

Edge Hill University

SEPTEMBER 2006

Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) exists to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education (HE) qualifications and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of HE.

To do this QAA carries out reviews of individual HE institutions (universities and colleges of HE). In England and Northern Ireland this process is known as institutional audit. QAA operates similar but separate processes in Scotland and Wales.

The purpose of institutional audit

The aims of institutional audit are to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges are:

- providing HE, awards and qualifications of an acceptable quality and an appropriate academic standard, and
- exercising their legal powers to award degrees in a proper manner.

Judgements

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 quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards
- 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.

These judgements are expressed as either **broad confidence**, **limited confidence** or **no confidence** and are accompanied by examples of good practice and recommendations for improvement.

Nationally agreed standards

Institutional audit uses a set of nationally agreed reference points, known as the 'Academic Infrastructure', to consider an institution's standards and quality. These are published by QAA and consist of:

- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*, which include descriptions of different HE qualifications
- *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects
- guidelines for preparing programme specifications, which are descriptions of the what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study. They outline the intended knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes of a student completing that programme. They also give details of teaching and assessment methods and link the programme to the FHEQ.

The audit process

Institutional audits are carried out by teams of academics who review the way in which institutions oversee their academic quality and standards. Because they are evaluating their equals, the process is called 'peer review'.

The main elements of institutional audit are:

- a preliminary visit by QAA to the institution nine months before the audit visit
- a self-evaluation document submitted by the institution four months before the audit visit
- a written submission by the student representative body, if they have chosen to do so, four months before the audit visit
- a detailed briefing visit to the institution by the audit team five weeks before the audit visit
- the audit visit, which lasts five days
- the publication of a report on the audit team's judgements and findings 20 weeks after the audit visit.

The evidence for the audit

In order to obtain the evidence for its judgement, the audit team carries out a number of activities, including:

- reviewing the institution's own internal procedures and documents, such as regulations, policy statements, codes of practice, recruitment publications and minutes of relevant meetings, as well as the self-evaluation document itself
- reviewing the written submission from students
- asking questions of relevant staff
- talking to students about their experiences
- exploring how the institution uses the Academic Infrastructure.

The audit team also gathers evidence by focusing on examples of the institution's internal quality assurance processes at work using 'audit trails'. These trails may focus on a particular programme or programmes offered at that institution, when they are known as a 'discipline audit trail'. In addition, the audit team may focus on a particular theme that runs throughout the institution's management of its standards and quality. This is known as a 'thematic enquiry'.

From 2004, institutions will be required to publish information about the quality and standards of their programmes and awards in a format recommended in document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*, published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The audit team reviews progress towards meeting this requirement.

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A report, in lieu of institutional audit, based on enquiries undertaken in academic years 2004-05, in connection with Edge Hill College of Higher Education's (now Edge Hill University) successful application for taught degree awarding powers.

Summary

Introduction

Following an application by Edge Hill College of Higher Education (the College) to the Privy Council seeking the grant of its own taught degree awarding powers, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) was asked to advise the Privy Council as to whether such powers should be granted, based on the Government's criteria. A team of QAA assessors visited the College in 2004-05 to review the College's application. Following scrutiny of the institution's application and QAA's subsequent recommendation to the Privy Council, the University College was granted taught degree awarding powers in November 2005 and subsequently granted university status and the title of Edge Hill University.

To arrive at its conclusions the assessor team reviewed quality assurance procedures in operation, spoke to members of staff throughout the College, to current students and it also read a wide range of documents relating to the way the College manages the academic aspects of its provision.

At the same time as the College was undergoing QAA scrutiny, it was also due to be engaged in a QAA institutional audit. The purpose of audit is to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards it offers. Audit leads to a judgement of confidence in the management of the quality and standards of the awards being offered by the institution. However, when an application

for taught degree awarding powers has been successful, it can also be concluded, on the basis of the evidence reviewed, that a judgement of broad confidence can be made on the management of quality and standards, therefore no further institutional audit visit is required.

Academic standards is a way of describing the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the UK.

Academic quality is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate teaching, support, assessment and learning opportunities are provided for them.

This report provides a summary of the findings of the assessor team, focusing on those areas that are relevant to institutional audit. The report also highlights some matters that a future institutional audit team may wish to pursue.

Outcome of the scrutiny

As a result of its enquiries, the view of the assessor team is that:

- broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the College's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards.

In due course, the institutional audit process will include a check on the reliability of the information set published by institutions in the format recommended in the Higher Education funding Council for England's document (*HEFCE 03/51*), *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*. At the time of the taught degree awarding powers scrutiny the College was alert to the implications of the document *HEFCE 03/51* and was moving in an appropriate manner to fulfil its responsibilities in this respect.

Main report

Introduction: Edge Hill College of Higher Education

1 The contents of this report reflect the position of the then Edge Hill College of Higher Education (the College or Edge Hill) in August 2005, at the conclusion of the scrutiny of its application for taught degree awarding powers (TDAP). Edge Hill was founded in 1885 as the United Kingdom's first non-denominational teacher training college for women. Initially based in the Edge Hill district of Liverpool, the College moved to a new campus in Ormskirk in 1933. In 1960 Edge Hill became a co-educational provider of teacher education and training, diversifying its provision to include training for the National Health Service in 1968. Subsequent developments included the introduction of a broad range of undergraduate degrees in the 1970s; the assimilation of Chorley College of Education in 1980; the creation of an independent corporation under the 1988 Education Reform Act; and the assimilation of the Sefton School of Health Studies in 1993. Edge Hill's academic relationship with the University of Lancaster dates back to 1975 when it became a validated partner of the University. In 1995 Edge Hill gained accredited status from the University. The re-accreditation arrangements with the University were renewed for a further five years following a February 2005 re-accreditation exercise. In addition to the Ormskirk Campus, the College has two campuses at Aintree and Chorley. The Faculty of Health is based at the former and the Faculty of Education's continuing professional development (CPD) work is located at the latter. In 2004-05 the College employed 375 academic staff and had 14,619 students.

2 The College submitted an Application which described its academic structures and strategies for assuring the standards of awards and the quality of the student learning experience. It also indicated the nature and extent of the preparation for scrutiny, which had included staff, student, governing body

and, latterly, external consultants. The Application drew particular attention to four major themes, namely: the planning and validating of new programmes of study; the effectiveness of the deliberative structure; external examiner nomination mechanisms; and the effectiveness of annual monitoring and review.

3 The assessment for TDAP was conducted through reading the Application; scrutinising extensive documentation (including programme documents and agendas, minutes and papers of College committees) submitted to the assessor team both in advance and during the year of assessment; private briefing meetings; visits to the College; observation of formal committee meetings, validation and review events, and assessment and progression boards; and structured discussions with staff, students and external interest groupings. This evidence provided the body of evidence upon which decisions were made regarding the award of TDAP, and which has been subsequently used to inform the writing of this report.

