



# **Institutional audit**

**Edge Hill University**

**May 2010**

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## Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

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

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

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

## **Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex**

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

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

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

## Summary

### Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the Edge Hill University (the University) from 24 to 28 May 2010 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 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 Edge Hill University is that:

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

### Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University has taken institution-wide steps to embed quality enhancement in its strategies and operations. Enhancement features at all stages of the quality management cycle. The University's enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities and the student experience has created sound basis for further development.

### Postgraduate research students

The audit found that the arrangements for postgraduate research students, including those for support, supervision and assessment, were effective and 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.*

### Published information

The audit team found that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information 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 integrated and comprehensive nature of annual monitoring and review
- the contribution of SOLSTICE fellows to the development of technology-enhanced learning across the University.
- the wide scope and inclusive nature of the personal and academic support provided for students.
- the responsive and wide-ranging programme of staff development.

## Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- ensure that future students taking the planned but currently unvalidated Independent Studies as a minor element would be studying on a validated programme
- ensure that the policies and procedures in relation to awards in Independent Studies are made explicit and consistent in the University's documentation.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- review the committee framework at institutional and faculty level in order to reduce the potential for duplication
- ensure that the recommendations of internal audits are consistently and visibly actioned in a timely fashion
- keep under review its strategy for the provision of placements for students
- complete its revision of the training programmes for postgraduate research students and their supervisors.

## 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*
- the frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and 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 Edge Hill University (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 24 May 2010. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers and the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. The audit included the University's collaborative provision.

2 The audit team comprised Dr M Byde, Professor A Cobb, Dr D Edwards, Dr S Hargreaves and Professor A Jago, auditors, and Ms R Penny, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mr A Bradshaw, Assistant Director, Reviews Group. In advance of the audit the University provided a Briefing Paper, and the Students' Union provided a very helpful student written submission.

### Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The University has a commitment to increasing access to higher education, and has developed collaborations with further education colleges. The University considers its portfolio of courses to be distinctive, with particular strengths in vocational training for the public sector. Although learning-led, the University considers research to be a defining element of a university, and is developing its support for scholarship and research.

4 In 2009-10 the University had over 22,000 students and 2,000 staff. Over 14,000 of the students were studying part-time. Of the 2009 full-time student intake, 33 per cent were male, 57 per cent aged 21 or under on entry, and six per cent from ethnic minorities. Eight per cent of this intake had a self-declared disability and 88 per cent were domiciled in the north-west region. There is a small community of 72 research students, 71 of whom are part-time.

5 The University has taken action on four desirable recommendations from the 2006 QAA scrutiny report. The University has established development programmes for its managers. Personal development planning for students has been explored through internal review processes. To encourage staff and student engagement in effective use of the virtual learning environment, the University has developed a minimum entitlement for first-year students, and uses experts amongst its staff to support the design and review of programmes. Finally, the University believes that it has reduced the burden of the management of the quality of programmes. Overall, the University has addressed effectively the recommendations of the 2006 report. Nevertheless the audit team recommends that it would be desirable for the University to review the committee framework at institutional and faculty level in order to reduce the potential for duplication.

6 The University's Board of Governors delegates responsibility for academic policy and strategy to the Academic Board which in turn delegates approval, monitoring and review to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. Some processes, such as module approval, are further devolved to faculties, which report through an annual Quality Statement.

7 A principle of the University's approach to the management of quality and standards is that of mutual accountability through discussion between committees and units. Key to this is the process of Annual Monitoring and Review which is conducted both for academic units and for support services. Programme approval operates through a formal validation process during which proposals are scrutinised by a small team of academic peers. The intensity of approval processes for programmes varies according to a formal categorisation of different types of provision and consequent risk. The Research Degrees Committee, a subcommittee of the Academic Board, has responsibility for the quality and standards of research programmes.

8 The University's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities is effective because there are clear lines of accountability to the Academic Board for standards and quality, alongside comprehensive peer review of risks and opportunities, principally through the process of Annual Monitoring and Review.

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

9 Final responsibility for academic quality and standards lies with the Academic Board. The University produces a Quality Management Handbook, which is updated annually for approval by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, a subcommittee of the Academic Board. The Handbook is available online and in printed form. In addition, advice is available to staff at faculty level from the Associate Deans responsible for quality management, and at University level from the Dean of Quality Enhancement, Head of Academic Quality, the Academic Quality Unit, the Dean of Teaching and Learning Development and the Head of Collaborative Partnerships.

