six years. The focus of periodic review is review as well as the future health of the subject area. The University involves external specialists in the review process. The audit team noted from reading documentation and speaking with staff and students that the periodic review process was very thorough.

24   Feedback from students at the module level occurs across the University. Module evaluations are comprehensive in their coverage of questions relating to the student experience of the module and the results inform annual subject reports. The audit team found that subject teams do not consistently make use of the data available; some are very effective and comprehensive in their analysis, while others are less so.

25   The National Student Survey is examined in detail at institutional level and the outcomes have informed the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy. Other central services operate user surveys and react to the results.

26   The audit team found that the University was making an effective use of student feedback information within its institutional management of learning opportunities. However, the varied use made of module evaluation data at the subject level did not lead to a consistently comprehensive approach. The team considers that it would be desirable for the University to ensure effective and consistent analysis of student data in annual subject reports.

27   It is an institutional policy that there should be student representation on all relevant committees. The University's Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy recognises the contribution made by students to quality enhancement.

28   The audit team confirmed that students are represented on all the major committees, although the University may wish to review student representation on the Academic Quality and Standards Committee's Subcommittee for Collaborative Provision. At the time of the audit, the University had also recently introduced a Student Representatives Steering Committee, a subcommittee of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. In addition, the President of the Students' Union has regular discussions with the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic).

29   At school level, trained student representatives, known as STARs, present the students' views formally at staff-student liaison committees or, in some cases, within school or subject boards. Other less formal methods, including focus groups and direct approaches to staff also operate effectively. The role of students in quality assurance is highly effective in some disciplines, although further development appeared to be necessary in others.

30   Responsibility for student representation arrangements in collaborative provision is delegated to partners. While the audit team saw evidence of student representation in collaborative provision, it considered that it would be desirable for the University to make explicit reference to student representation in the memorandum of cooperation with partner institutions and that partner institutions should be represented on the new Student Representatives Committee.

31   The audit team concluded that adequate student representation mechanisms are in place at institutional and school level to ensure that students have a role to play in quality assurance. However, the team considered that it would be desirable for the University to consider more formal and consistent arrangements to ensure student engagement in quality assurance at subject level.

32   The links between research and scholarly activity and learning opportunities have been integral to the way in which the University has defined itself as a teaching-led university. Staff are required to make explicit reference to how their research activities benefit teaching and learning. The Research Consultancy and Scholarship Committee oversees research matters and undertakes an annual audit of activities within each school, and schools are required to demonstrate how research activity has been related to teaching provision.

33   The audit team found that research and scholarly activity were directly linked to the enhancement of students' learning opportunities and contributed positively to the management of the quality of learning opportunities.

34   The Vice Chancellor is responsible for resources and seeks advice from others with delegated responsibility for particular areas. Resource requirements for new programmes are identified and signed off prior to approval.

35   The Artswork Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning funding has provided additional resources for learning, including the University's six Artswork learning laboratories, the upgrading and adaptation of existing buildings and the provision of new equipment. Funding for library resources, determined initially by historical need, is informed by user surveys and external benchmarks and influenced by new technology, the development of curricula and student numbers.

36   The resource implications resulting from annual monitoring are discussed by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, which reports annually to the Academic Board, identifying priorities. Shortage of space has been identified by staff and students as a recurring theme. Evidence suggested that both currently, and in the recent past, the University was actively seeking ways to overcome space difficulties. The student written submission reported general satisfaction with resources, findings which accorded with Library and Information Services' user surveys.

37   The audit team concluded that the University's approach to the oversight and development of its learning resources makes a positive contribution to the institutional management of learning opportunities.

38   The University has a clear, documented institutional undergraduate admissions policy and entry requirements are set out clearly in the prospectus. All undergraduate and taught postgraduate admissions, including admissions to courses delivered at the partner colleges, are handled centrally by the Registry. For undergraduate programmes where additional selection criteria are applied, typically in the Performing Arts and Art and Design, initial consideration by the Registry is followed by interviews and/or auditions in schools. Applications from candidates who do not meet the basic entry criteria are referred for consideration up the hierarchy of decision-making in the Registry and, if necessary to heads of schools. The audit team considered that the University's admissions policies and procedures are clear, explicit and implemented consistently.