4 A Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) audit team visited Edge Hill in January 1996 and noted that the College's quality assurance framework was still evolving. This was attributed to the revised school structure (established in 1993) and the attainment of accredited status from the University of Lancaster (see paragraph 1 above). The HEQC team concluded that, while many of the individual elements within the quality assurance arrangements appeared to be effective, the number of layers in the system and the proliferation of new structures might detract from the potential effectiveness of the whole. This was reflected in some discrepancy between the College's quality assurance arrangements as described in the Academic Quality Handbook, and as practised. Notwithstanding the external links within the School of Health Studies and the School of Teacher Education, the HEQC team highlighted the considerable importance of promoting, coordinating and disseminating external awareness across the schools in developing a more self-critical culture and informing quality enhancement within the College.

5 The HEQC audit team observed that the College would need to work towards a more consistent quality of experience for students on its three main campuses in order to fulfil its commitment to equal opportunities. The HEQC team considered that the evident personal commitment to quality and standards, and enthusiasm of the staff was a major strength of the College. It found considerable evidence of a cohesive, consensual and caring community providing a positive student experience, especially in terms of learner support. The HEQC team commended the College for the effectiveness of its Academic Quality Handbook in disseminating knowledge of quality assurance arrangements; the enthusiastic and committed participation by staff in the College's evolving quality assurance system; the involvement of library staff in consideration of the resource implications of new course proposals; the training provided for chairs and members of validation panels; the high level of communication supplied by the campus network, including the widespread dissemination of innovations in teaching and learning; the active approach of the Library, Student Services and the Careers Service in supporting students and gathering feedback; the implementation and monitoring of the equal opportunities policy for both staff and students, especially in terms of the induction week for first-year students, the Lancashire Widening Access Project and the inclusion of part-time and support staff in induction and staff development; the good practice in two course handbooks which provided helpful advice and information to students on assessment matters; the provision and monitoring of a substantial staff induction programme; and the procedures for ensuring the accuracy and quality of the prospectus and promotional video.

6 The institution's performance in Ofsted subject, academic and major reviews is sound. The College was actively pursuing the development of an action plan to its recent major health review during the assessment scrutiny. The report of the review was strong. The College has been subject to eight Ofsted inspections and reviews in the 2004-05

academic session. Four short inspections were undertaken in Design Technology, History, Mathematics and Music. In each case, 'good' or 'very good' grades were awarded (the reports of these inspections had yet to be published at the time of the assessor team's visit). One inspection focused on emerging standards nationally in new vocational Postgraduate Certificate in Education routes (no institution-specific report was to be produced but the findings feeds into a survey undertaken by Ofsted). The College has also been subject to two full inspections of its initial teacher training programmes in Information Technology (IT) and Religious Education (RE). The College was awarded grade 2 (good) for both teaching and standards for its IT provision, grade 1 (very good) for teaching, and grade 2 for standards in respect of its RE provision. The College was also awarded grade 1 for the management and quality assurance of its secondary initial teacher training provision. In addition, during 2003-04 the College was subject to four QAA academic reviews of provision, all of which had positive outcomes.

Institutional processes

Institutional structure

7 From 1993 to 2003, the College's academic provision was based on five schools: Education, Health Studies, Humanities and Arts, Management and Social Sciences, and Sciences and Sport. A review of the organisational structure in the 2002-03 academic year indicated that, while Education and Health Studies were large enough to have developed a significant administrative infrastructure, the same did not hold true for the remaining three schools. This was considered to be inhibiting the development of the smaller schools, each with an average of less than 45 academic staff. At the same time, the College took the opportunity to bring together all of its initial teacher training (ITT) provision (some of which had been located within the three smaller schools) under the direct management of the School of Education. As a consequence of the review, the College adopted a three faculty

structure: Education; Health; and Humanities, Management, Social and Applied Sciences (HMSAS). Education and Health have matrix structures while HMSAS has a departmental structure. The review also led to the academic administration being strengthened in the three faculties and the creation of the new post of Academic Secretary. The College commissioned an experienced external senior academic as a consultant to undertake a review of the impact and effectiveness of the revised structure after its first year of operation in autumn 2004. The *Review of Academic and Administrative Structures: Report and Recommendations (2004)* (hereafter the Gower Review) made recommendations of a mainly minor nature.

8 In 2003-04, the full-time equivalent student and academic staff numbers in each faculty were as follows: Education (2,800 students and 114 academic staff); Health (2,000 students and 125 academic staff); and HMSAS (3,170 students and 136 academic staff). The College's Application (for TDAP) referred to Edge Hill's position as 'a major regional supplier of education and training for the Health service' and indicated that, since September 2004, it had also become 'the United Kingdom's largest trainer of Secondary Teachers'. HMSAS, which has assumed responsibility for the College's BA/BSc modular undergraduate scheme, was formed from the former Schools of Humanities, Management and Social Sciences, and Sciences and Sport. Each faculty is headed by a dean, and associate dean posts have also been introduced.

9 Edge Hill was allocated an award under the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) initiative in 2004-05 on the basis of a proposal for supported on-line learning for students using technology for information and communication in their education (SOLSTICE). The initiative is orientated towards widening access by making learning opportunities available flexibly, including from the workplace. It is focusing initially on enhancing student access (from a range of disciplines and contexts including public services) to opportunities for lifelong learning.

10 The institution has developed a governance model which recognises the distinctive contribution of both the deliberative and executive functions. Based upon the principle of 'dialogic accountability', the model implies mutual accountability of staff and their line managers, and of committees and groups spanning the executive and deliberative structures. The College has sought to involve the widest range of staff in shaping and informing academic development with a view to improving decision-making and promoting collective ownership of decisions. The assessor team noted that, over the last three to four years, the College has developed significantly to become an increasingly mature and confident institution, leading to greater independence from the University of Lancaster.

11 The Board of Governors is ultimately responsible for the strategic direction and character of the institution and a range of mechanisms is in place to ensure that it is informed of developments within the College, for example, through receipt and discussion of Academic Board minutes in addition to regular reports from members of the Directorate. The Directorate consists of the Director and Chief Executive; Director of Academic Affairs (DAA); Director for Students and External Relations (DSER); and the Director of Resources (DR). Reporting to the Chief Executive, the DAA, DSER and DR are each responsible for a cross-functional team of senior managers with academic provision, academic support or service delivery responsibilities.

The institution's framework for managing quality and standards

12 Subsequent to a major internal review of the Academic Board committee structure and constitution in 2003, boards and committees now report to the Academic Board as follows: Academic Planning Committee (APC); Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC); Equality, Widening Access and Student Support Committee (EWASSC); Faculty Boards (Education, Health and HMSAS); Research Committee; and the Research Degrees

Committee. AQSC came into existence as a result of the 2003 review (see above, paragraph 7) when it replaced the former Academic Standards Committee. AQSC's terms of reference reflect its responsibility for academic regulations, the approval of annual monitoring reports and the institutional annual quality report and action plan.

13 Three subcommittees report to AQSC: External Examiners (EESC); Quality Risk Assessment (QRASC); Teaching, Learning and Assessment (which had previously been a committee of the Academic Board but was found by the 2003 review to suffer from a lack of clarity relating to its remit in relation to assessment issues involving academic standards). As such, it was re-established as an AQSC subcommittee to 'ensure the channelling of all quality and standards matters through that committee'. Two subcommittees report to EWASSC (which was formed following the 2003 review recommendation to merge the former Equal Opportunities Committee and the Recruitment, Access and Student Support Committee) as follows: Widening Access, Retention and Progression; and Student/Staff Partnership. Programme boards report to the relevant faculty board. The Gower Review (2004) (see above, paragraph 7) of Edge Hill's revised academic and administrative structures reassured the College that the new structures are essentially sound.