10 New programmes are approved by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee following a validation process. The process is initiated after the approval of an Initial Planning Proposal by the Academic Planning Committee. A validation panel is set up both for new programmes and those undergoing revalidation. All panels have two external members, who are normally academic peers from other higher education institutions. The University takes seriously the role of external participants, and the audit team saw evidence of their effectiveness in securing standards. The team was provided with the documentation for recently approved programmes, which clearly demonstrated the thoroughness of the process and the significant contribution that programme approval makes to the University's management of the standards of its provision.

11 There is a process for the closure of programmes and the safeguarding of the academic experience of students studying on programmes that are running out. There is also a process for considering changes to programmes between periods of validation. The audit team saw evidence of both these processes being used with rigour.

12 The University sees its Annual Monitoring and Review process, informed by the principle of mutual accountability through discussion, as the keystone of its quality assurance and risk management. The process begins with the production of reports by each department and collaborative partner. These are based on reports from each programme leader and include a risk management plan, which is used to assess and prioritise internal and external threats. After review by the faculty, both types of report are subsumed within a broader faculty report considered by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, which provides an overview analysis, including examples of good practice. Academic service departments are required to produce their own Annual Monitoring and Review reports, responding to issues raised by the faculties. Finally the Directorate produces its own Annual Monitoring and Review report, dealing with institution-wide issues. The audit team saw evidence that resulting actions at all levels were usually taken in a timely way. The team considered the integrated and comprehensive nature of the Annual Monitoring and Review process to be an area of good practice.

13 The University has other processes to review its academic provision, including periodic review and internal audit. The former, which occurs every six years, reviews all the taught provision within a discipline. Discipline teams produce a critical review of programmes, and a panel considers the evidence in order to produce a report which indicates the degree of confidence that can be placed in the programme team's capacity to manage its provision and in plans for academic development. The audit team came to the view that the process is both thorough and effective.

14 The Academic Board and its sub-committees discharge their responsibility for overseeing academic standards effectively and thoroughly. Although students and staff who met the audit team stated that attendance at committees and working parties was neither repetitive nor burdensome, the team had some doubts about the density of the committee arrangements. It is desirable for the University to review the committee framework at institutional and faculty level in order to reduce the potential for duplication.

15 The external examiner system underpins the University's assurance of academic standards. External examiners are nominated by faculties and scrutinised by the External Examiners' Sub-committee, which makes recommendations to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. The University has criteria for appointment; the Quality Management Handbook clearly sets out roles and responsibilities. External examiners are offered the opportunity of attending an annual conference, and receive an annual update of University changes. External examiners are appointed to modules and are expected to attend the relevant Progression and Award Board. They are expected to produce an annual report to which they receive a response within four weeks. The faculty produces an annual summary report of matters raised by external examiners which is considered by the Faculty Board and then by the Quality Risk Assessment Sub-committee. The Head of Academic Quality produces an annual institution-wide report for the University's senior management outlining any emerging themes.

16 From the evidence that the audit team saw, it was clear that the external examining system was effective in assuring academic standards of the University's programmes.

17 The University considers external reference points to be an important aspect of the University's framework for quality assurance, including the use of external examiners, the Academic Infrastructure and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. The University has embedded the principles of the FHEQ and the *Code of practice* into its Quality Management Handbook. It was also clear to the audit team that the procedures for considering professional, statutory and regulatory bodies' accreditation requirements for relevant awards are effective and comprehensive.

18 The Academic Regulations provide clear and comprehensive guidance on assessment. There is a common set of regulations for undergraduate awards and taught postgraduate programmes including collaborative provision. All module assessment strategies and requirements are published in module handbooks which are provided to students studying the module. All the students whom the audit team met were clear about the regulations and requirements for assessment. The team concluded that, overall, the University's policies and regulations for the assessment of students make an effective contribution to the maintenance of academic standards.

19 The University's strategic plan lists key performance indicators which include measures of student applications, intake, progression, completion and achievement. Data on such indicators are presented and discussed at the Academic Board and at departmental level through Annual Monitoring and Review. The University has effective systems for using statistical management information and is further developing such systems to strengthen the use of statistical information at the programme level.

20 The audit team found that confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

### **Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities**

21 The University's programme approval and periodic review processes and associated documentary guidance are designed to ensure that the precepts of the *Code of practice* published by QAA are embedded in programmes. Guidance documents and templates

## Institutional audit: report

require design teams to engage with the Academic Infrastructure, and alignment with its advice is checked at validation and periodic review.

