



Institutional audit

Lancaster University

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Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education's (QAA) mission is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. editorial control

In England and Northern Ireland QAA conducts Institutional audits on behalf of the higher education sector to provide public information about the maintenance of academic standards and assurance of the quality of learning opportunities provided for students. It also operates under contract to the Higher Education Funding Council in England and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland to provide evidence to meet their statutory obligations to assure the quality and standards of academic programmes for which they disburse public funding. The audit method was developed in partnership with the funding councils and the higher education representative bodies and agreed following consultation with higher education institutions and other interested organisations. The method was endorsed by the former 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 approach to external quality assurance. At the centre of the process is an emphasis on students and their learning.

The aims of the revised Institutional audit process are to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges in England and Northern Ireland have:

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

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

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes
- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research

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

If the audit includes the institution's collaborative provision the judgements and comments also apply to collaborative provision, 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 academic standards of its awards.

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

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

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

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website. The institution will receive the summary, report and annex in hard copy (*Handbook for institutional audit: England and Northern Ireland 2006* - Annexes B and C refer).

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Lancaster University (the University) from 9 to 13 March 2009 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.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its provision
- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University has adopted a systematic approach to the appraisal and enhancement of the quality of students' learning opportunities across all levels of the institution.

Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The University's arrangements for postgraduate research students are soundly based, and the research environment and postgraduate research student experience meet 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 University provides helpful information for staff and for current and potential students, and has in place procedures for ensuring its accuracy and completeness.

Features of good practice

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

- the annual teaching prizes which have encouraged innovation and the dissemination of good practice
- the thematic review process which has provided a structured approach to enhancing students' learning opportunities.

Recommendations for action

The audit team considers it would be advisable for the University to ensure:

- that its arrangements for the management of quality and standards in collaborative provision are better integrated with standard institutional mechanisms
- that external examiners for all overseas collaborations are competent to make independent and robust comparisons with UK national standards.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- require an element of formal external academic input to programme approval
- strengthen the systematic analysis of data in annual and periodic review.

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 engages constructively with the Academic Infrastructure.

Report

1 An Institutional audit of Lancaster University (the University) was undertaken in the week commencing 9 March 2009. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of its awards and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. The audit also involved visits (one of them virtual) by audit team members to two providers of the University's collaborative provision: a local college and an overseas institution. The outcomes of these visits have been integrated into the present report.

2 The audit team comprised Dr C Alder, Mrs E Barnes, Dr P Brunt, Dr K Elliott and Dr R Haggarty, auditors, and Miss G Hooper, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Professor R Harris, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The University, founded in 1964, occupies a purpose-built campus on the edge of the city; all campus-based students (the majority of whom are full-time undergraduates) are members of a college as well as of the University itself. Research and research supervision are core activities, and the University is committed to pursuing research of international standards of excellence: over 92 per cent of academic staff were entered in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, and the University confers over 200 doctorates annually. It does not anticipate significant growth in on-campus student numbers, but will expand its range of regional and, increasingly, international partnerships where it identifies the potential for mutual benefit.

4 Since the last Institutional audit, in 2004, considerable change has taken place. These include: (i) the codification of the quality framework in the newly-created Manual of Academic Regulations and Procedures, a document which, in both capturing the totality of the quality framework and communicating it to the University community as a whole, was found to have become a key resource in quality management and enhancement, both of on-campus and collaborative provision; (ii) the institution of a Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy and Committee; (iii) the introduction of a new Strategic Plan specifying as a key aim enhancing the quality of the student experience; and (iv) restructuring central and faculty-level organisation. The University now has five academic main delivery units, termed faculties or schools but with similar levels of delegation (in this report they are referred to collectively as faculties). Of particular note is the assignment to each faculty of a dedicated teaching quality support officer to disseminate and support policy implementation. The University has responded to all recommendations of the previous Institutional audit, although the fact that it completed the process only shortly before the present audit means not all consequent structures and procedures are as yet fully embedded.

5 At the time of the audit the University was reviewing, with a view to restructuring, its central administration. In that this review casts doubt on the future of a number of structures relevant to this audit, notably the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching and the Office for the Associated Institutions, some arrangements featuring in this report will change in the near future. The audit cannot assess the likely consequences of this, but confirms that the aim of the review includes the further enhancement of students' learning.

6 The separate audit of the University's collaborative provision in 2006 led to the identification of four features of good practice and seven recommendations. While the University has addressed most of the recommendations, progress has sometimes been slow. This report will suggest that the planned growth in international collaborations will test the efficacy of current procedures (see paragraph 33).