39   At institutional level, student support is managed by Student Support Services, its Head being a member of the Senior Management Team and reporting to the Learning and Teaching Committee.

40   The current Strategic Plan commits the University to a continued high level of student support and an intention to increase the level of support for students who are disadvantaged and students with disabilities, as part of the widening participation agenda. These commitments are reflected in the Learning and Teaching Strategy and in the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy, and the University has a comprehensive policy for disability and equality. Subject annual reporting and a range of surveys are used to inform management reviews of student support.

41   A new, more formalised personal tutor system was introduced for the 2004-05 academic year, offering students tutorial sessions throughout the course. While take up of the system is considered by the University to be somewhat disappointing, the general student view is that staff are very approachable and matters can normally be resolved by direct contact with staff.

42   The University's range of prospectuses, guides and handbooks are comprehensive, informative, easy to use and accurate sources of reference. Students find the subject handbooks to be particularly useful. The on-line student portal contains a wealth of information on student support and students generally find it to be a straightforward, easy to use point of reference. Additional support and guidance is available for international students via the International Activities Office.

43   The University is developing a strategy to address perceived concerns about the employability of students graduating from the University. 'Employability champions' have been appointed within schools to promote and disseminate good practice by embedding employability within the curriculum. As part of this development, a school-based professional and academic development module was intended to be introduced the following academic year to replace the current University-based module, which is considered by students to be too generic and lacking in discipline focus.

44   A number of other student support initiatives, including the Students' Union's Guide to Study and the University's Study Skills Centre have recently been established to support students who require additional study support. The audit team concluded that the level of support for students was appropriate, as was the University's approach to the management of student support.

45   The University's human resource policies and procedures are clearly described and communicated to staff via the human resources website. Central provision for staff development is organised by several University agencies. The School for Development and Participation organises a variety of staff development events, which extend to partner college staff, and the mandatory in-house programme for new and inexperienced teachers. The Graduate School provides development activities for supervisors of research students. Learning and Information Services supplies dedicated staff support for information technology issues.

46   Locally, schools and departments organise development events related to their own specific strategies, which must be congruent with the University staff development strategy. Staff have an annual appraisal, and peer observation of teaching is common practice. The audit team found that the University's approach to staff support and development made a positive contribution to the management of the quality of learning opportunities.

47   Overall, the audit team found that 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.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

48   The Briefing Paper stated that the University is committed to systematic improvement, and that the approach to enhancement is planned and strategic. The Learning and Teaching Committee has developed a Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy for 2006-09, which provides a clear expression of the direction of the many enhancement activities planned and in place.

49   The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy is congruent with the institution's Strategic Plan, its separate Learning and Teaching Strategy and other strategic plans at institutional, school and department levels. The main aims of the Strategy are: to develop, maintain and enhance programmes of study that continue to meet students' needs; to ensure that the quality of the student experience is monitored and enhanced through reflective practice; to encourage the development of innovation in learning and teaching practices; and to encourage the dissemination of good practice in learning and teaching across the University and the sector. The reporting mechanisms vary, but the progress of the Strategy is regularly reviewed.

50   The Artswork Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning has become central to the University's strategy for enhancement in several ways. For example, an Artswork project is to develop models of employability that can be disseminated and embedded within other curricula across the institution. In other respects, the use of management information is another instance where detailed analysis that results in actions for improvement across the institution is carried out. Here, for example, analysis of the views of graduates as expressed in the National Student Survey has led to specific actions, such as the development of policies related to the employability agenda. Projects and activities such as these are indicative of how an ethos to encourage the enhancement of learning opportunities has been developed within the institution.

