



# Institutional audit

**Bournemouth 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 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 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, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website. The institution will receive the summary, report and annex in hard copy (Handbook for Institutional audit: *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 Bournemouth University (the University) from 1 to 5 December 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 Bournemouth University is that:

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University'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 University'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*. In recent years, the University has conducted a number of major initiatives to enhance its support for postgraduate research.

### Published information

The audit 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 University's planned, systematic and reflective approach to the review of its processes and structures
- the peer-assisted learning scheme, in its development opportunities for student mentors and in the additional support it provides for first-year students

- the peripatetic roles for liaison, advice and support that operate across the University and its partner institutions, serving not only to disseminate information but also to enhance the student experience wherever delivered
- the fully integrated support mechanisms for research students operating across all areas of the University.

### **Recommendations for action**

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

The team advises the University to:

- ensure that the impact of the development of frameworks does not detract from its current ability to maintain appropriate oversight of the standards of awards and the quality of the student experience in individual programmes.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- clarify the balance of activity relating to quality assurance and to quality enhancement within the University's deliberative committees
- monitor carefully the impact of the University's Releasing Potential initiative (a major programme to support staff in their development within the organisation) upon the student experience
- ensure that the development of annual monitoring fulfils its potential with respect to the enhancement of student learning opportunities across the University.

### **Reference points**

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

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

The audit found that Bournemouth 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

1 An Institutional audit of Bournemouth University (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 1 December 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 delivers and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team was Professor S Blandford, Dr P Cardew, Professor T Dugdale, and Mr R Farmer, auditors, and Miss E Smith, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr P J A Findlay, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

### Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The University's Corporate Plan 2006-2012 contains the following Vision for the University in 2012: 'Bournemouth University is a youthful and innovative international institution offering a range of high-quality academic programmes geared to the professions. Our student-centred environment emphasises both intellectual achievement and employability. We are proud of our strength in research and enterprise and the world-class standing of our centres of academic excellence'.

4 The University traces its origins to the early part of the twentieth century with the foundation of the Bournemouth Municipal College. Its more recent history flows from the formation of the Dorset Institute of Higher Education in 1976. This was redesignated as Bournemouth Polytechnic in 1990 and incorporated as Bournemouth University in 1992. The University is located on two campuses within the Bournemouth and Poole conurbation.

5 At the time of the audit, the University had approximately 16,500 students, of which 11,200 were full-time undergraduates, 3,500 part-time undergraduates, and 1,700 postgraduate students. Of these, approximately 2,700 students were studying at a partner institution of the University. The University has six academic schools: the Business School, the School of Conservation Sciences, the School of Design, Engineering and Computing, the School of Health and Social Care, the Media School and the School of Services Management.

6 The University Senate has overall responsibility for advising the Vice-Chancellor on academic matters, maintaining the quality assurance framework and ensuring that the schools fulfil their responsibilities with regard to the educational provision. University-level committees supporting Senate and reporting to it are the Academic Standards Committee, the Education Enhancement Committee, school academic boards, the Research and Enterprise Committee and the Research Ethics Committee. In addition to school academic boards, each school has a school research and enterprise committee, a school quality assurance and enhancement committee, together with framework management teams. The deans lead a management team in each School, supported by a Deputy Dean (Education), a Deputy Dean (Research and Enterprise) and a number of associate deans with specific responsibilities within schools.

7 Recent major developments in the policy and planning of the University have included a review of the curricula, a move to 20 (or multiples thereof) credit units, and a reorganisation of the provision into frameworks. Frameworks involve the academic and administrative clustering of cognate programmes into larger groupings which embrace, where possible, more than one programme. These changes required an intense period of programme review scheduled for 2007-09. The University has also carried out far-reaching reviews of its deliberative committee structure and of its quality assurance framework during 2007-08. This included within its scope the arrangements relating to collaborative provision, aiming to more firmly embed collaborative partnerships within schools, while strengthening the strategic overview of partnership boards.