22 The Academic Quality and Standards Committee considers revisions made to the *Code of practice*, guidance documents published by QAA, and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies' guidance to ensure that the University's practice remains in alignment with their expectations for the quality of the student experience.

23 The audit team concluded that the University was making effective use of the *Code of practice* and other external reference points in the management of the quality of student learning opportunities.

24 Faculties have powers to design, plan, approve and make modifications to modules and, save for major programme modifications where a University validation event is required, to determine their own approval processes. The audit team found that the University maintains effective oversight of faculty-specific processes through Annual Monitoring and Review.

25 Processes and documentary requirements for programme approval are set out clearly in the Quality Management Handbook. Additional documentation gives further detailed guidance for course teams for the provision and enhancement of academic quality in the University's programmes. It was clear to the audit team that the programme approval process ensured that programme approval decisions received University oversight and suitable external advice, and that, where programmes contained a significant proportion of technology-enhanced learning, the requirement for an adviser expert in this theme was satisfied. The team verified that University processes ensured that conditions of approval were being satisfied and that final approval was not granted by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee until conditions were met and the definitive course documentation approved.

26 The audit team formed the view that the University's programme approval process was rigorous in ensuring the quality of student learning opportunities in programme design, and that faculty processes and institutional oversight were working effectively.

27 The audit team formed the view that the Annual Monitoring and Review process for programmes achieved its objectives in the assurance of the quality of learning opportunities for students, notably mutual accountability between all parts of the institution, the integration of quality assurance procedures with academic planning and resource allocation, and the identification of enhancement activity. The team considered the integrated and comprehensive nature of the Annual Monitoring and Review process to be a feature of good practice.

28 Periodic review of programmes is conducted on a six-yearly cycle within cognate discipline areas. It comprises scrutiny of critical review documentation and supporting material and a periodic review event conducted by the University's Validation and Audit Standing Panel, including a meeting with students. There is external membership of periodic review panels. The audit team also found that periodic review reports were full and evaluative, summarising key evidence, making recommendations for development and highlighting features of good practice. The team concluded that the requirements for periodic review were being implemented effectively and consistently across the institution and that the University's periodic review process was effective in securing the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of students' learning opportunities.

29 Internal audits and annual process review provide additional mechanisms for review. Internal audits conducted in recent years have considered the quality of students' learning opportunities in areas such as assessment feedback, course organisation and management, and the management of collaborative provision. The audit team found the process of internal audit to be thorough and internal audit reports to be analytical and evaluative, with detailed

recommendations for action. The team also found examples of follow-up action prompted by internal audit recommendations. However, there were instances in which clear action planning had not been undertaken or recommendations from internal audit had not been actioned in a timely manner. The team considered that it would be desirable for the University to ensure that recommendations from internal audit are consistently and visibly actioned in a timely fashion.

30 The audit team concluded that the University's requirements for programme approval, annual monitoring and periodic review are clearly specified and implemented consistently across the institution, and that the University has mechanisms providing effective institutional oversight of the maintenance of the quality of students' learning opportunities.

31 Faculties are required to ensure that their departments have arrangements for continuous monitoring of the quality of student learning opportunities. It is an institutional expectation that departments operate a system of written module evaluation based on student views, and the University requires the establishment of programme boards and student-staff consultative forums.

32 Students generally confirmed that they had the opportunity to complete module evaluation questionnaires and described the effective operation of programme boards and the forums. The audit team noted the use of student module evaluation in Annual Monitoring and Review, and noted the reporting of actions taken in response to student feedback in staff-student consultative forums and programme boards.

33 The National Student Survey is supplemented by the University's own internal student satisfaction survey, which uses the national questions as its basis. The University entered the national Postgraduate Research Experience Survey in 2008-09 while continuing to operate its own internal postgraduate student experience survey. The University has also supported the Students' Union in the development of its own survey of student opinions. Survey results are considered at all levels of the institution, and various methods have been used to provide feedback to students on survey results and follow-up actions.

34 The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for collecting and acting on student feedback were effective in maintenance of the quality of student learning opportunities.

35 Student representation operates across the University. Students are involved in policy and decision-making through Students' Union representation at institutional level, and there are regular meetings between Students' Union officers and members of the senior management team. The University requires both student representation on faculty boards and the establishment of programme boards and student-staff consultative forums with elected student representatives.