14 The Board of Governors currently comprises 16 members including three staff governors, one student governor, and the Chief Executive who is *ex officio*. Despite regular prompting from Edge Hill, the University of Lancaster has still to appoint an individual to sit on the College's Board of Governors to replace the University's previous nominee who had retired from the Board the previous year. In the assessor team's view, the failure to replace the previous nominee had served to fracture a previously strong communication channel and this state of affairs was unhelpful to both parties. Observations of meetings of the Board of Governors and other meetings involving members of the Board suggest that the Board is effective and fulfilling

its terms of reference, and that through careful management by the senior Governors and the Chief Executive, the lack of support from Lancaster was not having great deleterious impact. Governors are well briefed and College staff members help to inform them about initiatives having a bearing on the academic development of the College; for example, the Research Assessment Exercise 2008.

15 Governors are engaged with the academic processes of the institution, recognising the need for a greater awareness of academic activity undertaken by the College and the elements shaping and influencing that activity. Governors undertake an 'attachment' to committees of the Academic Board (whereby nominated governors receive committee papers and agenda, may discuss agenda items with the Chair of the relevant committee, engage with the committee and report back to the full Board of Governors). Staff have embraced this initiative and governors have developed a greater understanding of the workings of the College. The team met a range of staff who perceived that the Board of Governors is giving good direction. From their observations of, and meetings with governors, the team concluded that the governance of Edge Hill appeared to be robust with a committed and engaged Board of Governors.

16 Members of the Directorate meet relevant senior managers once a fortnight and each member of the Directorate chairs an executive group (Academic Managers' Group; Business Operations Group; and Marketing and Recruitment Group) and/or a committee of the Academic Board (see above, paragraph 12). The assessor team learnt that the Directorate had debated the possible expansion of its membership but had concluded that it, as currently established, was fit for purpose. However, this did not preclude the matter being revisited in the future, as appropriate. Deans are content not to be part of the Directorate given the openness of communication channels within the College. The team considered that the Directorate was working well under the effective leadership of the

Director and Chief Executive. As a result, the institution is well managed and due attention is given to finance, resources, and academic excellence considerations. Although the Directorate is smaller in size in comparison with most other higher education (HE) institutions, the team found that this had a positive effect on the operation of the College and faculties with evidence of a full appreciation of both the academic and executive dimensions of issues.

17 The Directorate and senior managers of the College develop, implement and communicate academic policies and systems to staff at all levels in a positive and supportive manner. Effective and inclusive communication is a considerable strength, guided by the published communication policy. Staff surveys (conducted independently) contain evidence of effective communication throughout the institution: a perception that was reinforced through the assessor team's reading of documentation; website access; meetings with groups and individuals; and meetings observed as part of the scrutiny process involving staff, students and governors. The team noted that policies and systems are discussed widely before adoption, generating a sense of ownership at all levels within the institution. It is apparent that senior managers take every opportunity to inform all committees and members of developing strategies and plans, reflecting the inclusive leadership style adopted within the College. The team also had opportunities to observe the nature of the students' involvement and representation in institutional decision-making processes and considered that the level of strategic interaction with, and by, the Students' Union (SU) was strong. It was evident that the student community's views are clearly respected by the College.

18 The assessor team found evidence of sound academic leadership in addition to communication of, and engagement with, academic policy implementation, monitoring and review and sensible change management. There are many new staff, some at senior levels, who have been generally appointed from universities and are contributing to the

development of the College's research and advanced scholarship strategy (see below, paragraphs 58 and 59). Key new appointments, the establishment of a Leadership College and the staff performance review process, have served to strengthen academic leadership across the College. The team met staff recently appointed to senior management positions who provided clear testimony to effective senior management induction and openness in the leadership of the College.

19 There is significant evidence that deans, along with their newly appointed associate deans, are beginning to operate as effective teams providing strong leadership and developing a more strategic orientation, anticipating developments in the changing HE environment. Staff who met the assessor team welcomed the new faculty structure. As previously indicated (see above, paragraph 7), the Faculties of Education and Health are based on a matrix structure while HMSAS, which is much more complex and appears, understandably, still to be developing, is structured on a departmental basis. The stated roles of heads of department were to provide strategic direction; bear programme responsibilities; demonstrate research leadership; and to undertake external engagement. It appeared to the team that programme leaders and faculty deans were driving curriculum development since they observed only a small input from heads of department. From the assessor team's observations, practice was variable with some heads of department being clearly effective while others appeared less certain about their role (see also paragraph 54 below). The team felt that the College would find it desirable to continue and further focus its programme of development of its staff in leadership roles. Establishing consistency across heads of department is an area faculty deans intend to address. The faculties, as currently configured, have only been operating for 18 months and the team formed a strong sense that Edge Hill's senior management and quality officers 'own' processes. However, there is concerted movement to devolve appropriate decision-

making powers from central departments to the faculties and there is evidence in the Academic Plan, and elsewhere, of authority and ownership being devolved to faculties in a measured way.

20 Academic administration has developed significantly since the 2003 review in two main ways. The creation of the new post of Academic Secretary responsible for the development of the academic administration in broad terms, with line management responsibility for the Academic Registrar and reporting to the DAA (see above, paragraph 11), has been accompanied by the strengthening of the administrative base within each faculty through the designation of the senior posts of Faculty Administration Manager; Faculty Assistant Registrar; Faculty Quality Officer; and Faculty Partnership Officer. The assessor team considered that the creation of administrative support systems in the new faculties had been well-managed through the careful identification of best practice for adoption by the College. In the team's opinion, the College's administrative support is professional and effective. This is further supported by the ongoing and successful introduction of new computer-based records systems which have further served to strengthen the academic support base. The thorough data integrity checks that Edge Hill has conducted provide further reassurance. The team found evidence of clear processes for publishing Teaching Quality Information (TQI) data. In addition, they formed the view that confidence can be placed in the systems established by the College to ensure the security of certification issued to its students.

21 Edge Hill has an academic development plan which takes full account of relevant legislation, the UK Academic Infrastructure, the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA, and of professional accreditation and standards, where appropriate. There are ambitious targets for increased student numbers and the APC has a pivotal role in seeking to husband resources

appropriately. This committee sits between the Academic Board and the Directorate (deliberative and executive functions) and it has a clear role in linking academic considerations and resource requirements, making recommendations to the Academic Board for new and replacement academic provision, including collaborative provision, as appropriate. Proposals to APC are clearly positioned within Edge Hill's strategic plan before approval to engage in detailed planning is given. APC was found to be operating effectively with decisions made at APC appropriately placed at present, given the current size and stage of the institution's development. From the evidence seen, the assessor team considered that Edge Hill's financial planning, quality assurance and resource allocation policies are coherent, robust and relate well to its HE mission, aims and objectives.