8 The Corporate Plan presents a framework for the transformation of the University to a more academically-led institution. This has involved a range of initiatives, including significant recruitment of new academic staff, investing in the potential of existing staff through substantial development programmes, and a major PhD scholarship programme. In particular, the audit

team noted the strategic commitment to a 'fundamental change in the nature and engagement of our staff', moving from a staff base of predominantly 'teachers' to one of 'academics'. In 2007, the University launched an associated initiative to support the development of its staff, the 'Releasing Potential' initiative. This had two main streams of investment, supporting innovation in educational practice, and also giving strong encouragement to staff to strengthen the University's research profile by increasing their confidence and productivity in research and enterprise.

9 The University was last audited in 2004 and that audit 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 University has since engaged in a number of other external review activities, including a Collaborative provision audit (2006), a Major Review of healthcare and IQER (Integrated quality and enhancement) (within partner institutions), and the review of a Foundation Degree delivered at a partner further education college. The University provided the present audit team, through its Briefing Paper, with a full account of the actions it had taken in response to the resulting reports. The most significant of these has been a review of Senate committee structures. The team found that the University had fully considered issues arising from all external audit and review activity and had taken appropriate action in addressing matters raised therein. Of particular note was the progress that had been made with respect to the management of collaborative provision.

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

10 Under the overall authority of Senate, the University has an established framework for the management of quality and standards. This is overseen by the Academic Standards Committee. Much of the operation of the framework is done by members of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group, which comprises individuals approved by the Academic Standards Committee who have training and experience of quality matters. Collaborative provision is embedded firmly within schools and is generally subject to the standard processes of validation, annual monitoring and periodic review which operate across the University.

11 Validation, annual monitoring, and periodic review currently operate at framework level, with annual framework monitoring reports being further reflected upon through school quality reports. These together take an overview of the quality assurance at framework level, and thus enable issues to be addressed that may have an impact beyond framework, or even school, level. The University's academic procedures describe the operation of each process and are designed to facilitate a uniformity of approach at school level.

12 The audit team found good examples of these processes in operation through the sampling trails and was able to confirm that there was clear evidence that the University's intention to implement a coherent and integrated structure of monitoring and reporting was being realised. School quality reports, in particular, showed that the opportunity was being taken to focus across a wide range of activity and to draw out matters, both of concern and of good practice, which were of interest outside an individual framework, or school.

13 The curricular changes relating to the introduction of programme frameworks across all the University's schools has led to substantially larger groupings of programmes than was previously the case. The University is aware that consequently its programme-based systems for approval, review, monitoring and external examining require adjustment, and it considers that the development of these frameworks within larger programme areas will support the strategic oversight of quality and standards within a range of interlinked programmes. The audit team considered that the management of frameworks within larger, and more complex, programme structures will require careful implementation. The team noted that appropriate modifications had been suggested by Academic Standards Committee, but the team found that the necessary planning remained to be completed in a number of areas. The team therefore considered it to be advisable for the University to act in a timely manner to make the necessary adjustments to its arrangement for quality management of frameworks, so that its current ability to maintain



appropriate oversight of the standards of awards and quality of the student experience in individual programmes was not put at risk.

14 As a result of the Senate committee review, the Academic Standards Committee has taken a pre-eminent role in the management of the University's framework for quality and standards. At the same time, the recently established Education Enhancement Committee has taken on the brief for enhancement-focused activity. The audit team found that the distinction between the Academic Standards Committee and the Education Enhancement Committee was still subject to some development. The team considered that the University should monitor the relationship between the remits and operation of these two committees, taking care, particularly, to ensure clarity of purpose and action.

15 The University's mechanisms for ensuring that academic standards are secured consist of: approval, monitoring and review procedures that include the involvement of external contributors; assessment policies and regulations; monitoring of progression and completion rates; engagement with external reference points; and the use of external examiners. From an examination of the comprehensive documentation provided through the audit trails, the audit team found that these processes were effective, rigorous and well supported by the Office for Academic Development and Quality. The approval and review process made full use of a wide range of data and demonstrated a positive engagement with external personnel. The introduction of a 'live action plan', an evaluative school quality report process and the periodic school quality audit are all developments that have the potential to strengthen the role of annual monitoring with respect to the enhancement of student learning opportunities. The team would encourage the University to take forward these constructive developments. In doing so it may, in particular, wish to clarify the role of the Education Enhancement Committee in relation to school quality reports (see also paragraph 33). Appropriate emphasis is placed on the input of external examiners in the management and maintenance of academic standards in the University. Every programme leading to an award of the University must have one external examiner, and where there are a team of external examiners for one or more programmes, a chief external examiner may be appointed. In 2007, the Academic Standards Committee determined that new external examiners should be briefed on their role and responsibilities by the Office for Academic Development and Quality, schools and the chairs of boards of examiners.