7 The Vice-Chancellor, as chief executive officer, chairs and is supported by an influential Advisory Group. Senate is responsible for the strategic development of academic activities and for approving policies relating to academic quality, both on-campus and collaborative; its standing committees most relevant to this audit are, with the exception of the Learning, Teaching and

Assessment Committee, referred to as thematic committees. Thematic committees, which receive reports direct from faculty committees, include the Committee for the Associated Institutions, which is responsible for implementing the strategy for collaborative provision and overseeing partnership arrangements; it is itself parent to a further range of committees, boards and groups. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, membership of which includes the chairs of all thematic committees, is responsible for monitoring and developing learning, teaching and assessment strategy and promoting enhancement.

8 In summary, thematic committees play a key role in assuring standards and quality through their roles in course approval, annual monitoring and periodic review; the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee is charged with promoting enhancement. Faculties, particularly through their teaching committees and quality support officer, scrutinise proposals for new and revised programmes, and oversee both the annual monitoring and review of existing programmes and the implementation of central policies at departmental level.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

9 The University oversees academic standards on the basis of a 'hierarchy of compliance', involving precepts (broad guiding principles), regulations (where compliance is required), standard practice (where variation requires justification and approval) and operational procedures (where specified operational variability is permitted). The Teaching Quality Support Office plays a central role in supporting academic staff in relation to course design, approval and modification, both internally and by clearly explaining external requirements or expectations.

10 Programme approval begins with a two-stage faculty procedure prior to involving the appropriate thematic committee; it involves student advice and information, and, normally, external contributions (invariably so in collaborative provision and where professional, statutory or regulatory bodies are involved). The process is rigorously implemented, but the fact that external disciplinary experts other than external examiners are not routinely consulted means there is scope to strengthen the process. It would be desirable for the University to require an element of formal external academic input into programme approval.

11 Annual teaching review, a departmental responsibility covering most aspects of the student experience, results in a carefully monitored action plan. Faculties collate reviews undertaken by component departments for consideration by the faculty teaching committee and onward transmission, in summary form, to the thematic committee concerned. The audit found that this robust process has the potential to enhance institutional practice.

12 Periodic quality review, an institutional process steered by the teaching quality support officer concerned, involves a wide range of documentary evidence, including a departmental analysis and a faculty perspective. The two-day review is undertaken by a panel chaired by a senior academic member of the University and including two internal and two external members, one of the latter normally being a former external examiner, the other more detached. The outcome is reported to Senate. Faculties monitor follow-up actions, reporting annually to the thematic committee concerned. The audit, while finding examples of common themes being identified and addressed and of careful thought being given to issues raised, also found scope for more attention to be paid to data analysis as a firm basis for identifying strengths and weaknesses (see paragraph 16).

13 The audit found institutional procedures for appointing and inducting external examiners for internal programmes satisfactory (the external examining of collaborative programmes is discussed in paragraph 34), external examiners' handbooks clear and comprehensive, reporting arrangements (including responding to reports) efficient and with enhancement potential. The external examiner system is generally robust and, as far as internal provision is concerned, meets the expectations of the *Code of practice*. It is confirmed that institutional procedures permit the effective institutional oversight of external examiners' contribution to securing the standards of internal awards.

14 The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee is responsible for overseeing the University's engagement with external norms and expectations, a matter also addressed in annual and periodic quality review. The Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching is responsible for ensuring that the *Code of practice* is communicated to staff; faculty teaching quality support officers are critical to ensuring that departments are kept informed; departments, supported by faculties, are responsible for maintaining relationships with professional and other accrediting bodies, and the audit found examples of the appropriate discharge of this duty. The University increasingly liaises with employers in the development and delivery of curricula and in seeking to enhance student progression into work; it engages fully with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points.

15 Assessment regulations, which form part of the hierarchy of compliance (see paragraph 9), address all aspects of the process, aiming to ensure parity of treatment for students. A university-wide classification scheme for taught awards is in operation, although since special schemes for non-standard programmes also exist and have been the subject of critical comment in faculty overview reports, consultations on possible changes to examination board procedures and degree classification regulations are scheduled for later this year.

16 Since the 2004 Institutional audit, initiatives have been put in place to enhance the departmental use of management information, particularly in annual and periodic review. In furtherance of this, data sets have been produced, covering all main student indicators and facilitating comparative analysis. Since the audit found, however, that not all departments routinely use these data sets, the University has some way to go before it can be said to be making systematic use of such data within annual and periodic review. It is therefore desirable for the University to strengthen the systematic analysis of data in annual and periodic review.

