



Institutional audit

Coventry 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 Coventry University (the University) from 3 to 7 November 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.

As the University will be subject to a separate audit of its collaborative provision these judgements do not apply to that provision.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University has a strong commitment to quality enhancement, introducing the Quality Enhancement Framework in September 2005. The audit team noted that the new framework had produced a more streamlined approach by establishing a more focused system of course approval and review.

Postgraduate research students

In 2005 the University adopted an Applied Research Strategy with much emphasis on external income generation and working with partner organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors. In 2008 the University introduced a new framework for research and professional degrees. The audit formed the view that the previous arrangements met the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, Section 1: *Postgraduate research programmes*, and the new arrangements, when fully implemented, should strengthen the position.

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 establishment and commitment to the continued appointment of the Student Representative Coordinator that contributes to the improvement in communication between course consultative committees, the student body and the University
- the University's response to the diverse learning needs of its students, as evidenced by the quality of the support offered by bodies such as the Centre for Academic Writing
- the work of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, most notably the role of the teaching development fellows and the investment made by the University in supporting this work
- the ongoing work of the Leadership Action Team for student retention.

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- clarify the delegation of authority between Academic Board and its subcommittees, and strengthen the accountability and reporting arrangements
- establish a formal procedure for the discontinuation of courses that will safeguard the quality of learning opportunities for students
- review the management of placement learning in the light of its intention to expand this type of provision in order to ensure that it remains effective.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- explore with the Students' Union further ways of enhancing the systematic dissemination of information from course representatives to ensure all students have access to key information.

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

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

Report

1 An Institutional audit of Coventry University (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 3 November 2008. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of its awards and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit was carried out using a process developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in partnership with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), GuildHE and Universities UK, and has been endorsed by the Department for Education and Skills (now the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills). The scope of the audit included all of the University's provision leading to its awards except collaborative provision which is the subject of a separate audit.

3 The audit team comprised Professor Sue Frost, Dr John Hostler, Professor Jane Longmore and Dr Stephen Ryrie, auditors, and Ms Louisa Green, audit secretary. Mr Derek Greenaway and Emeritus Professor Peter Hodson, Assistant Directors, Reviews Group, coordinated the audit on behalf of QAA.

Section 1: Introduction and background

4 The University was granted university title in 1992, changing its name from Lanchester Polytechnic to Coventry University. Figures for 2007-08 show that there were 17,446 students studying on its campus in the centre of Coventry, a further 839 students on collaborative degree programmes in the United Kingdom (UK), and about 3,000 drawn from overseas collaborative provision. Adjacent to the main city centre campus is the Technology Park which houses a number of University organisations focused on enterprise activities.

5 The majority of the student population is at undergraduate level; full-time study is the predominant mode with almost two-thirds in this category. Postgraduates, who account for 15 per cent of the total student body, have dedicated space in the Graduate and Continuing Professional Development Centre, which opened in September 2005. The number of UK students drawn from the subregion of Coventry and Warwickshire has declined in recent years from over 40 per cent in 2003-04, to around 34 per cent in 2007-08. Approximately 10 per cent of the student population is from outside the European Union (EU) and a further 6.4 per cent are non-UK students from within the EU.

6 The mission states that the institution is 'a dynamic, enterprising and creative university committed to providing an excellent education enriched by our focus on applied research'.

7 The University has undergone significant organisational, structural and procedural changes since the previous audit, including the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor, major restructuring to create three academic faculties and two academic schools, and the establishment of the '2010 Agenda', encompassing the research and physical infrastructure of the University. There have been increased opportunities for pedagogic development since the University secured funding from HEFCE for three Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in 2005. Following a review of the Estates Strategy in 2007, the University has commenced implementation of an Estates Master Plan.

8 The University's responses to the recommendations of the Institutional audit carried out in 2004 are addressed below in paragraphs 14, 17, 22 and 26.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

9 The University's framework for managing academic standards comprises those parts of the University's committee structure which serve this purpose and a set of policies and procedures developed to support the work of committees and individuals. The University's Academic Board has responsibility for keeping under review the development of the academic work of the University, for formulating proposals for new courses and other academic activities, and for academic standards and the validation and review of courses.