22 Student admissions and recruitment policies and procedures are detailed and full, and were arrived at following a wide, inclusive debate within the College. While the Head of Admissions maintains tight executive control of the process, ensuring consistency in the application of the regulations, admissions tutors are fully engaged in the process, generally specifying entry thresholds well in excess of the College minimum, which in itself generally exceeds minima used elsewhere in the HE sector.

23 Edge Hill has a strong reputation for its approach to widening participation (WP), but it has taken care to ensure that WP does not imply 'reducing entry standards'. As an example, the College has developed a summer access course (FASTRACK) to support students with a non-traditional background in making a transition to HE. The course accrues credit (at level 3 in the national framework), and clearly evidences candidates' abilities to benefit from study in HE. The assessor team found that entry standards are understood and maintained by the College.

24 It became apparent to the assessor team that Edge Hill has in place a robust regulatory framework and mechanisms for the delivery, assessment and determination of taught degrees and other awards. It is clear that the College processes are mature and deliberative, matching well with the rest of the HE sector, and giving confidence that the framework will evolve sensibly in response to changes within national and professional contexts.

25 Responsibilities for implementation and operation of the framework is shared: the Academic Secretary is responsible to the DAA (see above, paragraph 11) for the maintenance of the general academic regulations; the Heads of Student Services and Admissions are responsible to the DSER (see above, paragraphs 11, 16) for the student experience (including complaints) and recruitment; and the Head of Academic Quality and Standards is responsible to the DAA for ensuring that appropriate mechanisms are both in place, and used, for monitoring and reviewing academic quality and standards. An important and positive feature of the academic culture at the College is the recognition that all aspects of College activity may impact upon the quality of educational provision. Thus the Annual Monitoring Review (AMR) process embraces all departments and operating units, and permeates all deliberative mechanisms in the institution.

26 Assessment strategies are articulated clearly at validation, and fully described for students within the resulting programme specifications. Students who met the assessor team were generally well-informed regarding module assessment criteria and the standards expected. They indicated that staff were invariably willing to give further information as required. The team's observation of assessment boards and reports from external examiners made it clear that assessment was valid, addressed all learning outcomes, was pitched at the right level, and provided opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning across the entire range of achievement.

The institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards

27 The process of self-critical reflection is well embedded in the College quality processes. Course planning, validation, AMR, periodic critical review and revalidation set an academic challenge to course and programme teams in which they routinely reflect and evaluate current activity. Validation, periodic critical review and revalidation provide a five-yearly cycle of self-evaluation resulting in appropriate changes and evolution of courses. This, in effect, addresses the need for a periodic internal subject review, enhanced by broader parallel processes of academic development planning, research development planning and AMR within departments and faculties. The use of industrial and professional input in programme planning brings an appropriate externality to the enhancement process.

28 The AMR process provides an annual self-critical evaluation, resulting in recommendations for action in response to matters of academic concern and changes in the environment. The assessor team, in its reading, came to believe that the AMR process is no longer seen as a 'ritual' by staff, but is a truly open and reflective process which, given its emphasis upon risk, naturally requires teams to consider future developments and opportunities (better embedded in some areas than others, but operating successfully in all). The College claims that the process encourages openness and disclosure and is non-threatening appears to be true. Enhancement is thus naturally occurring within discipline and course teams, but is arguably less evidenced between teams.

29 Institution-wide enhancement may occur through discussion of AMRs as they are distilled and discussed at more senior levels within the College, but the assessor team was not made aware of any significant examples. However, mechanisms are developing which will further encourage cross-College enhancement activities. The Teaching and Development Unit (TLDU) is well-respected, and is already proactive in engaging with course teams as they develop their curriculum and teaching

strategy. Similarly, thematic audits are a central part of the College's academic quality processes; for example the audits of distance and e-learning, collaborative provision and teaching quality all identifying good practice within their findings. In due course, good practice will spread naturally from such work. The support for staff as they undertake leadership roles in the College will again provide mentoring and enhancement opportunities.

30 An inclusive style of chairmanship at all levels within the College was observed throughout the scrutiny. The use of an early standing item of 'Chair's Business' on all agendas permits the chair to bring items of success and good practice to the attention of staff. This itself is an excellent and effective form of enhancement, shortening many over-long communication channels. The assessor team found that an academically self-critical community, receptive to change and development, existed at Edge Hill. Quality enhancement, while embedded within teams, is still evolving College-wide. The AMR process is now well-established, the central TLDU and Academic Quality Unit (AQU) are repositories of good practice, and the establishment of the CETL will provide impetus to the development of a natural internal quality enhancement culture.

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

Course approval

31 The process for initial approval of new courses is clearly defined. The APC, in effect, grants 'permission to plan', and ensures that appropriate resource will be subsequently made available for new provision. The APC's scrutiny of proposals was found to be thorough, ensuring congruence between College and faculty academic development plans and enabling the College to ensure that institutional initiatives (for example, synergies between the Faculties of Health and Education in the development of the 'Children's agenda') are addressed. The assessor team considered that the thorough interaction between academic and resource planning was an aspect of good practice.

32 Planning teams produce full proposals, generally with external/industrial/professional advice. The use of professional bodies appears almost instinctive in the Faculties of Health and Education (less so in the more diverse provision within HMSAS), and courses are routinely considered against appropriate professional accreditation guidelines during planning. Proposals are subject to scrutiny by a faculty review committee, usually concluding with a number of requirements that must be met before proposals can be considered by a full validation panel. Validation panels include two external members. Faculty review committees and validation panels typically include senior staff and subject experts drawn internally from within the College, in addition to external members as appropriate, and last for a full working day. Course proposals may be approved, approved with conditions and recommendations, or rejected by a validation panel.

33 The assessor team observed a validation panel at which a proposal was rejected. Following modifications, the course was approved some four months later. While approval with conditions may have arguably been a more appropriate initial outcome, the process was detailed, drew upon appropriate external input and ensured academic coherence in the provision. Proposals for collaborative provision undergo the same process, with the additional requirement for formal approval of the partner if the College is not already working in partnership with the collaborating institution. The team was unable to identify any occasion where the University of Lancaster, in its subsequent scrutiny and approval of Edge Hill's proposals, had found any reason to doubt the recommendations from validation panels, lending weight to the team's view of a robust process of course approval.

34 The strong process of academic challenge at validation, at a very detailed level, helps ensure curriculum coherence. For example, in HMSAS the modular degree scheme provides an overarching administrative structure, but the particular modules, the programme coherence

and rationale all have to be justified in detail at validation of new awards. The scheme does not permit a 'pick and mix' approach to curriculum choice. College staff are engaged in a range of external engagement activity, and experienced external examiners and members of national policy committees can generally be found on course planning committees. Planning teams thus have appropriate experience to benchmark their provision alongside similar courses elsewhere.

35 The College welcomes proposals to deliver courses and training to corporate clients, but is careful to ensure the academic and financial integrity of any such partnerships. In particular, the assessor team observed that proposals for non-credit bearing, non-HEFCE/Teacher Training Agency/Strategic Health Authority (SHA) provision are considered by the normal deliberative course approval processes, thereby ensuring that academic standards and reputation will be maintained.