51   The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy further identifies the dissemination of good practice as an aim of the strategy. For example, the development of a University virtual learning environment to promote independent learning was established, and was led by a group of 'champions' to manage the operation of the system and to disseminate good practice across the institution. Moreover, the audit team found mechanisms to recognise and reward staff for a variety of activities related to good practice in teaching and learning, such as its teaching fellowship and promising researcher fellowship schemes. These schemes demonstrated to the team how the institution positively encourages staff to enhance learning opportunities.

52   The audit team found that the University's institutional approach to quality enhancement was informed by clear strategic direction and was leading to systematic improvements in learning opportunities. The team found the way in which the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning has been incorporated into the institution's strategies to enhance learning opportunities to be a feature of good practice.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

53   The University's collaborative provision is referred to as the Wessex Partnership. Operational responsibility rests with the School for Development and Participation and is overseen by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee through its Subcommittee for Collaborative Provision. The Wessex Partnership Policy and Guidelines (2008) is the definitive document that sets out the procedures for partner and programme approval, monitoring and review. After validation, formal approval of new partnerships and programmes is given by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. The academic and managerial arrangements between the University and the partner institution are formalised in a memorandum of cooperation. Financial arrangements are covered in a separate financial memorandum. For the first three years of a new programme, annual monitoring is undertaken by the University's School for Development and Participation and approved by the Subcommittee for Collaborative Provision, with the outcome being reported to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. An action plan to address any issues of concern is also approved and monitored by the Subcommittee. After three years, the partner takes a more proactive role and is required to produce a self-evaluation document which provides the starting point for the review process. Every three years, the review also considers a number of strategic issues concerning the partnership, including a review of the memorandum of cooperation. The successful outcome of this triennial review is the renewal of the partnership. Six-yearly periodic review is part of the subject-based review of the home school, which is informed by the triennial review of the partner(s). The audit team considered that the additional triennial review provided a robust approach to programme monitoring and partner review.

54   The audit team found the University's arrangements for the approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision to be effective. The team found the robust review mechanisms for collaborative provision to be a feature of good practice.

55   Awards, assessment procedures and regulations for collaborative provision are identical to those for programmes delivered at the University. Where identical programmes are delivered at both the partner and University, the same external examiners are used. Where programmes are only offered by partners, external examiners, nominated by the link school at the University, are appointed.

56   Details of student representation at partner institutions are provided in Section 3 above. The main source of student feedback is from the module questionnaires. The University makes no formal requirement for a staff-student liaison committee in the memorandum of cooperation and the partner can make its own arrangements. Opportunities for students to give their views are available, including direct informal contact with tutors. The audit team considered that it would be desirable for the University to make explicit reference to student representation in the memorandum of cooperation with partner institutions.

57   Partner institutions are responsible for the allocation and quality of the learning resources provided to students. The link tutor carries out regular reviews of the resources, which inform annual review, and helps with staff development. Details of partner colleges' teaching staff are approved by the Subcommittee for Collaborative Provision before they can teach on any collaborative provision programmes. The School for Development and Participation organises staff development events specifically for partner institutions and, in addition, partner staff can attend the University's staff development events. Special arrangements are in place for staff at partner institutions to engage in postgraduate study at the University.

58   The student and staff handbooks for collaborative provision, available on the Wessex Partnership website, provide extensive information. The audit team's view of the accuracy and completeness of the information available to collaborative provision students is considered in Section 7 below. Although students in collaborative provision have access to the support and services provided by the University, take-up appeared to be minimal. Nevertheless, students appeared to be satisfied with the support being provided by the partner institution. The Wessex Summer School, organised by the School for Development and Participation, helps students with the transition from the partner institutions to the University by introducing them to the campus and the support facilities available.

59   The audit team found clear evidence that the management and operation of the University's collaborative provision was appropriate and effective and was referenced to the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

60   The University offers programmes of supervised study leading to research degrees of the University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE). Responsibility for the quality of these programmes rests with the Academic Board, and the Higher Degrees (Research) Committee maintains oversight of the processes. The link with UWE is facilitated through UWE representation on Higher Degrees (Research) Committee and the Head of Graduate School's membership of UWE's Graduate Studies Committee.