10 In considering the work of the subcommittees to which the Academic Board delegates some of its responsibilities, the audit team noted some confusion and ambiguity in terms of reference and reporting arrangements. The team formed the view that the nature and extent of the authority which the Academic Board had delegated to other bodies in the University is unclear, and that the accountability which the Board requires of these bodies is insufficiently strong.

11 The audit team found evidence that the Quality Assurance Committee effectively discharges its responsibilities in respect of academic standards through receiving and considering reports from faculties.

12 The Strategic Academic Planning Group plays a crucial role in determining and implementing the University's academic strategy by approving new course developments and coordinating the management of new course proposals. The audit team formed the view that it is effective in making and implementing plans for the University's academic development.

13 The audit team formed the view that the Teaching and Learning Committee is a forum for useful debate and discussion about matters affecting the student learning experience, but that stronger links to decision-making bodies would allow the University to derive greater benefit from these discussions.

14 Regarding the responsibility for academic standards in faculties, the audit team saw evidence that boards of study addressed and took action on matters within their remit, and that faculty boards received and gave appropriate consideration to reports received from boards of study. The team formed the view that the University's Quality Enhancement Framework makes an effective contribution to securing standards, and that the Quality Enhancement Unit provides an effective means of securing adherence to procedures and the timely preparation of programme specifications and other forms of documentation.

15 The University has developed a new framework for research and professional degrees, to be operational from 2008-09 onwards, and has expressed confidence that it will enable greater central oversight of student progress and offer more timely feedback to students at key milestones. The audit team encourages the University to ensure expeditious implementation of the framework for all provision.

16 The University has a two-stage process for programme approval. First, approval 'in principle' is granted by the Strategic Academic Planning Group which manages the University's portfolio of programmes and commits resources for course development; then final approval is given by a Review and Approval Panel on behalf of the Quality Assurance Committee. There is a requirement for programme development to be informed by external experts and to take due account of subject benchmark statements and *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ).

17 The procedure for monitoring programmes involves an 'upward cascade' of reporting, from boards of study, via faculties, to the Quality Assurance Committee. The process involves consideration of statistical data, student feedback and comments from external examiners, and there is a requirement to comment on individual modules where the Pass rates are below the norm. Emphasis is given to the identification of good practice and to action planning to address any issues of concern. This approach, together with the arrangements noted in paragraph 14,

addresses the recommendation in the 2004 Institutional audit to improve the consistency and comprehensiveness of annual reports from faculty boards.

18 Like the process of programme approval, periodic review of a programme involves preliminary consideration by the Strategic Academic Planning Group to confirm that a course continues to be viable before it undergoes revision. The process involves a critical review of the course, input from external experts and consideration of student views; the programme specification is revised and updated and is considered against appropriate elements of the Academic Infrastructure. Final approval for the programme to continue is again given by a Review and Approval Panel.

19 There are two main ways in which the University makes use of external advisers and experts to assist in managing the standard and quality of its provision. The first is through the system of external examiners (see paragraph 17); the second is through the involvement of external experts in programme design, approval and review (see paragraphs 16 and 18).

20 The University's regulations specify detailed criteria governing the appointment of external examiners, normally for a period of four years. New external examiners are provided with a comprehensive and detailed handbook that explains their role and duties and provides useful additional information. They are also invited to a briefing session each year.

21 External examiners' reports are submitted to the Registrar and Secretary and are copied to the Chair of the Quality Assurance Committee and to the appropriate faculty. There they are considered by boards of study who report on any issues raised and actions taken, and reply in writing to the external examiners themselves; there are also arrangements for an overview of broader issues at faculty and university level. Student representatives on the boards of study will have the external examiners' reports available to them.

22 The 2004 Institutional audit recommended the University to review its arrangements for securing input from external examiners to decisions relating to the standards achieved by students over an entire course. Since then the University has restructured its curriculum. The report form used by external examiners explicitly requires them to comment on the standards of whole programmes for which they have responsibility.

23 The University takes account of subject benchmark statements and the FHEQ during the processes of programme development and approval and periodic review. All of its programmes and awards link to the FHEQ through its curriculum frameworks and regulations. It takes account of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)* by producing an annual report on its position with respect to each section and Precept, taking particular note of changes as sections of the *Code* are revised.