16 External examiners are required to review all proposed examination papers and the design of course work assessments where assessment is 100 per cent course work. In line with the Independent Marking Policy, examiners review a range of marked assessed work and are required to attend all boards of examiners meetings at which decisions on awards are made. Examiners confirmed that they were satisfied with the conduct and decision of the boards. External examiners are invited to give an oral report at the board of examiners meeting and are required to submit a written report, preferably within two weeks of the meeting. Reports seen by the audit team were generally positive and the report summaries confirmed that the standards set for the awards were appropriate, and the standards of student performance was comparable with those in other higher education institutions.

17 The University has procedures in place for checking and ensuring that programmes respond to the comments of external examiners in their reports. The External Examining Review Group conducts an annual analysis of external examiner reports, which is then reported to the Academic Standards Committee. The analysis identified the very small number of negative reports, and the audit team was satisfied that the University's procedures for addressing these were thorough and effective.

18 In close association with its review of Senate committees, the University conducted a comprehensive review of its quality assurance framework in 2008. The review engaged a range of University staff working in subgroups, which considered best practice at other higher education institutions in a range of areas. Recommendations from the review were discussed in detail at a series of meetings of the Academic Standards Committee, and resulted in a number of

improvements that are being effectively tracked through an updated action plan. Collaborative partnership issues were included in this review. In addition to these substantial system-wide reviews, the University conducts regular annual review of its key procedures, including the evaluative overviews of external examiner reports and programme evaluations. From its examination of the documentation relating to these reviews and from its enquiry in discussions with staff, the audit team concluded that the University's planned, systematic and reflective approach to reviewing its operations comprehensively at the various levels of the institution represented good practice.

19 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**

20 The Academic Standards Committee has traditionally played a key role in overseeing the monitoring process and the management of learning opportunities. It is not yet clear how much of this overview will now fall to the recently established Educational Enhancement Committee and it would be desirable for the University to clarify the balance of activities relating to quality assurance and to enhancement within its deliberative committees. The audit team established that the University makes effective use of external reference points in the management of learning opportunities. Schools maintain extensive employer engagement and have effective and well-supported work placement systems. The University is taking steps to spread good practice in this respect through the coordination of the work of placement advisers and through a regular reporting line through to the Education Enhancement Committee. The annual monitoring process reports effectively on issues relating to learning opportunities, with the reports on programme monitoring identifying programme-related matters and the school quality reports identifying aspects of cross-school and University interest. The team found evidence of extensive discussion of learning opportunity issues at programme and school meetings.

21 Under the overall authority of Senate, the University has established mechanisms for student feedback at programme, school (within academic frameworks) and University levels. Student feedback is fully considered at programme meetings and as part of the monitoring process. The National Student Survey and student unit evaluation data relating to a range of learning opportunity issues are reviewed by schools and by the Academic Standards Committee. Steps are being taken to improve the response rate for unit evaluations. Much work has taken place to ensure that students are trained by the Students' Union as programme, school and University representatives and that the student voice is heard at all Senate-related committees. Quality matters are considered by students in committees, work groups and in open discussion forums held in some schools (coordinated by the deputy deans education). Curricular developments and enhancement are subject to consultation and evaluations involving students at all stages. National Student Survey reports have been evaluated with good effect by central university services and academic schools.

22 The University has developed a Releasing Research and Enterprise programme that facilitates staff engagement in doctoral study and research projects. The University has invested in its policy to ensure that all academic staff are enabled to develop from teachers to academics in the full sense, engaging with the broad range of University-level activity. The strategy has been generally positively received by staff, as has its impact on research into teaching. Scholarly, academic and professional practice are evident in the development and delivery of programmes, and this is recognised by academics and students.