36 Students confirmed that the student representation system worked effectively, that students understood the representative role, and that training for student representatives was available through the Students' Union. Documentary evidence also confirmed that student representation operated at all levels within faculties, allowing students to participate in quality management processes, including access to external examiner reports. Students also participate in periodic review and have contributed to internal audits.

37 The audit team formed the view that the University's arrangements for student involvement in the management of student learning opportunities were effective.

38 The University's Learning and Teaching Strategy 2009 set out as a key objective the enhancement of student learning through research-informed teaching. The University's research vision is of an institution where staff understand, celebrate and promote the research and scholarly activities that underpin the development of the curriculum. Programme approval and periodic review processes require consideration of the impact of

research and advanced scholarly activity upon the curriculum. Supporting documentation provides guidance to course teams on the incorporation of research-informed teaching into programmes.

39 The audit team noted that validation and review events placed emphasis on different aspects of the research-teaching link, and concluded that the University's key objective for the enhancement of student learning through research-informed teaching was being addressed. The team concluded that the university has effective arrangements for maintaining the link between research or scholarly activity and teaching and students' learning opportunities.

40 The University has three forms of flexible and distributed learning: placements and work-based learning; technology-enhanced learning; and student-initiated programmes. Placements and work-based learning are particular features of many of the University's programmes. The University works closely with its placement providers. Documentation for programmes that include work-based learning and placements is clear. Staff, students and the University acknowledge the increasing pressure on the number of placement places: the audit team considered it desirable for the University keep under review its strategy for the provision of placements for students.

41 The University regards technology-enhanced learning as a valuable support tool in the curriculum rather than a principal delivery mechanism. It has adopted a minimum entitlement for the use of the virtual learning environment which has resulted in all students having access to it both on and off-campus. The University's SOLSTICE Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning has been central in supporting the development of technology-enhanced learning at the University, including in validation panels for programmes, the training of staff and the identification and sharing of good practice. SOLSTICE has established a technology-enhanced learning professional development programme which has recently been adopted as a template by the Higher Education Academy for wider staff development and training in technology-enhanced learning. The audit team concluded that the contribution of SOLSTICE fellows to the development of technology-enhanced learning across the University is a feature of good practice.

42 The third form of flexible learning, 'Independent Studies', refers to student-initiated programmes where students negotiate with staff an individualised curriculum and programme of study. This allows them to pursue a particular interest, to work independently or at a distance, or, in the event of failure of no more than two modules, to complete an award. The University envisages that it will operate two versions of Independent Studies. The route may lead, in principle, to the award either of a degree in Independent Studies or of an award with Independent Studies as a minor element. To date neither award has been made by the University.

43 The 'Independent Studies' opportunity is a work in progress still, as the institution itself recognises. The University's documentation on the Independent Studies degree award, which has not been formally validated, is somewhat unclear and inconsistent; however, the University does have an 'enabling' mechanism specified in the Academic Regulations to validate an Independent Studies award.

44 Also, at the time of the audit, there had been no completed operation of procedure to validate Independent Studies as a minor element, but the University had plans to validate an Independent Studies minor in 2010-11. It is advisable for the University to ensure that future students taking the planned but currently unvalidated Independent Studies as a minor element would be studying on a validated programme. The audit team also recommends that it is advisable that the policies and procedures in relation to awards in Independent Studies are made explicit and consistent in the University's documentation.

45 Learning resource issues are identified as part of the annual monitoring and budget submission process. Students are satisfied with learning resources at the University, particularly the electronic access to essential textbooks. Students are also positive about the lecture and seminar rooms and other aspects of the learning environment.

46 The University has conventional arrangements for the admission of students. The University's admissions policy makes special reference to students with additional needs. The University accepts students with advanced standing where they provide evidence of prior learning. Claims are assessed by faculty Accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) mechanisms. In the view of the team, the arrangements for the admission of students are appropriate.

47 The University provides an extensive and inclusive range of centrally-provided support services for students including pre-enrolment assistance, induction, personal tutoring and careers advice through an award-winning careers service. Part-time students have equal access to the range of support services. Support provided for students with additional needs is a particular feature of the University, and was commended by students. The audit team considered the wide scope and inclusive nature of support provided to students to be a feature of good practice.