61   Although the number of postgraduate research students in some subject areas is small, students seemed generally to feel part of a research community, notably through engagement with the Graduate School's activities, school-based workshops and seminars and similar events at the University of the West of England and elsewhere.

62   The University acknowledged that it does not have the in-house library facilities of a research-intensive university, although it referred to its long-established specialist Art and Design library, and to its ability to enhance its provision through electronic resources. Students spoke positively about the other research facilities provided and clearly valued the graduate Sophia Centre, which helps promote a sense of community and, given current student numbers, provides sufficient resources. Pastoral support is effective and fit for purpose.

63   Some postgraduate research students undertake teaching. Where PhD students are contracted for regular teaching duties, they are treated like any other hourly-paid lecturer, with the full requirement of induction, mentoring, probation, and so on. Some students teach occasional seminars, and for the latter, there did not appear to be any institutional requirement for support or training for this work. If the number of postgraduate research students grows, the University may wish to consider how it can continue to ensure appropriate support in this area.

64   Full admission to postgraduate research degrees entails enrolment and subsequently registration, following Higher Degrees (Research) Committee approval of the student's formal research proposal and the supervisory team. Pre-enrolment discussions ensure that the proposed research area aligns with school expertise and that the necessary resources can be provided. There is comprehensive induction support and information. The audit team found admission and induction processes to be appropriate and satisfactory.

65   Supervisory teams, who must have appropriate experience, are supported by extensive information and guidance in handbooks and online. The University has introduced a Postgraduate Certificate in Research Supervision and Management, the first module of which is compulsory for all 'new' supervisors. Students were highly complimentary about the extent and quality of their supervision, including supervision external to the University.

66   Each academic school presents an annual report and plan on research degree provision direct to the Higher Degrees (Research) Committee and, additionally, students and supervisors are required independently to report annual progress through the school higher degrees tutor, who provides an overview to the school and to this Committee. In 2006-07, the University followed through its commitment to the 2006 QAA review of research degree programmes regarding the provision of more data in annual reporting. The audit team noted that the 2006-07 Higher Degrees (Research) Committee report incorporated a wide range of data.

67   The University provides guidance to students and supervisors on the importance of keeping appropriate records of meetings and other activities. The University has recognised that the research log, which students are encouraged to keep, has not proved effective and is considering a web-based system for recording supervisory meetings and providing a personal developing planning platform for students. The University will wish to continue to press ahead with this project.

68   Students must complete a credit-rated element of their programme known as the '60-credit requirement', based on individual research skill and development needs. Total or partial exemption is available through the accreditation of prior learning. The audit team found that the relevant processes appeared to operate effectively. It was clear that students engaged with the seminars and workshops offered by schools, the Graduate School and the University of the West of England, Bristol.

69   Opportunity for formal feedback from students is offered through representation on local and institutional committees. Informal feedback is gathered through contact with supervisors, the school higher degrees tutor, the head of school and the Head of Graduate School. Student representation functions satisfactorily, with appropriate action taken in response to issues raised by students.

70   Students must successfully complete an interim progression assessment, comprising a research paper and a viva. Students described this assessment as rigorous and useful in helping them to focus their work. The final assessment is examined by a panel with suitable training and independence, the arrangements being approved by the Higher Degrees (Research) Committee and the University of the West of England, Bristol. The audit team considered the assessment arrangements to be appropriate and satisfactory.

71   Students are given full information about the procedures for complaints and appeals.

72   Overall, the audit team formed the view that the arrangements for postgraduate research students were appropriate and satisfactory and met the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes.* The team considered the quality of information provided by the Graduate School for postgraduate research students and supervisors to be a feature of good practice.

Section 7: Published information

73   The Briefing Paper stated that 'a systematic drafting and approval process for printed and electronic published information ensures that information is accurate and complete'. Information produced by collaborative partners is required to be approved by the University, and specified individuals, such as course leaders, provide information on courses to the marketing department. The Head of Marketing and Communications and a Deputy Vice Chancellor (in the case of the main prospectus and website) are responsible for approval.