Course monitoring, review and revalidation

36 The AMR (see above, paragraph 25) process adopted by the College is predicated upon a thorough review of activities by each 'operating unit'. Thus course teams, departments, subject groupings, faculties and central departments all produce their own AMR. AMRs are required for collaborative provision, and these are considered routinely by the host faculty. Minor modifications of courses generally arise from consideration of the course AMR. Such modifications are detailed fully, discussed by the course team, departmental groups, faculty boards and the AQSC.

37 The AMR process is sequential, with departments producing AMRs drawing from the conclusions of course and subject AMRs, faculty AMRs drawing on departmental reports, and the institutional AMR drawing on faculty and central departmental reports. The assessor team found that all the AMRs they reviewed were reflective and forward looking with faculty and institutional AMRs increasingly focused on the future. AMRs strongly inform annual faculty and College academic development planning and the Corporate Planning Statement. While all AMRs included analysis of the academic risks associated with their review, reflection of risk

was found to be more sophisticated in central departments and in the Faculties of Health and Education. This was recognised by the College, and there was an expectation that the year-by-year improvements in the quality of AMRs would continue.

38 AMRs are formally considered in departmental and faculty committees, and by the AQSC and Academic Board at institutional level. At the more senior committees, consideration of additional data (for example, retention, student:staff ratios, first-destination statistics and degree classifications) informs deliberation of the AMRs. The new student record system will, the College considers, enhance the collation and consideration of such data. QRASC (see above, paragraph 13) additionally analyses all AMRs to provide institutional feedback to the authoring team. While somewhat burdensome, the AMR process provides the College with a deliberative, robust and non-threatening framework with which to review academic quality and risk. The assessor team explored the sustainability of the process with the Directorate, and were assured of the College's commitment to maintain and develop the process which is embedded well at all levels in the College's academic framework, and informing academic planning in a timely and appropriate manner. The team concluded that while the robust and self-reflective practice of AMR was good practice, the burden of the multi-tiered review process may, in due course, become excessive. The team thus felt that the College may wish to consider the desirability of reviewing the process.

39 Courses undergo periodic review five years after validation. Course teams prepare a comprehensive critical review document which may include proposals for modification. This document is considered in detail by an internal panel which offers direction and advice to the course team in preparation for the subsequent revalidation event. Revalidation by a full validation panel, including external members, takes place within 12 months of periodic review.

Course closures

40 Course closures are discussed formally in programme boards, departments, and at faculty boards. Final decisions are taken by the Academic Board. In some cases, course closure may simply be the result of a change of direction (and hence title) identified in critical review or in faculty AMRs. It was clear from the assessor team's observations that the rationale for closing a course was just as important as that for opening one. Also worthy of note was the importance given to ensuring continuation of study for any students left on the award to be closed. The assessor team was told by staff that decisions to close programmes were not imposed on programme teams, but would be fully discussed and owned in the faculty at programme level. There is a clear sense of academic guidance at College and faculty level, but academic ownership and decision-making at subject and course team level.

41 One notable exception from this collegial approach is the strong central direction over 'at risk' collaborative provision. The assessor team noted that some years ago the College had taken swift remedial action when provision in a partner institution was seen to be below standard. During the year of scrutiny, a number of indicators culminating in the lack of an AMR from another partner college led the faculty concerned to seek support from the College's central administration. AQSC immediately acted to instigate an emergency audit of provision at the partner. The audit report was considered by AQSC, and recommendations made to Academic Board. Meanwhile, the Directorate initiated contingency planning to ensure that current students were not disadvantaged by further developments potentially leading to course closure. Edge Hill then worked with the partner to set in train a complete revalidation of all collaborative provision, leading to the partner's later decision to withdraw (at least temporarily) from HE work. Edge Hill then set in place arrangements to directly teach enrolled students using its own staff. These examples provided the team with reassurance that the

College has robust partnership arrangements and that in the event of indicators of failing health, it has emergency audit mechanisms to identify appropriate remedial action, management determination to take decisions to close failing partnerships, and the flexibility to take responsibility for students still to complete their awards.

External examiners and their reports

42 As an accredited institution of the University of Lancaster, Edge Hill has a traditional external examiner system which it operates with care. Faculties nominate external examiners (against College and University criteria for the appointment of external examiners). The assessor team observed the detailed discussion regarding external examiner appointments at faculty boards. Issues regarding competition, reciprocity of appointment, subject expertise, match with existing externals were all explored with rigour. Faculty nominations are considered by the EESC (see above, paragraph 13) which was found to exercise its remit robustly and appropriately. Nominations are then passed to the University of Lancaster for final approval; none has been rejected by the University, giving confidence in the rigour of the Edge Hill process. The EESC scrutinises both external examiners at Edge Hill and those staff from Edge Hill who are external examiners at other institutions on an annual basis, enabling any 'inadvertent reciprocal arrangements' to be identified.

43 Although the Academic Board does not consider the appointment of external examiners itself, the assessor team found the process adopted by the College to be sound. The assessor team identified a sense of academic maturity and understanding of the role and criteria for the appointment of external examiners at faculty level. The profile of external examiners is strong, including many from traditional universities and with a good academic record.

44 Scrutiny of external examiner reports occurs both within faculties and centrally. At faculty level, course/programme teams,

departments and faculty boards all consider the reports. Each faculty produces an overview report, summarising key issues for the faculty, and all report comments are addressed in AMRs. Personal responses are sent to external examiners from course/programme teams, having firstly been approved by the appropriate head of department and faculty dean. Of particular note is the practice for assessment boards to formally receive and discuss the external examiner's report and the team response. This discussion takes place with the external examiner present, and the assessor team observed the resulting detailed and thorough discussions. The process engages the external examiner directly with the teaching staff, and brings his/her expertise and experience directly to bear in the annual monitoring and development process. This is clearly a feature well in excess of the requirements of the University of Lancaster. At a central level, following scrutiny by the DAA, the Academic Secretary and the Head of Academic Quality and Standards, explore commonality of comment which might lead to changes in the regulatory framework.

45 Another example of the College's thoughtful use of external examiners, over and above the University's requirements, is to be found in its Foundation Degree framework. While the University only appoints external examiners to second and third-year undergraduate courses, Edge Hill has decided to engage the external examiner independently of the University in order to obtain the appropriate scrutiny of the work of first-year Foundation Degree students. The appointment and use of external examiners seemed to the assessor team to be strong and robust, providing confidence in the integrity and validity of assessment at all levels in the College.

46 The assessor team concluded that the College makes good use of external peer input, both in programme approval (see above, paragraph 32), and in the external examining process (see above, paragraph 44). The strong engagement with external peers was considered an aspect of good practice.

External reference points

47 The College regulatory framework for its awards is carefully defined and embraces all aspects of the national Academic Infrastructure. Changes to the national, or indeed to appropriate professional body, frameworks are formally and carefully considered, and changes are made to College regulations as necessary. The framework and detailed regulations are carefully scrutinised and discussed at the appropriate subcommittees before approval by Academic Board. The assessor team observed at first hand the careful way in which changes to mitigating circumstances and other regulations were introduced and heard how consideration was given to the new *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* statement. Significant changes to the College framework are brought to the attention of the Board of Governors. The College Committee structure reflects the responsibilities of the members of the Directorate, and thus various aspects of regulations and procedure may be debated in different subcommittees. Final decisions are, however, always taken by Academic Board, ensuring an appropriate holistic overview of the entire framework.