17 Overall, the audit found that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

18 For student feedback the University draws on a range of internal and external surveys; students are involved in evaluating the quality of their experience through online module questionnaires, from which the feedback is reported in annual teaching review and presented to staff-student committees. Commitment to the collection, analysis and use of feedback is evident across the institution: several examples were found of remedial or enhancement-driven action emerging from it and students commented generally positively on its deployment. It was found that student feedback contributes significantly to the development and enhancement of learning opportunities.

19 Students are well represented on institutional-level committees, and the Students' Union has made telling contributions to policy development. While at departmental level the experience of student representatives is variable, the student written submission spoke generally warmly about communication and involvement, and some departments have supplemented the training provided for representatives with additional support. While the representative system appears to work better for undergraduate than for postgraduate students, postgraduate representatives are increasingly having an impact on departmental practices. The audit found that the student participation system contributes to the management of the quality of learning opportunities, but functions variably across faculties and departments.

20 The University's commitment to ensuring that research has a significant impact on students' learning is reflected in workload allocations, study leave, promotion and staff development, and in the fact that most curricular developments reflect institutional research strengths: the audit found examples of this approach being both successful and appreciated. Since, however, some collaborative arrangements exist in fields where research expertise is lacking, synergy between teaching and research is clearly neither obligatory nor ubiquitous.

21 The University considers its e-learning strategy integral to the student learning experience, and its well-established virtual learning environment includes a facility for personal development planning: this has received a generally positive response from students. In addition, while departmental use of the virtual learning environment is variable, the audit found that the best practice has contributed significantly to enhancing students' learning. Nevertheless, since two further virtual learning environments lacking institutional support are currently operational, one of them used in association with a recently developed collaborative master's programme, the University may wish to take steps to ensure the long-term reliability of its existing arrangements.

22 The University was, at the time of the audit, in the early stages of delivering ambitious and comprehensive strategies for information and communication technology and for estate development. The implementation of this latter strategy in particular has led to unavoidable but limited short-term disruption which the University is attempting to minimise. The audit found that the enhancement potential of both strategies is considerable, and that, overall, students are well served by the range of learning resources available.

23 The University's admissions policy aims to ensure that all applicants are treated equally and fairly, that those with the potential to succeed are attracted and retained. Targets for widening participation, considerably aided by regional collaborations, have largely been met. The University has enhanced its provision of language teaching for international students; some faculties and departments supplement this with tailored provision for their own students, either directly or through the Student Learning Development Centre. The audit found that the University's admissions policy is fit for purpose and that the institution is taking proper steps to meet the needs of its students.

24 Prospective students apply to a college on the basis of information which helps them make an appropriate choice; while the audit found that undergraduates particularly value the college system, survey evidence makes clear that, for the most part, they also appreciate the support of departmental personal tutors. For postgraduates, particularly research students, the experience is more variable, and the fact that some research students are affiliated to two departments was identified as a complicating factor in delivering effective support. Nevertheless, the audit found that the University is endeavouring to enhance the postgraduate experience, as it is that of direct entry and international students.

25 The Centre for Enterprise, Employment and Careers provides information and guidance on career planning and preparation for job applications, interviews and work placements and experience. At present, not all departments engage closely with the Centre, and some respondents to the Student Experience Survey 2007 identified progression to employment as an area for improvement. The University is addressing the issue both by embedding support into curricula and by planning the rollout of a pilot Insight into Enterprise and Employability programme to all second-year undergraduates in 2010.

26 The University's strong commitment to staff development is formally expressed in the five key areas of its People Strategy (2006 to 2011): talent management; total reward; professional and leadership development; employee relations; and human resource management. It has guidelines both for inducting new staff (those new to teaching normally take a Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice) and for preparing existing staff for significant new roles such as head of department or research student supervisor: staff who had received this support spoke warmly of it.

27 The appraisal and review scheme aims to support both individual aspirations and institutional planning; faculties assign teaching loads within a broad framework of expectations; a well-established and universal peer observation scheme is in operation; and the reward and development framework is inclusive, well understood and was found to be successful. Outstanding achievement in learning and teaching is recognised in annual teaching prizes, which promote both individual satisfaction and strategic initiatives: University or faculty teaching prize

winners are expected to disseminate their innovative practice, and the University's success in securing nine national teaching fellowships has been attributed to this scheme and to the commitment to learning and teaching underpinning it. Annual teaching prizes, which have encouraged innovation and the dissemination of good practice, are a feature of good practice.