24 The University makes consistent use of a detailed template for programme specifications which includes all the information recommended by the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*. It also includes a detailed curriculum map, in which the contribution of each module to the learning outcomes of the programme, and to the development of a range of generic skills and capabilities prescribed by the University, is clearly specified.

25 The University has many interactions with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, through formal reviews and (re)accreditation of its programmes and through ongoing consultation and collaboration. The primary responsibility for managing these interactions rests with course teams: through the annual monitoring process, boards of study are made aware of any issues arising in relation to the expectations of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, and agreed actions are tracked through to completion.

26 The 2004 Institutional audit recommended the University to enhance its central overview of professional, statutory and regulatory body reports. The University had initially assigned responsibility for this task to its Employment and Enterprise Enhancement Steering Group, but that did not meet with sufficient frequency. At the time of the audit the University had added a requirement to report on professional, statutory and regulatory body activity within the normal process of annual monitoring and had established a subgroup of the Quality Assurance Committee to maintain specific oversight of professional, statutory and regulatory body reports.

27 The University's approach to the assessment of students is set out in an assessment strategy which is supplemented by clear and comprehensive assessment regulations. Within this framework, the process of assessment is overseen by subject assessment boards and programme assessment boards, both of which include external examiners. Subject assessment boards determine the results of assessment, module by module, within a given subject area, while programme assessment boards decide on the progression of students through a course and approve the eventual award. The University conducts annual briefings for staff involved in subject and programme assessment boards to promote consistency of practice and ensure that those concerned are aware of changes to regulations or procedures.

28 The student records database, UNIVERSE, holds information about student academic attainment, and progression data and award classifications are generated for assessment boards in line with the relevant regulations. Statistics are also produced to inform the annual monitoring of provision.

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

30 As Coventry University will be subject to a separate audit of its collaborative provision, this judgement does not apply to that provision.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

31 As described in Section 2, the University has a system for keeping abreast of developments in the *Code of practice* and for considering the implications for its own practice. An annual summary of these issues is considered at the Quality Assurance Committee and draws on reports from each of the faculties, thus ensuring that an appropriate degree of institutional oversight and consistency is maintained. Paragraphs 25 and 26 also describe how the University has established a mechanism to maintain central oversight of its interactions with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

32 The University's procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review have been described in Section 2. They contribute to the management of learning opportunities and the enhancement of programme quality through the input of external advisers, the consideration of student feedback, and a focus on planned learning outcomes and the acquisition of specified skills and capabilities.

33 The audit team heard that careful consideration is given whenever programme closure is considered to protect the interests of students. However, from documentary evidence and its meeting with senior staff, the team learned that the University did not have in place a formal procedure for programme closure or withdrawal (as recommended by the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review, Precept 9*), and the team recommends that the University establishes a formal procedure for the discontinuation of courses.

34 The University places great importance on the contribution of student representation to quality assurance and has put in place a well thought out framework for ensuring that there is a student contribution to quality management. This includes membership on key committees, course consultative committees and each course of study. Matters raised by students, and any actions taken as a result, are considered by boards of study as part of the process of annual

monitoring, and are thus fed upwards (if appropriate) to faculties or schools and the University. The system is generally effective but the students' experience of their representative system is variable. The University understands the need to strengthen the participation of student representatives and intends to continue the role of Student Representative Coordinator. The audit team supports the good practice created by the activities associated with this role. The team also recognises the importance the University places on representation and recommends that there should be further work undertaken, jointly by the University and the Students' Union, to ensure the effective dissemination of key information from student representatives to their fellow students.

35 The University collects and uses student feedback to assist with the management of learning opportunities through its arrangements for student representation and through student surveys and questionnaires, including the National Student Survey. The University makes use of data from three types of student survey. One (the most pertinent in the present context) is a survey that seeks anonymous feedback on every module and course each year. Previously paper based, this is now (since 2006-07) conducted electronically. A second source is a biennial student satisfaction survey which uses an established methodology to gather data on students' experience of the University's provision and its facilities. The data are broken down by programme, as well as by factors such as gender and mode of study. The third source is the National Student Survey which publishes data on the views of final-year students.