23 Work-placements are firmly embedded in the University's undergraduate programmes, and, while these vary in style and length, the audit team found that there was clarity of understanding in practice. The work of placement advisers ensures that good practice is shared. E-learning is a relatively new undertaking in some schools, but schools are gaining much from

the expertise and experience developed in the University's Centre for Excellence in Media Practice. Validation processes and annual evaluation and reporting mechanisms underpin the quality of curricular developments in this area.

24 The University's arrangements for student admissions processes have been reconfigured following a detailed evaluation process. Registry leads in the management of a devolved model, admissions staff in schools are inducted into the scheme, which is reviewed on an annual basis. Students recognised the quality of support given between application and registration.

25 The University has determined that its resources for learning will be developed and improved over time. The Strategic Plan noted that the estate is bench-marked at the lower end of the sector, and addressing this, together with investment in information and communications technology has been a priority. Campus-based provision in library and computers is considered by staff and students to be of good quality. Partner institutions, guided by link tutors and programme leaders are following the University's lead in ensuring the provision of appropriate learning resources. The virtual learning environment , 'myBU' has been introduced with some recognisable strengthening of learning support, which will be taken further by academic and central development teams.

26 Student support has been central to University development with central student services collaborating with the Students' Union and school teams. The peer-assisted learning scheme is an example of good practice arising from this collaborative approach. Second and third-year students provide mentor support to learning groups within their schools. The scheme enables the mentor to develop transferable skills and to develop as a learner while the mentee has the benefit of advice and support from students who have followed a similar path before them. The scheme has been evaluated at scheme and school level with positive results, and was considered by the audit team to constitute good practice.

27 Staff have also benefited from support and development. Human resource policies ensure that recruitment, induction, appraisal and career progression procedures are appropriate. While new professional bands established under the human resources framework have yet to be fully embedded the 'teachers into academics' strategy is moving at a significant pace. Recent recruitment has engaged more staff with doctorates and established staff are the beneficiaries of the Releasing Potential initiative. Workload balance has been considered alongside the introduction of academic and pastoral training programmes. The University has developed a staff support website and staff are consulted on academic and strategic changes.

28 The audit team was able to confirm that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

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

29 The University has sought to support enhancement in a strategic manner, working from an approach that seeks firmly to embed the assurance of academic standards, while moving away from quality control towards a more enhancement-led approach to the quality assurance of student learning opportunities. This approach is described within the Education Enhancement Strategy, which focuses upon key areas of the student learning, including assessment and feedback, employability and curricular design. Within this strategy, there is particular focus on the first-year experience of students and upon 'front loading' input and engagement within this period to enhance retention and progression.

30 The University has invested significantly in empowering and resourcing staff to enable them to become more academically and professionally focused, working across a range of initiatives aimed at 'Releasing Potential' that encompass such areas as staff workload and research capacity. The audit team saw much evidence of developmental progress in documentation relating to these initiatives and heard positive comments from University staff regarding the level

of investment made by the University. At the same time, students did express concerns that competing pressures on staff time, together with the move towards programme frameworks, had lessened formal contact opportunities, and the team believed it would be desirable for the University to keep this under review.

31 Much of the day-to-day focus of enhancement is channelled through the Education Enhancement Committee, which, while still in its early stages, is set to play an active part in developing, sharing and disseminating practice across the University. Deputy Deans (Education) are members of this committee, as is the Dean of Student Experience, and the audit team heard much of the positive part played by these roles in the development of an enhancement-led approach to the quality of student learning opportunities. The team learnt that, due to a combination of factors, the role of the Dean of Student Experience had been under review and re-evaluation in recent months, and the team considered that the University would benefit by ensuring that this important role, or its equivalent, becomes more fully established in its next phase of development.

32 Annual monitoring processes, particularly the introduction of a more responsive and dynamic process through 'live action plans' at the framework level and school quality reports, have the potential to provide useful management information to support enhancement activity across the University. These processes are still, however, being fully implemented and it was difficult for the audit team to gauge their potential fully. It would be desirable for the University to keep these processes under review and to ensure that development of annual monitoring fulfils its potential with respect to the enhancement of student learning opportunities across the University. In particular, this will realise the intention to involve the Education Enhancement Committee in drawing on monitoring information.