74   The audit team had access to a wide range of information published by the University. This included prospectuses, module handbooks, programme handbooks and student handbooks. The team was provided with staff and student access to the University website and intranet, where a large body of publications and regulations are available. Production of student handbooks is informed by guidelines and templates, although the team found that some module handbooks varied in depth and detail.

75   The student written submission stated that the University had informed students of what is expected of them in order to succeed on their course, and had ensured that all information is made available on the University website or the virtual learning environment. Students who met the audit team largely confirmed this. Postgraduate research students reported that they were particularly well informed via the range of information they received.

76   In the case of collaborative partners the information reviewed for internal documents was of a similar standard to those found within the University. Investigation of partner websites suggested a generally accurate, but brief explanation of the relationship between the University as the awarding institution and the partner college where the study would be located. However, some aspects of the transfer from Foundation Degree to final-year honours awards at the University were not always well expressed. Partner college websites, for some programmes, did not make sufficiently detailed comment on the University's entry requirements for transferring Foundation Degree students.

77   On the basis of information gained from meetings with students, the student written submission, and the published information read, the audit team concluded that information students receive is accurate and comprehensive. The team considered that it would be desirable for the University to ensure that public information for applicants to collaborative provision published on the websites of its partner colleges makes clear the relationship between the University and the partner, the location of study and the progression and transfer requirements from Foundation Degrees to honours-level study.

78   The audit team found that, overall, reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that Bath Spa University publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

79   The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the use of external members on school boards, contributing to the enhancement of the student experience (paragraph 19)

- the way in which the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning has been integrated into the institution's strategies to enhance learning opportunities (paragraph 52)

- the robust review mechanisms for collaborative provision (paragraph 54)

- the quality of information provided by the Graduate School for postgraduate research students and supervisors (paragraph 72).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for actions that are desirable:

- articulate the institution's strategy for the operation and development of assessment practice (paragraph 14)

- ensure effective and consistent analysis of module evaluations and student data in annual subject reports (paragraph 26)

- make explicit reference to student representation in the memorandum of cooperation with partner institutions and ensure that partner institutions are represented on the new Student Representatives Committee (paragraphs 30, 56)

- consider more formal and consistent arrangements to ensure student engagement in quality assurance at subject level (paragraph 31)

- ensure that public information for applicants to collaborative provision published on the websites of its partner colleges makes clear the relationship between the University and the partner, the location of study and the progression and transfer requirements from Foundation Degrees to honours-level study (paragraph 77).

Appendix

Bath Spa University response to the institutional audit report

Bath Spa University welcomes the Quality Assurance Agency's report and thanks the Agency for the professional way in which the audit was conducted throughout. The University notes the clear and unqualified statement of confidence in the quality and standards of our provision, both now and into the future. The report states that the University has been responsive to the guidance on good practice provided by QAA's Academic Infrastructure, including all sections of the *Code of practice*. No recommendation is outstanding from the previous audit report, or indeed from any of the seven 'engagements' of various kinds, five of them at institutional level, that the University has had with QAA since 2003.

The University notes that QAA ranks recommendations in a hierarchy of 'essential', 'advisable' and 'desirable': the report makes no recommendations in the first two categories for Bath Spa. The recommendations identified as 'desirable' identify no across-the-board omission, but rather urge the University to find ways to ensure the spread of good practice from its best provision to the whole.

The University is grateful to QAA for its identification of features of institutional good practice in a range of key areas in respect of both quality assurance and enhancement, particularly those in areas which relate to key aspects of forward strategy, including the way in which we are capitalising on our Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning to improve provision across the whole University, the continuing extension of collaborative provision, and our plans to gain autonomy in the award of research degrees. We will use these commendations in the continuous improvement of the quality of education we provide for our students.

The University has already begun to address the report's recommendations for action, and in particular will ensure that in the revision of the framework for undergraduate programmes currently under way, we incorporate an explicit University strategy for assessment.

We intend that when we report back to QAA within 18 months, we will be able to report progress in all areas recommended for action and in further outcomes from our strategy for enhancement.