48 The College's academic framework is thus well-matched to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, subject benchmark statements, the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, and other appropriate professional frameworks. Edge Hill also employs clear formal and appropriate mechanisms to ensure that the College framework evolves in line with changes nationally. The College makes proactive use of benchmark retention indicators, enabling early action to be taken to address a gradual decline in retention, notwithstanding the fact that its performance exceeds the benchmark. The assessor team's observations indicated that the matter had been grasped at all levels, from Academic Board, through faculties to members of course teams. Various mechanisms to address the issue were put in place, and early indications show a reversal of the decline. This suggested that Edge Hill made

constructive use of national frameworks, subject benchmarks and other indicators in the strategic and detailed management of its academic provision.

49 During the scrutiny, the College was disappointed to receive news of a likely negative outcome from the QAA's 2005 review of Foundation Degree provision involving the University of Lancaster, Edge Hill and two further education partner institutions. The debate in committees and at the board of Governors was lively and mature. Notwithstanding the possible final outcome, the assessor team noted that swift action had been taken on receipt of the news. The College prepared to undertake an emergency academic audit to clarify the magnitude of the issue, and to propose remedial action with partners. The team was reassured by the mature manner in which the College has approached the outcome of the Foundation Degree review, and believed that its existing collaborative and internal audit processes would enable a swift resolution of the matter.

50 The College has adopted Personal Development Planning (PDP) schemes to enable students to monitor their own development and develop progress files for recording purposes. In meetings with students and staff, the reading of AMRs, and in observations of validation events and committees, it became apparent that implementation of PDP was variable. In the Faculties of Health and Education, professional requirements have ensured, for many years, that a form of PDP has been fully embedded in the curriculum. However, in HMSAS, the assessor team observed rather more patchy implementation. The modular degree scheme (embracing most of the degree provision in HMSAS) is due for revalidation, and a more consistent implementation of PDP will be included in the overarching scheme. The TLDU also has the remit to 'refresh' institutional guidance on PDP implementation.

51 The assessor team thus formed the opinion that the College had embedded appropriate processes to ensure that its provision matched the appropriate external

reference points. They considered, however, that the College would believe it desirable to ensure that national guidance on PDP and progress files was fully grasped by programme teams throughout the Institution.

Progression and completion statistics

52 A new student record system is currently being rolled out, and is capable of embracing student identification recognition, student secure access to personal records, student billing, timetabling and other features. The new system, while developed and 'owned' by the Academic Registry has the potential for increasing devolved operation by faculty staff who indicated that the old system was robust but cumbersome and ready for replacement. Staff had been fully consulted in the development of the new system, have received full training, and are confident that it will be a far more flexible tool which will integrate naturally with the virtual learning environment (VLE) and other IT services. The assessor team, in many observations of committees and assessment boards, was able to see at first hand the accuracy and detail of recorded data.

Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development, appraisal and reward

53 The employment of staff at Edge Hill is guided by a human resources strategy which is founded in a long tradition of a strong centrally-driven staff development policy. The College gained Investor in People status in 1996 and has maintained that recognition. In 2002-03, it established a Centre for Learning and Teaching Research to provide a focus for staff researching learning and teaching in the post-compulsory education sector. The College is building a significant learning and teaching culture, as is evidenced by the award of the CETL. It has developed successful continuing professional development activity in Education and Health, in particular, and its reputation in these areas continues to grow while Edge Hill staff are leading the development of a lifelong learning network and are members of Foundation Degree networks. Research and

scholarship are regarded as important and significant and are not necessarily driven by the Research Assessment Exercise. Indeed, Research Development Fund resources have been moved strategically away from bursaried research students towards the development of research capacity. The College has also appointed learning and teaching fellows who are drawn from both academic and academic-related communities.

54 Faculty deans and, where appointed, associate deans provide clear leadership with regard to academic development. In a small number of cases, the assessor team observed clear direction and guidance at head of department level, but noted Directorate recognition of the need to further develop leadership skills among this group of academic leaders (see also paragraph 19 above). Many heads of department are engaged in the Leadership College, and the Director and Chief Executive is currently exploring with the Directorate and with governors how best to further develop these key staff. Leadership of courses and planning committees is vested in senior staff in recognition of the centrality of course and curriculum planning.

55 The AQU provides support and guidance for staff directly engaged in academic quality processes. Edge Hill's Quality Handbook is a thorough document, providing detailed advice on every stage of the academic life-cycle of a course. It is currently undergoing review, and the assessor team was able to follow the detailed discussions of drafts at committee stages within the year. It also noted that the College has led a HEFCE project on risk assessment in academic quality processes; again reflecting the sound practices to be found in the College. The AQU and Academic Registry provide direct support to staff undertaking pivotal roles in the quality processes; for example, chairs of validation panels and assessment boards are given briefings, personal training and mentoring in preparation for, and during, the initial stages of their new role. Chairs are briefed directly about changes to the regulatory frameworks. Discussions with chairs

of panels and boards suggested the existence of a mutually supportive and reinforcing environment.

56 Edge Hill has a long-established TLDU. The TLDU is well-respected within the College and has taken a proactive lead with regard to staff development, pedagogic research, and supporting course planning teams in curriculum development. Currently developing a refreshed teaching, learning and assessment policy/strategy for the College, the TLDU leadership was instrumental in securing the CETL award (see above, paragraph 9 and below 58). The assessor team noted how teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) strategies were explored in depth in the course of validation and periodic review; course teams being challenged to demonstrate the appropriateness of their approach. TLA strategies were focused upon the mode of delivery and therefore met the learning outcomes well.

57 Edge Hill undertakes a biennial survey of academic qualifications, experience and external engagement. The most recent survey indicates that 22 per cent of staff have doctoral qualifications and a further 47 per cent have master's level qualifications. The Faculty of Health, in particular, has many professionally qualified and active staff. In addition, 40 per cent of staff have worked in other HE institutions. 77 per cent of staff are active in a subject, scholarly or professional association. Staff are strongly encouraged to become external examiners and 27 per cent of staff have been, or are, acting in this capacity. Edge Hill has extended its readership posts through its teaching and learning strategy, and there is considerable evidence of a growing culture of staff engagement in scholarship. Annual monitoring reports seen by the assessor team consistently emphasised the academic and professional expertise of academic staff. Staff with key programme management responsibilities have relevant experience of curriculum development and assessment design.

58 The CETL is testimony to, and recognition of, the pedagogic leadership role of Edge Hill within the region, and nationally. Pedagogic

research is supported through a teaching fellowship scheme and Edge Hill's framework for the appointment of teaching fellows permits non-academic staff to achieve such recognition. The number of non-academic staff actively engaged in pedagogic research is increasing. Membership of the Higher Education (HE) Academy is being encouraged by payment of joining fees. The HE Academy accreditation for Edge Hill's Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning indicates the commitment of the College to provide professional support for its staff. Staff have considerable knowledge and understanding of current research and advanced scholarship in their discipline area and this knowledge and understanding directly informs and enhances their teaching.