33 Overall, the team found that the University's enhancement strategy was well developed and that structures were in place that would facilitate the sharing of good practice and the facilitation of an enhancement-led approach across all schools. The University had done much to engage all academic staff within this agenda, for instance through its annual Learning and Teaching Conference, and there was clear evidence that staff were enthusiastic about these developments. As already noted, one area in which more clarity would be beneficial, is in the growing role of the Education Enhancement Committee, particularly with respect to the demarcation of activities between this committee and Academic Standards Committee, although this clarity may well emerge quite naturally once the day-to-day activities of each become more firmly embedded across the University.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

34 The University has a wide collaborative portfolio that continues to be of strategic importance to the University. The University identifies three categories of partner institution: the regional Further Education Colleges; bi-lateral partnerships where a single school links with a partner institution; and the associate college, the Anglo European Chiropractic College, which is viewed as a quasi-school.

35 In response to the recommendations made by the QAA Collaborative provision audit in 2006, the University restructured its arrangements for the management of its collaborative provision. All collaborative provision is now located in one of the six schools or being migrated to another institution. From 2008-09, collaborative provision is a standing agenda item for school academic boards and school quality assurance and enhancement committees. The University has formed a Regional Strategic Partnership Board, strengthened the strategic view of partnership boards and established the post of Director of Partnerships and Widening Access to act as a link between partner institutions and schools. Given their recent introduction, it was difficult for the audit team to determine fully the effectiveness of the new arrangements. However, based on documentation seen by the team and meetings with staff, early indications were that these changes, as they bed in, should provide the necessary oversight for the Academic Standards Committee.

36 The audit team was satisfied that, for the most part, the management of collaborative provision through the linked schools adheres to the same quality assurance framework as the campus-based provision, or is well on the way to full alignment with that framework. The arrangements differ only in providing in some aspects a more intensive oversight and communication framework. All prospective partner institutions undergo partnership approval, which can only be granted by the Academic Standards Committee. The team was able to confirm that partner institution programme approval adheres to the standard University procedures, and that these procedures are thorough and appropriate. The approval of programmes with a substantial element of distance learning will include the review of sample learning materials. Annual monitoring and student representation and involvement in the management of quality operate in much the same way as for campus-based provision. There are student representatives on partnership boards and at programme or course team meetings. The University has introduced a procedure for partner institutional review, which was piloted in 2008. It has well-supported arrangements for the academic oversight, administration and communication needs of its partnerships, which include peripatetic University staff and link tutors who maintain ongoing links and support for partner institutions. The team considered that the regular and supportive liaison work of these peripatetic staff constituted good practice in supporting collaborative provision partners. In recognising these strengths, the team also considered that the move to frameworks had significant implications for the quality assurance of collaborative provision, and that it will therefore be important that the University, through the links between partner institutions and schools, to continue to maintain a detailed view of the student experience at the programme level.

37 University staff development activities are open to staff from partner institutions, and to make these more accessible, some sessions may be delivered at partner institutions. There is a University staff post with a specific remit to support higher education-related staff development in partner institutions. The audit team confirmed that additional peripatetic staff are responsible for coordinating the delivery of other services, including additional learning needs and Library Services. It was confirmed in a meeting with students that tutorial support was in line with the campus provision. Students from partner institutions were particularly complimentary about the support they received. The team was also informed that the Dean of Student Experience role included liaison with partner institutions. For example, the Dean of Student Experience arranged for the counselling staff from partner institutions to visit the University to discuss issues that arose when counselling higher education students. Students at partner institutions can register to use the University library and electronic learning resources and they should also have access to myBU although its use is not as widespread as it could be. The development of its use by partners is a priority area for 2008-09.

38 The audit team found clear evidence that the management and operation of the University's collaborative provision was appropriate and effective and took into account the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. The team confirmed that the judgements and recommendations made in other parts of this report apply equally to the University's management of the academic standards and quality of learning opportunities in its collaborative provision.

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

39 In line with its strategic plan, the University has invested heavily in developing student and staff engagement with research, enabling over 70 staff to engage in its 'doctoral track' or complete the Postgraduate Certificate in Research Degree Supervision and funding a large number of research studentships across all schools. This has led to a rapid expansion in postgraduate research student numbers within the University, leading to some pressure on supervision arrangements in some areas.