36 The most recent student satisfaction survey (2008) indicated that there was student dissatisfaction in relation to the management of placements. In particular, there was significant criticism of the mechanisms for finding placements and general unhappiness with the support and advice during placements in some subject areas. In other subject areas the placement mechanisms work well. The audit team came to the view that the current arrangements for managing work placements needs strengthening to meet the University expectations for its students in some subject areas at the current time. In the light of the University's plans for significant expansion, the team advises the University to take action to ensure that staff and students understand the current definitions of 'work placement' and that there are sufficiently robust mechanisms in place for management of student placements.

37 The University has identified the development of applied research as one of its core objectives and applied research is a central theme of the University's Research Strategy. Part of this strategy is designed to ensure a link between research and scholarship in ways that have application in the learning environment.

38 The University recognises the need for additional academic support, given the diverse range of students' prior learning experience. The Centre for Academic Writing was established in 2004 to provide enhanced individual support and guidance. It was clear to the audit team that students see this as one of their most useful support mechanisms. The University recognised the value of this type of support for learning and identified the need for specialised support in other areas of core skills development. The strategic oversight of and commitment to enhance the learning environment with this focused support, together with the evidence of positive outcomes for student learning, were recognised by the audit team as an example of good practice.

39 The University has developed a number of effective programmes to be delivered online and through distance learning. The approval and support mechanisms that have been used are appropriate and reflect the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. The University could achieve greater consistency of new distance-learning courses through formalising its additional arrangements for the development, approval, support and examining of this mode of delivery.

40 The Learning Resource Strategy is derived from the Teaching and Learning Strategy and investment has been made to ensure that resource investment underpins teaching and learning and quality enhancement. Benchmarks are used to identify areas of per capita spend in key areas including the library and IT Services.

41 The University does not have a discrete admission policy but embeds its approach to admissions within the regulations and frameworks for courses and programmes. The management and oversight of recruitment and admissions is located in three separate departments of the University: the Recruitment and Admissions Office; the International Office; and the Graduate and Continuing Professional Development Centre.

42 There is a commitment to make courses available to under-represented groups, and the audit team heard from students about the great effort made to give opportunities to all, and recognised the measures to create progression and access opportunities that are making a difference for under-represented groups.

43 One of the issues of concern to the University and to the Students' Union is the poor retention and progression of students in some courses, while other courses have excellent completion rates. The University has put in place a number of additional mechanisms including comprehensive support through the Centre for Academic Writing and other centres for skills development. The audit team commends the work of the Leadership Action Team in its systematic approach to reviewing the causes of attrition from courses and the development of relevant action plans that are starting to have an impact.

44 The arrangements for student support are generally effective. While there is evidence of good practice and support in the academic guidance and supervision, further attention needs to be given to the implementation of the personal tutor system for all students. University standards for student personal tutoring have been put in place and are being implemented in the current academic year to address this concern.

45 The University has invested significantly in staff development that supports the corporate plan. There is a well thought through framework for the selection, appointment and induction of staff, and a process of annual development review that links to key themes in the University. Staff have available considerable support and access to a wide range of materials, conferences and resources that enhance understanding of pedagogy and skill development in teaching, learning and assessment. New initiatives such as flexible learning programmes are well supported with advice and development from teaching development fellows and the e-Learning Unit support team. A peer observation of teaching system is in place and all academic staff are expected to participate in an annual development and performance review.

46 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.

47 As the University will be subject to a separate audit of its collaborative provision this judgement does not apply to that provision.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

48 The University embeds the process of enhancement within institutional structures by basing it on the University's Corporate Plan and, specifically, on the 2010 Agenda that sets out objectives for achievement in the years leading up to 2010, and which provides the framework for the University's approach to quality enhancement. Evidence from the student satisfaction survey, in particular, is central to plans for the enhancement of the student experience.

49 As an example of the approach to enhancement, the University has developed plans for improving progression and retention rates. The audit team saw evidence of retention strategies in faculties including activities based on identification of 'at-risk' students, student tracking, attendance monitoring, and pedagogic developments.