28 The audit found that student participation in quality assurance is established; constructive links are maintained between research and teaching; resource monitoring and allocation procedures are effective; student support is sometimes outstanding and seldom or never less than satisfactory; arrangements for staff development and support are noteworthy. Confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the learning opportunities available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

29 The University's commitment to driving forward its enhancement agenda has been supported by the organisational changes consequent upon the reform of academic decision-making structures: these relate particularly to the increased emphasis on self-reflection contained in annual teaching review and the creation of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee (see paragraph 7). This Committee's introduction of thematic reviews, designed to examine particular processes and procedures relating to the student experience and to steer improvements by cutting across institutional boundaries, has had considerable impact at institutional, faculty and departmental levels, such that enhancement is now part of day-to-day institutional discourse. The thematic review process, which encourages and disseminates good practice and enhances students' learning opportunities, was found to have provided a structured approach to enhancing students' learning opportunities, and to be a feature of good practice.

30 The University's faculties and departments were found, on the basis of documentary study and meetings, increasingly to be driving and monitoring an institution-wide enhancement programme. The University has adopted a systematic approach, across all levels of the institution, to the appraisal and enhancement of the quality of students' learning opportunities.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

31 The University's approach to collaborative provision is underpinned by a commitment to capacity building among partner institutions. In that this involves devolving greater responsibility to some partners than to others, the approach can be described as flexible and risk-based within a common framework. This framework broadly involves high-risk arrangements being managed by the Office for the Associated Institutions, and elements of more low-risk ones being devolved to faculties and departments. Most non-academic operational responsibilities lie with the seven subcommittees of the Committee for the Associated Institutions, although the University has plans to incorporate them more fully into normal faculty business.

32 Collaborative partners are supported by a course consultant system. Course consultants, where they are members of University staff, bring both disciplinary expertise and sound quality assurance to the partner institution to which they are assigned as critical friend. The University does, however, have a small amount of collaborative provision where it lacks disciplinary expertise: in such cases it employs external course consultants who are, in some cases, employees of another collaborative partner in the same region as the partner for which they serve as consultants. While the University explained that such individuals are familiar with the University and the educational context of the partnership, and while the audit did not uncover problems, it was considered that this one-step removed approach should be handled with care: not only are conflicts of interest possible, but the University may find it more difficult both to ensure that such staff are effective in ensuring the integration of research and teaching to which it is committed and to control a link managed by a non-employee.

33 The audit found that the rather separate management of collaborative provision, which was considered complex by the 2006 Collaborative provision audit, remains so, and that current procedures will be tested if expansion plans materialise - a possibility which the University itself acknowledges. More closely integrating the quality assurance of validated institutions into on-campus procedures would provide greater assurance as to the comparability of academic standards and more opportunities for quality enhancement. The University is advised to ensure that arrangements for the management of quality and standards in collaborative provision are better integrated with standard institutional mechanisms.

34 The University retains responsibility for external examiner appointments, in most cases following on-campus procedures. In some overseas collaborations, however, local academics without United Kingdom (UK) higher education experience are appointed on the basis of partner institution recommendation, subject only to their being able to take an 'informed view' of the programmes concerned. The justification for this procedure rests on: (i) its own evaluation of equivalence of standards between the higher education systems of the partner country and the UK; (ii) the training provided by the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching; and (iii) meetings with, and moderation by, course consultants. The audit found, first, that in such a situation external scrutiny is not necessarily independent, critical and competent; and secondly, to the extent that reliance is placed on course consultants to ensure comparability with institutional standards, the University is effectively externally examining its own programmes. The University is advised to ensure that external examiners for all overseas collaborations are competent to make independent and robust comparisons with UK national standards.

35 The approval process, both for new partnerships and for subsequent validations, involves a common set of due diligence questions; the institution of a panel containing at least one external member; and, normally, an on-site visit. Annual and periodic monitoring and review operate within common principles, detailed operations being defined in individual memoranda of agreement: the procedures were found to operate generally effectively, although with some variability in the levels of scrutiny given. The audit found that the University's collaborative provision meets the expectations of the Academic Infrastructure and engages with relevant external reference points.

36 The Office for the Associated Institutions website, although it has a link to the Register of Collaborative Partnerships, does not provide programme details: these are maintained in two databases managed by the same Office. Since the memoranda of understanding archive is also separately maintained it was concluded that the rather fragmented manner in which the University maintains its Register is unduly complex, and that benefit would accrue were it to create a unified and comprehensive Register of Collaborative Provision.