40 Postgraduate research students are supported within the individual academic schools of the University and within the Graduate School, which provides added support and training for all research students. Postgraduate researchers, met by the audit team, strongly praised the level of support they received, picking out, particularly, the contribution of school research administrators as being of great value. The University also operates across 22 research centres, which provide another focus of activity for researchers and which can serve to strengthen supervisory teams by supporting supervision across cognate academic disciplines. The University has developed a Postgraduate Certificate in Research Degree Supervision, which was highly praised by staff.

41 All postgraduate students are required to participate in an induction programme and undertake an annual 'training needs analysis', which informs their support needs for the coming year. Supervisory teams are led by experienced supervisors, and can include members from outside the University (when there is a specific academic need so to do). Student progression is tracked through an online environment, myBUILD, which also facilitates operational processes and provides an excellent audit trail of research activity. While this is not yet fully utilised in all areas, it should provide excellent support for researchers and supervisors when it becomes more firmly embedded. Postgraduate researchers also receive an annually updated 'Code of Practice for Research Students', which contains all relevant information for them regarding the University procedures relating to research degrees.

42 All postgraduate researchers undertake an annual review and cannot progress within their programme until this is completed. There is a cross-University research-skills programme, and those researchers who undertake teaching duties are also required to participate in a three-day training programme. Additionally, at the BA transfer stage from MPhil to PhD, postgraduate researchers participate in a viva voce examination, after which they receive feedback from their supervisory team. Postgraduate researchers, met by the audit team, spoke highly of this experience.

43 In examining online and paper-based resources, and from meetings with postgraduate researchers, it was clear to the audit team that the University had substantially enhanced the potential for development of its research capacity and supported its postgraduate researchers well. Postgraduate researchers felt themselves to be recognised as participating at academic staff level within their academic schools, to be given the opportunity to share practice and develop skills within research centres and to have a central point of support within the Graduate School. This network provided them with a good overall experience and was supplemented by approachable and supportive supervisory teams, working with able administrators. The team concluded that the wide-ranging and well-integrated support arrangements relating to postgraduate research, and its ongoing encouragement and development, constituted good practice within the University.

## **Section 7: Published information**

44 The audit team had access to a wide range of information published by the University. This included prospectuses, programme handbooks and other student handbooks and guides. The team also viewed the University website and intranet and its portals for undergraduate and postgraduate students. The University has a range of processes that operate to ensure the accuracy of its hard copy and electronically published information. These include, in particular, the identification of specific responsibilities in its New Media team, the work of the Publications Steering Group, and local school procedures and responsibilities.

45 The student written submission concluded that generally the information published by the University was reliable. It considered that the systems in place to ensure that information is up to date and accurate were, for the majority of the time, robust, although there was a reliance by the University on individual programmes to update regularly. The written submission also noted that access to myBU, the University's virtual learning environment, was not always easy for students at partner institutions and this could be a disadvantage. In general, students met during the audit

felt that information on programme, unit or regulatory matters was available through the student handbook, myBU or the website.

46 The University's undergraduate prospectus is now divided into two separate publications, one focused on honours degree courses and the other on Foundation Degree courses. The Foundation Degree prospectus emphasises partner institution provision, facilities and resources, while the honours degree prospectus provides information on campus-based programmes and resources. A separate prospectus is devoted to the postgraduate provision and a separate international prospectus has been introduced for 2009-10. The production of prospectuses is clearly delineated through a general planning process for hard-copy published material and a specific prospectus production process.

47 The University 'Course Search' programme database provides online access to course details for prospective students. The accuracy of essential information such as programme overview, content, entry requirements, subject and title is ensured by only publishing it online when the programme has been approved and recorded by the Office of Academic Development and Quality. Applicants receive the University Welcome Pack. The University Handbook, which includes web-based material, provides a variety of general academic information including details of plagiarism and associated penalties. According to the student written submission and the Partnership Institutional Review reports some students have expressed concern that it was not always clear whether a programme was being offered at the University or partner institutions. The University has taken action to address this: sample prospectus and website material viewed by the audit team makes this distinction clear and separate handbooks are now being issued for partner institutions. International students also receive a special welcome guide.