50 The University's Learning and Teaching Strategy identifies three key areas for enhancement within the context of the 2010 Agenda, specifically: enhancing the student learning experience; enhancing the University's 'authority to teach'; and enhancing its organisation for teaching. As noted in paragraph 45, the role of the teaching development fellows has been created to contribute to the enhancement of learning and teaching, and their work is identified as good practice by the audit team. However, the team found little evidence that the objectives of the Learning and Teaching Strategy were a key driver in determining the manner in which academic staff approached their roles, nor that the Teaching and Learning Committee had oversight of the implementation of the strategy in the individual faculties' learning and teaching strategies.

51 Since 2006-07 the University has conducted thematic audits with a view to evaluating the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures and identifying and spreading good practice within the institution. The audit team formed the view that the thematic audits form useful contributors to the dissemination of good practice.

52 The annual summary of the reports of external examiners, prepared by the Registrar and Secretary, provides a useful and detailed statement of themes arising in those reports, encompassing both on and off-campus provision, and enables institutional oversight of good practice identified by external examiners, and of areas of concern for which remedial action might be called for.

53 The University has a variety of means for supporting the development of teaching staff, including the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Professional Practice for newly-appointed staff; a Leadership Development Programme to enhance academic leadership across the institution; and a pay and reward scheme for staff. The Centre for the Study of Higher Education plays an important role in helping to enable institutional enhancement through staff development. Teaching development fellows are also regarded by the University as playing a key role in the implementation of its Learning and Teaching Strategy. The development of the curriculum is supported by the teaching development fellows scheme, supporting innovation and assisting in the application of pedagogical research. The audit team formed the view that the Centre for the Study of Higher Education and the impact of the work of the teaching development fellows were making an effective contribution to the University's enhancement agenda and were a feature of good practice. Induction and mentoring are offered to all newly appointed staff, and peer observation is offered for all teaching staff, although the University accepts that there is variability in the uptake of these.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

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

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

55 The University acknowledges the role of postgraduate research students in creating a vibrant research environment and has taken recent action to enhance the framework for supporting such students. The new framework was introduced at the start of 2008-09. Research students expressed a strong level of awareness of the new framework after a consultation process in which some of them had been involved. The audit team formed the view that the previous arrangements met the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, and the new arrangements, when fully implemented, should strengthen the position.

56 The responsibility for monitoring the maintenance of academic standards has been that of the Research Degrees Committee and the faculty research degree subcommittees. The Annual Report of the Research Degrees Committee shows that it has given careful attention to a range of issues in respect of research degrees and of support for students and supervisors.

57 From 2008-09 the University has adopted programme specifications for programmes leading to the award of a research degree. The specifications provide a full and detailed description of the required outcomes of a research degree programme and of the programme of study which a student will be expected to follow in order to achieve them. It specifies also the modules which a student is required to complete alongside the research programme, including a module in Research Methods taken by every student.

58 The selection and admission of students has been carried out within faculties, normally by academics who, for successful candidates, formed the basis of the supervisory team.

59 The audit team heard that the University's statement of the Postgraduate Research Degree Student Entitlement provides a helpful guide for research students. The team also heard from students that their experiences of induction had been somewhat varied and that not all events had been suitably tailored to the needs of research students. The University is taking steps to address this.

60 The Centre for the Study of Higher Education runs training workshops for supervisors. Their mode of delivery has been evolving over the past two years in response to perceived needs and to address a problem of poor attendance. A survey of the experience of research students in 2007 found that students were very satisfied with the quality of supervision.

61 The University has established a new system for monitoring the progress of students. The audit team heard from research students that they had a positive view of the new Progress Review Panel system, and that they valued the opportunity for annual feedback and discussion.

62 The University requires research students to carry out study of research methods as well as relevant subject-specific material: the 10-credit module in Induction and Research Methods is delivered at various times during the year; the student selects appropriate subject-specific modules by agreement with the Director of Studies.

63 Recognising that most research students are expected to carry out some form of teaching while studying at the University, the University has determined that training should be provided to such students in order to ensure that standards are met. The audit team encourages the University to ensure all research students participate in this training before teaching.

64 The views of research students are expressed in the Student Satisfaction Survey and have led to the preparation of comprehensive and detailed faculty-based action plans approved by each faculty research degrees subcommittee and noted by the Research Degrees Committee.