48 The University has a personal tutor system and engages students in personal development planning. Through 'thematic enquiries', a particular form of the University's tradition of internal audit, it has recently reviewed its policies and procedures for personal development planning and personal tutoring to ensure that they are aligned with practice elsewhere in higher education. The audit team was informed that working groups had been established to solve difficulties of variation between faculties in personal tutoring, but noted the lack of clear, time-limited action plans arising from internal audits in general, and considered it desirable that here, as elsewhere, the University ensure that internal audit recommendations are consistently and visibly actioned in a timely fashion.

49 Staff development is administered through the annual performance review and development scheme and the annual monitoring process. The University offers a wide range of staff development opportunities, coordinated by the Staff Development Unit, which is open to all staff including part-time and hourly paid. All staff new to teaching are expected to follow the University's Higher Education Academy-accredited Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education and Learning Support. The audit team considered the responsive and wide-ranging programme of staff development to be a feature of good practice.

50 Overall, the audit team found that confidence could reasonably be placed in the University's current and likely future management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

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

51 The University has taken institution-wide steps to embed enhancement in its programmes, with one of its strategic aims being advances in its portfolio of research and scholarship and academic practice in support of learning. This approach is articulated in the University's Quality Management Handbook.

52 The enhancement of student learning opportunities features at all stages of the quality management cycle, from planning and approval of new provision to annual monitoring of programmes and revalidation. The University also annually reviews aspects of its quality strategy, through an Annual Process Review, making recommendations for improvements in policies and procedures.

53 The University has processes for identifying and disseminating good practice identified in its programmes. The Directory of Good Practice is a repository for the good practice identified through programme approval and review. The University acknowledges that more work is needed to ensure that the information contained within the Directory is disseminated to staff. The recently developed Undergraduate Degree Framework Handbook contains detailed guidance for programme developers based on good practice across the University and sector and has facilitated a series of cross-faculty programme developments.

54 The Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, SOLSTICE, has been central to the enhancement of technology-enhanced learning across the University' with SOLSTICE Associate Fellows in some of its partner organisations ensuring that good practice is identified and shared at a local level. The audit team saw evidence of the identification and dissemination of good practice through these means and noted the cross-faculty sharing of good practice.

55 The audit team concluded that the University is committed to enhancing the quality of learning opportunities and the student experience, and has taken significant steps to promote this approach through its quality procedures.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

56 The University is committed to widening access to higher education. Its leadership of the Greater Merseyside and West Lancashire Lifelong Learning Network and membership of the Lancashire Lifelong Learning Network have facilitated the development of regional partnerships. The University currently operates 25 outreach and franchise partnerships in the region, mostly involving further education colleges. Students have access to locally provided higher education programmes and the opportunity to progress to higher levels of study at the University. The University has one overseas partnership in Singapore.

57 Most of the collaborative provision is in foundation degrees. A few masters level courses for continuing professional development are delivered through health service providers. The percentage of the University's students on collaborative programmes in 2009-10 is 5.4 per cent.

58 The University recognises the dangers inherent in collaborative provision, and operates a cautious, risk-based approach to its management. The approval and monitoring of low-risk provision is delegated to faculties; the Academic Quality and Standards Committee retains responsibility for approving and monitoring high-risk provision. With the exception of some outreach provision (travelling University lecturers) and work placement provision, collaborative arrangements are formalised through a memorandum of cooperation, which details the responsibilities of the partners.

59 The Head of Collaborative Partnerships has the central responsibility for the coordination of the establishment, approval and review of collaborative partnerships and works closely with the faculties and the partner organisations. Within the faculties, an academic liaison tutor provides support to the staff in the partner institution; an internal verifier confirms that standards are not being compromised and that students are receiving the right learning opportunities; and a faculty partnership officer provides an overview of administrative processes. The arrangements for the validation and delivery approval of new franchised provision differ from those for programmes delivered solely at the University. There is a two-stage process: partner approval followed by approval of programme-delivery arrangements.

60 Faculties are responsible for ensuring that the annual monitoring and periodic review of collaborative provision are completed. The Annual Monitoring and Review reports are often comprehensive and detailed, and include overviews of plans, liaison themes, resourcing of the programme and a risk analysis, with an action plan and list of progress from

the previous year. The liaison tutor has oversight of all programme information published by a partner college. The Collaborative Provision Forum, to which higher education managers and coordinators at partner colleges are invited, enables consultation with partners on strategic and operational issues and considers the collaborative provision annual development plan.