48 Materials produced by the schools and professional services are subject to local sign-off processes. Within the Schools, the school marketing manager is responsible for the quality of published information. The Publications Steering Group offers advice and guidance on the production of publications. One of the tasks for the Partnerships Marketing Manager is to ensure that marketing information on partner institution websites is kept up to date and correct. Publicity for programmes at partner institutions is governed by specific University protocols.

49 Programme and unit specifications are available electronically in a central location where they can be accessed by all staff. The programme specification forms the core of the programme handbook and it is supplemented with operational and 'student-friendly' guidance. Unit specifications are provided to students either through the handbooks or unit guides as appropriate to the programme. The University is in the process of uploading programme specifications onto its website, where they will be available for public access through the portal. During 2008-09, Academic Services will develop the virtual learning environment, to ensure a minimum information presence for all units. This involves the inclusion of unit specifications.

50 It is a University requirement to produce programme/unit handbooks. Generally there are effective local arrangements to monitor the annual update of these handbooks. However, the University acknowledges that the arrangements for checking partner institution handbooks have been less consistently followed. This is addressed in the most recent version of the Academic Procedures.

51 From 2008-09, programme teams are required to discuss external examiner reports at the first appropriate programme team meeting. Most of the students met by the audit team were not aware of this and University staff acknowledged that there was no alternative process in place that would make the external examiner reports available. However, it is possible for students to request copies of reports. The University is considering a method of communicating external examiner reports to students through myBU, the University's virtual learning environment.

52 The University makes the appropriate returns to the Higher Education Statistics Agency regarding student numbers. These are subsequently uploaded onto the Unistats site. The University has not yet provided the optional commentary on these statistics.

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

## **Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations**

### **Features of good practice**

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

- the University's planned, systematic and reflective approach to the review of its processes and structures (paragraph 18)
- the peer-assisted learning scheme, in its development opportunities for student mentors and in the additional support it provides for first-year students (paragraph 26)
- the peripatetic roles for liaison, advice and support, which operate across the University and its partner institutions, serving not only to disseminate information but also to enhance the student experience wherever delivered (paragraph 36)
- the fully integrated support mechanisms for research students operating across all areas of the University (paragraph 43).

### **Recommendations for action**

55 The team advises the University to:

- ensure that the impact of the development of its programme frameworks does not detract from its current ability to maintain appropriate oversight of the standards of awards and the quality of the student experience in individual programmes. (paragraph 13).

56 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- to clarify the balance of activity relating to quality assurance and to quality enhancement within the University's deliberative committees (paragraphs 14 and 20)
- to monitor carefully the impact of the University's Releasing Potential initiative (a major programme to support staff in their development within the organisation) upon the student experience (paragraph 30)
- to ensure that the development of annual monitoring fulfils its potential with respect to the enhancement of student learning opportunities across the University (paragraph 32).



## Appendix

### Bournemouth University response to the draft Institutional audit report

The audit team's confidence judgements in the University's management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities is a welcome endorsement of ongoing staff effort to achieve the University's 2012 Vision. In particular, the University is pleased to note the many positive features included in the audit report, as well as those specifically identified as features of good practice:

- The University's 'planned, systematic and reflective approach to the review of its processes and structures'. This recognises the significant effort to streamline deliberative structures and introduce more accountability into our processes.
- The Peer Assisted Learning Scheme (PAL). PAL has matured to include all the Schools at the University and is a nationally recognised approach to providing additional support to first year students. PAL also provides significant benefits to the second-year student mentors acting as PAL Leaders.
- The fully integrated cross-University support mechanisms for research students. This reflects the University's ongoing strategic investment in developing its research base.
- Support for our partner institutions through peripatetic roles. This reflects the University's continued commitment to enhance the support provided to staff and students in partner institutions.

The University is already responding to a number of the audit teams' recommendations. In particular, proposals for the future management of frameworks and the programmes within frameworks are being finalised; the key focus from the students' perspective will, however, remain the programme on which they are enrolled. The planned one-year-on review of the new Senate Committee Standing Orders will take on board the recommendation to reflect on the balance between quality assurance and enhancement within the University's deliberative committees. The University will also continue to monitor the impact of the University's Releasing Potential initiative on the student experience. Progress on all these initiatives will be monitored by the University's Academic Standards Committee.

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