59 Staff at Edge Hill undertake a significant amount of research which is now assuming a higher priority throughout the institution. The research policy and strategy flow naturally from Edge Hill's mission statement. Research development reports, considered by the Research Committee, provided detailed descriptions of current and planned activity but contained little critical reflection, limiting the institution's ability to make judgements of academic quality, resource allocation and research management. There are five research objectives and progress is being made on all five. There is evidence of an active research culture, development of which is ongoing, and largely independent of the University of Lancaster. The College has invested significant sums in research, in general, and a research development fund, in particular. Staff who met the assessor team reported that there was time and support for research and scholarship. Details of recent staff research publications (approximately 400) were available to the team. Edge Hill has extended its readership posts through the teaching and learning strategy adopted and the team found considerable evidence of staff engagement with, and a growing culture of, scholarship. In every meeting held with staff, they were provided with examples of such activity.

60 The assessor team found evidence of some heads of department encouraging a research-led approach to curriculum development, and research undertaken by staff appeared to have a significant relationship with the taught undergraduate curriculum. There was active personal engagement with research and advanced scholarship to a level commensurate with the degrees being offered. The team noted that targets had been set, supported by appropriate infrastructure and funding, to ensure the embedding of a research culture across the College while, at the same time, respecting differences between the faculties.

61 External networking is very evident with many new and enthusiastic staff involved externally in a variety of ways. Health and Education, for example, have strong continuing professional development provision involving significant engagement with local and regional practitioners. There is also considerable involvement in the activities of providers of higher education in other organisations through, for example, involvement as external examiners, validation panel members, and external reviews. In addition, there is involvement by other senior members of staff in national groups and consultancies. The level of debate regarding changes to academic regulations was much enhanced by the experience of many staff sitting on national committees and acting as external examiners in other institutions.

62 Academic department heads have clear line management responsibility for performance review which is linked to staff development with needs identified, and courses organised, as appropriate. The assessor team considered that an away day on technology in teaching and learning indicated the commitment of the College to persuading staff to make better use of the VLE (and other technology). Departmental and faculty annual research targets inform performance review and the College is investing in staff development for part-time teaching staff. There is a year-long induction programme for all new staff and, while there is no formal training for new roles, such as course

leadership, strong peer, informal and team support is available. Staff development is responsive to perceived need and staff are aware that training will be provided, should they request it. The levels of support offered to newly appointed chairs of assessment boards indicate Edge Hill's concern to ensure that chairs have a full grasp of all key matters. Staff training and support for chairs of committees in academic decision-making is readily available.

63 The College provides most central support services through the Academic Registry, Student Services and the Admissions departments; in addition each faculty has its own dedicated administrative staff. Faculty staff are managed within faculties but have functional responsibility to the central administration for matters where College-wide consistency is important. Administrative staff intimated that staff development was made available, as required, to facilitate the faculty restructuring and the establishment of faculty support teams; development opportunities remain available as required. A feature, perhaps unique to Edge Hill, is the expectation that some non-academic staff will wish to engage in research and development in support of learning. This is actively encouraged by the College.

64 The assessor team found staff to be happy with their workloads, the level of support they receive, and the opportunities for development they are afforded. Staff are confident in their roles, and in the institution more generally. Staff development and performance review opportunities enable them to further develop their professional competence and scholarship. Edge Hill's research policy is forward-looking and supportive of staff development, both in subject disciplines, and in a broader pedagogic sense. Staff are actively engaged in a range of external activities, enabling the College to benchmark performance against other HE institutions. These factors, along with the establishment of the Leadership College, indicate the strong commitment of the College to its staff and the recognition of the contribution made by staff to the further development of Edge Hill.

Learning support resources

65 Significant investment has been made in the implementation of a VLE. While a significant majority of students make use of the VLE, and most courses make some use of the VLE in supporting students, it was recognised that many staff and modules still did not make use of the advantages it offered. The College views the VLE as a support tool rather than the principal delivery mechanism. It does, however, intend to use the new CETL to disseminate good practice, to move towards a managed learning environment in which the VLE is integrated with the student data system (thereby encouraging greater student use) and to make greater use of the VLE to enable learning support staff to engage with students. The College displayed an awareness of the key issues surrounding teaching and learning, and has already identified actions to encourage change and development where necessary. In more general terms, Edge Hill is proactive in pedagogic development, and the TLDU provides strong support for both academic and learning support staff in this area.

66 The College has very little distance-learning provision, but where it does exist, the assessor team was able to confirm that students received appropriate support, whether electronically, by means of the library, or through direct contact with tutors.

67 Approval for new course development is only given when the APC is assured about the availability of appropriate physical and staff resources. In discussions with governors and the Directorate, it became clear to the assessor team that the College has a sound long-term estates strategy that reflects its five and 10-year academic plans and growth predictions. New building projects have been completed almost annually over the past few years, and new Education and Performing Arts buildings, completed to time and to budget, are a testament to the successful integration of financial and academic planning. Academic staff commented positively on the extent to which they were informed and consulted about estates-related matters impacting on their

disciplines. The team was able to observe the interaction between academic and estates planning as the College evaluates options for addressing the pressure on teaching accommodation at Aintree. Staff were engaged at all levels, and felt that they had been fully consulted. The Directorate is also aware of the poor physical state of much of the existing estate at the Aintree Campus as well as elements of the Ormskirk Campus, and plans are in hand to address this. It is worthy of note that the estates team makes use of the routine AMR reports and other indicators from the academic planning cycle, and has been able to prioritise the building and refurbishment activities. An example noted by the team was the recent decision to engage in some refurbishment of the halls of residence at Ormskirk.

68 Scrutiny of AMRs, the student experience surveys and discussions with students indicate that library and IT services are appropriate for existing demand. In particular, off-campus and part-time students were particularly appreciative of the Library Service. Students consider that access to IT facilities while off-site is becoming essential, and do not believe that this is fully appreciated by the College and academic staff. Students exhibit mixed views regarding the use of the VLE. Access from home is often slow, and most still prefer traditional notice-boards for communication regarding course administration. Students' engagement with the VLE appeared to reflect the differences in attitude of staff and course teams; there are many very positive, but also significant numbers with concern. The matters of concern raised by the students resonated with the assessor team's other observations of variable uptake and usefulness of the VLE. The team came to the conclusion that it would be desirable for the College to continue to encourage both staff and students to make greater and more effective use of the VLE.

Academic guidance, student support and supervision

69 The assessor team had some concerns that while the PDP schemes in place provided an appropriate mechanism to support and guide

students, the different levels of support available in the various faculties might lead to diverse experiences for students (see above, paragraph 50).

70 In discussions with both academic and support staff, it appeared that the underlying culture was to provide a continuum of support for students. Administrative staff in faculties often provided the first point of contact for students needing support and, if necessary, they would refer students to academic or central staff. Administrative support within faculties is well-regarded and is particularly strong in support of the assessment process.