Section 7: Published information

65 There are clear project plans for the production of the University's prospectuses which include arrangements for checking the accuracy of this material. The University's public website also includes information such as programme specifications, assessment regulations and guidance for external examiners. A number of pages of this public website are offered in different languages to serve the needs of international applicants. The University makes all of the information detailed in Annex F of HEFCE, *06/45, Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes*, publicly available as well as uploading the required data on to the Unistats website.

66 The University published a Student Charter for the first time in 2007-08, outlining a set of common expectations of students as well as academic, support and recreational services. The audit team concluded that the University met the expectation specified in its Student Charter that it will 'maintain high standards of clarity and accuracy in its printed and on-line communications'.

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

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

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

- the establishment and commitment to the continued appointment of the Student Representative Coordinator that contributes to the improvement in communication between course consultative committees, the student body and the University (paragraph 34)
- the University's response to the diverse learning needs of its students, as evidenced by the quality of the support offered by bodies such as the Centre for Academic Writing (paragraph 38)
- the ongoing work of the Leadership Action Team for student retention (paragraph 43)
- the work of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, most notably the role of the teaching development fellows and the investment made by the University in supporting this work (paragraph 53).

Recommendations for action

69 The audit team advises the University to:

- clarify the delegation of authority between Academic Board and its subcommittees, and strengthen the accountability and reporting arrangements (paragraph 10)
- establish a formal procedure for the discontinuation of courses that will safeguard the quality of learning opportunities for students (paragraph 33)
- review the management of placement learning in the light of its intention to expand this type of provision in order to ensure that it remains effective (paragraph 36).

70 It would be desirable for the University to:

- explore with the Students' Union further ways of enhancing the systematic dissemination of information from course representatives to ensure all students have access to key information (paragraph 34).

Appendix

Coventry University's response to the Institutional audit report

Coventry University welcomes the publication of its Institutional audit report which indicates that confidence can be placed in the academic standards of awards offered by the University. The University is also gratified that the soundness of its approach to the management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students, including future plans, is recognised.

The University has noted that a number of areas of good practice were identified by the audit team and have been referred to in the body of the audit report. The University is particularly pleased that the Quality Assurance Agency have continued to acknowledge the ongoing work conducted to support the overall student experience at Coventry, for example through the appointment of the Student Representative Coordinator to further aid communication between the students, Students' Union and the University, the work of the Leadership Action Team focussing on student retention and the work of bodies such as the Centre for Academic Writing to support the diverse learning needs of students. It is also pleasing that the audit team have drawn attention to the University's strong commitment to quality enhancement, with the introduction of the Quality Enhancement Framework and the resultant streamlined approach to course approval and review.

The University acknowledges the recommendations for action, some of which have already been actively addressed and others that will be subject to further development during 2009/10.

- Following a period of consolidation in terms of academic developments, and reflected within the discussions held within Academic Board, the University will shortly be adopting a new Teaching and Learning Strategy covering the period 2010-2015 and it is anticipated that this will result in increased activity within this Committee and those which report into it.
- The University has already put in place a formal procedure for the discontinuation of courses which will ensure that the quality of learning opportunities for students are formally safeguarded as they have been routinely in practice.
- The University is committed to providing appropriate placement learning opportunities to students. There are initiatives already in place in each Faculty. For example, through the Enterprise, Employability and Internship Unit based within the Faculty of Business, Environment and Society, the Student Experience Enhancement Unit located within the Faculty of Engineering and Computing and the Creative Futures Unit in the Coventry School of Art & Design. A new Mobility and Placement Team is to be established to provide support to home students seeking international placements, and to EU and overseas students seeking work placements in the UK.
- The role of Student Representative Coordinator is continuing and the University is continuing to work with her and the Students' Union to further enhance the manner in which information is regularly and systematically disseminated to students.

In conclusion, the University is appreciative of the constructive approach adopted by the audit team, and of the positive outcome of the audit process, which endorses the good practice already in place and, in many respects, echoes the University's own commitment to continue to enhance the quality of the student experience.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000
Fax 01452 557070
www.qaa.ac.uk

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