61 Faculty Academic Development Plans envisage consolidation in collaborative provision. A key aim of the International Strategy 2008-11 is to develop collaborative provision with organisations within and beyond the rest of the European Union. Some growth in the development of overseas partnerships is under consideration. There are no international exchange students at the University.

62 Application procedures for part-time study in partner colleges vary according to partner and University decision. Three ways of enrolment are operated: at Ormskirk; with University staff visiting partner institutions; or directly at the partner.

63 The University undertook a periodic review of foundation degree provision in the Faculty of Health in January 2008. The review panel noted the good and effective working relationships with five partner colleges and the infrastructure that had been developed to support the provision. Its report recommended that the University consider the need for partners to engage in research, to review the resource allocation model for partnerships and that the management arrangements for collaborative provision should be overseen by a critical friend.

64 An internal audit of institutional processes for the approval and management of collaborative provision was undertaken in 2009. While concluding that the franchise provision was generally effective and robust, the report reinforced the importance of liaison tutors and the faculty partnership officers, and made seven recommendations to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. These recommendations had not been entirely followed up in action plans by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee.

65 Students confirmed good arrangements for student progression from the partner colleges to study at the University, and that the transition to learning at a higher level was challenging. The partner student voice is noted at the University, and there are plans for representation on the Students' Union Council from partner colleges.

66 The audit team concluded that confidence can be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its collaborative provision awards and of the learning opportunities available to collaborative provision students.

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

67 Prior to the university receiving research degree awarding powers in 2008, research degrees were conferred by the University of Lancaster and governed by that university's regulations and procedures. The number of postgraduate research students in 2009-10 was 72, representing 0.3 per cent of the full-time equivalent of the student body. One was studying full-time and the remaining 71 were part-time. Seventy-six per cent of the postgraduate research students were in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. The Research Student Network provides a forum for this postgraduate research community.

68 The Academic Board agreed that a Graduate School be established in 2010 to support research degree students. The Graduate School will have broad responsibility for the administration of postgraduate research students and will evolve new processes for postgraduate and supervisor training, based on the expectations of Research Councils UK and the *Code of practice* published by QAA.

69 Applications from candidates with at least an upper-second class degree or equivalent are interviewed by a panel of experienced supervisors. An offer of a place on the Postgraduate Certificate in Research is made on behalf of the Dean or Head of Department who provides assurance that adequate supervisory arrangements exist. On admission, at least two supervisors are appointed and an experienced supervisor acts as Director of Studies.

70 There are two enrolment periods each year, and induction lasts for up to three days. Postgraduate research students are provided with the Research Student Handbook and are encouraged to maintain a record of personal development. Postgraduate research students expressed their satisfaction to the audit team with the support that they had received prior to and during induction, which had created a sense of identity for the part-time research community.

71 Postgraduate research students receive regular feedback from their supervisors and formal feedback on progress through their annual review. To transfer from MPhil to PhD, postgraduate research students submit an application to the Research Degrees Committee. A Transfer Review Panel is appointed, which, on completion of an oral examination, recommends that either the transfer is approved or the application is referred for further work.

72 A Postgraduate Certificate in Pre-Doctoral Studies was validated in March 2007 as a prerequisite to registration on a research degree programme. A consensus of opinion amongst staff and postgraduate students criticised the new programme. Consequently, an early revalidation took place in December 2009, and a new Postgraduate Certificate in Research was introduced to ensure a more marketable and attractive programme, tailored to the individual requirements of the research student and the proposed area of research.

73 It is anticipated that once a Graduate School is established the administrative responsibility for the newly revalidated Postgraduate Certificate in Research and for programme leadership will transfer to the Graduate School. Furthermore, it was agreed by the Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee that training would be provided for postgraduate research students that would be tailored to their disciplinary needs and beyond their first year of study. It is desirable for the University to complete its revision of the training programmes for postgraduate research students and their supervisors.

74 Key features of arrangements to obtain and act on postgraduate student feedback include the annual monitoring and review process, the completion of annual postgraduate research student evaluations and submission to the independent, national Postgraduate Research Experience Survey. These evaluations and the survey indicated broad student satisfaction.

75 The postgraduate research student voice is heard through representation on the Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee and in the monthly Research Student Network. The audit team noted that the actions of previous representatives had ensured the provision of a dedicated postgraduate research student study room and the publication of a postgraduate magazine. The postgraduates met by the team voiced strong praise for the support and care that they had received from their skilled and dedicated supervisory teams.