71 Under the terms of its accreditation by the University of Lancaster, Edge Hill carries responsibility for qualification transcripts, appeals and complaints. In addition, the Academic Board has just approved a plan to centrally coordinate a three-year cycle of policy and strategy review, to be led by the Academic Secretary.

72 The Admissions Department retains overall responsibility for the admissions process but, in 2005, the College transferred responsibility for the provision of induction activities and support for students preparing for referred examinations from central departments to faculties. Induction and referral support were both previously well-organised and well-received by students, but the College is of the view that ownership by the host programme and department is important. The new faculty-based induction programmes will extend over the whole of the first semester and central departments will retain an overall coordination role with a view to ensuring a reflective and holistic College review of both processes. Students indicated to the assessor team that they had felt extremely well-supported throughout the admissions and induction process. The College operates a wide range of taster courses and enjoys strong links with many regional further education colleges. Edge Hill is the college of choice for progression in many cases and its strong outreach network contributes to the College's high reputation with colleges and schools in the region.

73 Appeals are considered initially at faculty level but the full appeals procedure, run through the Academic Registry, is at institutional level. Similarly, the new malpractice regulations give faculties limited responsibilities for naïve and first offences, but cases are otherwise considered at institutional level. Student handbooks and intranet information articulate the detailed regulations in simple language to reduce misunderstanding and ambiguity and students have access to faculty administrative staff and SU officers for initial advice on appeals and complaints processes. The close working relationship at committee and operational level between SU officers and College staff ensure that SU officers are in a position to offer appropriate support to their members. Complaints are a student support matter, investigated within Student Services. Until recently, malpractice allegations were investigated under the guidance of the Academic Registrar but faculty deans now have this responsibility. Students on collaborative programmes have the same rights as Edge Hill students, and support from the Academic Registry for collaborative partners appeared strong. Faculties also provided dedicated administrative support to maintain healthy links with collaborative partners.

74 The College operates a broad equal opportunities policy, updated regularly reflecting experience and legislation. In particular it has established appropriate mechanisms to address the requirements of the *Disabilities Discrimination Act*. There was evidence of strong and proactive support available for disabled students.

75 Feedback is elicited from students, partners and employers in a number of ways. Of note is the wide system of student representation; the assessor team observed full and comprehensive engagement by students on all committees. All faculties convene staff-student meetings, generally at course level; most staff use module questionnaires as part of their own review of a module, and the College conducts regular institution-wide student experience surveys. Employers have representation on planning committees, and in the Faculty of Health,

SHA representatives are members of the Faculty Board, as partners in delivery of professional education. The wealth of health and education CPD provision attests to the strong reputation of the College in the region.

76 Students were generally happy with the feedback they obtained from staff regarding their performance in assessment. Work was usually returned in a timely manner, generally with constructive comment. They also acknowledged that staff often gave structured verbal feedback to the group, and that individual feedback would be available; they were very positive regarding the general 'open door policy' operated by staff. There were a few notable exceptions of work being returned late, if at all, although students reported that there were channels through which they could pursue complaints of this nature.

Published information

77 Information published for students, both electronically and in print, was found to be accurate, informative and appropriate for purpose. The College has clearly defined processes in place to ensure responsibility for the accuracy of such material. Similarly, the Academic Registry has robust processes in place to gather and confirm the accuracy of information to be published on the TQI website. Most TQI material is already available and the College is on track to complete publication by the due dates.

Conclusions

78 The assessor team believe that broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the College's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards. Overall, it considers the College has a clearly defined set of committees and quality assurance systems, with explicit and well-understood reporting lines. Quality assurance systems are thorough, perhaps at times cumbersome, but always robust. Student representation exists on boards and committees at institution and faculty level. The AMR process

appears embedded and robust, bringing a true sense of self-reflection and a detailed evaluation of risk. The College has well-developed processes for quality assurance; less so for quality enhancement.

79 The external examiner system appears sound throughout, as does the use of external peers within course design, validation and review. The College maintains a high level of awareness of, and engagement with, the institutional implications of external examiners' comments. At faculty level there is evidence that matters raised by external examiners are appropriately considered and acted upon.

80 Staff are confident in their roles, and performance review opportunities enable them to further develop their professional competence and scholarship. Edge Hill's research policy is forward-looking and supportive of staff development, both in subject disciplines, and in a broader pedagogic sense. Staff are actively engaged in a range of external activities, enabling the College to benchmark performance against other HE institutions. The establishment of a Leadership College indicates the strong commitment of the College to the development of its staff and the recognition of the contribution made by staff to the further development of Edge Hill.

81 The assessor team considers that the College's learning infrastructure operates efficiently and is underpinned by excellent internal communications. Resource needs are effectively identified, suitably related to academic requirements, and properly monitored. Comments by staff and students suggest that while library and IT facilities provide a sufficient resource to support the academic programme, use of the VLE might usefully be further developed. Students met by the team praised the quality of their learning and pastoral support, although use of progress files and PDP is patchy in some areas of study. Overall, the team believes the College is making conscious and realistic efforts to develop a holistic learning environment for the benefit of all its members.

82 While the leadership and management of the College is strong, the assessor team noted significant variation in the contribution made by the various heads of department. The College will no doubt wish to address the development needs of this group of staff.

83 The assessor team identified the following features of the College's operations which should be regarded as good practice: the effective and inclusive communication processes used by the College management team at all levels; the thorough interaction between academic and resource planning at APC; the robust and self-reflective process of annual monitoring and review; the commitment of the College to staff development for all staff and, in particular, the investment in the development of its senior and leadership staff; the proactive use of external peers in all stages of curriculum planning, approval, monitoring and review.

84 In addition, the assessor team makes the following recommendations. The College might find it desirable to: continue and further focus its programme of development of its staff in leadership roles; review the burden of its multi-tiered academic review processes; ensure that national guidance on PDP and progress files is fully grasped by programme teams throughout the institution; continue to encourage both staff and students to make greater and more effective use of the VLE.

Edge Hill University's response to the report

Edge Hill University welcomes the Quality Assurance Agency's report and thanks the Agency for the professional and courteous way in which the year-long scrutiny process was carried out. The university is pleased that broad confidence is expressed in the soundness of its current and likely future management of the quality and standards of its academic awards.

We have noted the many aspects of good practice detailed in the report which we believe will continue to contribute strongly to our development as a learning-led university. We confirm our commitment to the assurance of the quality and standards of academic provision and to the continuing enhancement of all aspects of our work. The Report will be widely used within the university in helping to ensure this enhancement.

The university notes that the Report details no essential or advisable recommendations, and accepts the four 'desirable' recommendations. All of these recommendations are in the process of being addressed within the university's development plans. In particular:

- staff development plans will continue and enhance the focus on the development of the leadership role
- a review of the university's Quality Assurance strategy is currently under way with a view to streamlining systems within the context of a rigorous risk-driven approach to assurance and enhancement
- the university's undergraduate modular degree scheme is currently under review, and particular attention is being paid to the further development of student induction, support and personal development planning (PDP)
- the university's VLE has developed substantially in the period since the QAA review through the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, SOLSTICE. This aspect of the university's work continues to be the focus of research and evaluation.

The university looks forward to sharing its progress in these and other areas with the Agency in the future.