76 The research environment and postgraduate experience meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

## **Section 7: Published information**

77 The University publishes a wide variety of information to stakeholders both in hard copy and on the University's website. The national requirements for making information available are met and are accessible through the website and the Academic Quality Unit's

home page. The latter also details links with employers and the University's register of recognition from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

78 The content of prospectuses is managed by the Corporate Communications and Student Recruitment team, which also oversees and approves all publicity materials produced by partner institutions. Heads of Department have oversight and responsibility for all departmental publications, with an annual check for accuracy. The national Unistats website contains information on entry qualifications, progression, degree classification and the results from the National Student Survey.

79 A central Web Services team manages the web content, working closely with designated staff in academic departments. The website also provides access to policies and regulations, minutes of meetings and general advice to prospective students on all aspects of student support.

80 During induction, all undergraduate and postgraduate students receive a programme handbook, providing information about support services, academic and student regulations, accessible both as a CD-ROM and on the student web portal. Students receive handbooks for each module they study, containing learning outcomes and assessment strategies. On completion of their studies, students are provided with a transcript, produced as a CD-ROM, with details of their programme of study.

81 Both undergraduate and postgraduate students confirmed that the information provided to them as prospective applicants was accurate, informative and helpful. The 'Hi' website, geared to those intending to study at the University, was particularly praised. Students' prior expectations of studying at the University had been met. The audit team noted that the students were also content with the published information that they receive while at the University. Students indicated that they had clear and accurate information about their modules and programmes from the detailed handbooks, which they had found valuable at all levels of study.

82 The audit team found that reliance could be reasonably 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**

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

- the integrated and comprehensive nature of annual monitoring and review (paragraphs 12, 27)
- the contribution of SOLSTICE fellows to the development of technology-enhanced learning across the University (paragraphs 41, 54)
- the wide scope and inclusive nature of the personal and academic support provided for students (paragraphs 47, 75)
- the responsive and wide-ranging programme of staff development (paragraph 49).

### **Recommendations for action**

84 The audit team recommends that the University consider further action in some areas. The team advises the University to:

- ensure that future students taking the planned but currently unvalidated Independent Studies as a minor element would be studying on a validated programme (paragraph 44)

Institutional audit: report

- ensure that the policies and procedures in relation to awards in Independent Studies are made explicit and consistent in the University's documentation (paragraph 44).

It would be desirable for the University to:

- review the committee framework at institutional and faculty level in order to reduce the potential for duplication (paragraphs 5, 14)
- ensure that the recommendations of internal audits are consistently and visibly actioned in a timely fashion (paragraphs 29, 48, 64)
- keep under review its strategy for the provision of placements for students (paragraph 40)
- complete its revision of the training programmes for postgraduate research students and their supervisors (paragraph 73).

## Appendix

### Edge Hill University's response to the Institutional audit report

We were pleased to welcome the audit team to the University, and would like to place on record our thanks for the courteous manner with which the team conducted the entire audit process. We would also like to acknowledge the professional and business-like approach adopted by the team throughout.

The features of good practice identified by the audit team are welcomed, and we are pleased to share the audit team's acknowledgement of four fundamental and excellent pan-University aspects of our work, which impact positively upon many aspects of the student experience.

We were also pleased that whilst the team found minor aspects of our processes that could be improved, there were no fundamental concerns to compromise confidence judgements in standards and quality.

We have already made significant inroads into the matters identified in the report.

As indicated at the time of the visit, preparations to validate a minor route in Independent Studies were already underway and have now been approved within our undergraduate framework. As anticipated, a broader review of the regulations pertaining to the use of the title of Independent Studies has been initiated.

Similarly, Academic Board has already approved a revised deliberative committee structure for 2010-11, and a broader review of committees is scheduled in twelve months time.

A new programme of training for research degree students and supervisors had already been formulated during the final months of the 2009-10 academic year, and commences in October 2010.

Our approach to the management of placements is already detailed and robust, but the two Faculties concerned with the placements of large numbers of students have been tasked with a detailed monitoring of processes during the forthcoming academic year, and they will be formally revisited during the summer of 2011.

Finally, we fully accept the audit team's observation that our follow-up of internal audit recommendations has not always been structured or completed in a timely fashion. This will be addressed by the newly-created Learning and Teaching Committee when it considers reports from internal audit teams.

**RG 669 10/10**

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