37 The audit found that while aspects of the University's arrangements for managing the academic standards and quality of learning opportunities in its collaborative provision are complex, grounds exist for confidence in the overall current and likely future management of the system.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

38 The University's arrangements for managing research programmes differ from those for taught programmes in that all procedures and regulations are coordinated (though not necessarily undertaken) by the Graduate School. The audit found that the Graduate School Committee (which also has responsibility for taught postgraduate programmes) plays a central role in monitoring research degree programmes; that proper oversight of the application of the regulations takes place; and that due regard is paid to the standards and quality of postgraduate research.

39 New research students are required to take part in induction programmes, and to undertake both a development needs analysis and any training the analysis identifies as necessary. The University makes available a wide range of training programmes, as well as information and advice on such matters as meeting supervisors, planning the thesis and administration.

Research students are monitored annually in a process designed to be both formal and reflective. Procedures for confirmation of PhD registration or downgrading to MPhil include an independent element, and are clearly expressed and understood. Transparent procedures and criteria exist for the selection, appointment and training of research students wishing to teach undergraduates. Research students spoke in complimentary terms of these procedures, which the audit found to be well-conceived, properly implemented and reliably assured.

40 Requirements and procedures concerning such matters as the qualifications and experience of supervisors, the composition of supervisory teams and the nature and frequency of supervision sessions are published internally and supported by training. Supervisory workloads within and between departments are audited, and research student supervision is included in work allocation. Examination arrangements are the responsibility of the Director of the Graduate School. Viva voce examinations are either independently chaired, usually by a senior member of academic staff, or audio-recorded. Procedures exist, and are readily available, for dealing with suspected plagiarism, complaints and appeals. The audit found these arrangements thoughtfully designed and efficiently implemented.

41 Research students are represented on institutional, faculty and departmental committees, and included in both internal and, in the case of the national Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, external surveys. The results of these are widely discussed with student representatives and other stakeholders, with issues of significance addressed institutionally. These arrangements were found to be fully operational and valued by research students.

42 The Graduate School, and the faculty-based arrangements for supporting research postgraduates, together constitute a coherent and student-focused cross-disciplinary framework. They are robustly managed and were found to be a reliable means of assuring academic standards and enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities. Institutional arrangements for research students are sound, and the research environment and postgraduate experience meet in full the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1*.

Section 7: Published information

43 Institutional information for both applicants and students, particularly since the implementation of the results of a thematic review of information undertaken in 2007, is produced in broadly consistent form and covers all aspects of students' educational experience and needs, including available support structures. Clear lines of responsibility exist for checking the accuracy of prospectuses and for updating institutional web-based material: in most cases in collaborative provision this responsibility rests with the Office for the Associated Institutions. Students, both campus-based and in partner institutions, consider published information accurate, and online information comprehensive and useful; they are also familiar with extension, complaint and appeal procedures. The audit found institutional-level information full and accurate, and, while the content of departmental handbooks was more variable, both accuracy and coverage are checked in periodic review; already the best handbooks were found to be of high quality; and the University is taking steps to achieve greater consistency.

44 Most statistical information used by the University is based on data held in the student information system, the accuracy of which is checked by the Student Registry, which is also responsible for ensuring the accuracy and currency of information on the UniStats website. The audit found that the University complies with all requirements and recommendations concerning public information about the academic standards and quality of its higher education provision. It provides full and accurate information for staff and for current and potential students, and has in place appropriate systems and guidance for checking its accuracy and completeness.

Section 8: Recommendations and features of good practice

45 As a result of its investigations the audit team found that:

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its provision
- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Features of good practice

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

- the annual teaching prizes which have encouraged innovation and the dissemination of good practice (paragraph 27)
- the thematic review process which has provided a structured approach to enhancing students' learning opportunities (paragraph 29).

Recommendations for action

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

48 The audit team considers it would be advisable for the University to ensure:

- that its arrangements for the management of quality and standards in collaborative provision are better integrated with standard institutional mechanisms (paragraph 33)
- that external examiners for all overseas collaborations are competent to make independent and robust comparisons with UK national standards (paragraph 34).

49 It would be desirable for the University to:

- require an element of formal external academic input to programme approval (paragraph 10)
- strengthen the systematic analysis of data in annual and periodic review (paragraph 16).

Appendix

Lancaster University's response to the Institutional audit report

The University welcomes the outcome of the institutional audit and the judgement that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of both the academic standards of its awards and the quality of learning opportunities available to its students. The University was pleased to be able to help pilot the methodology for a hybrid Institutional and Collaborative Provision Audit. The University appreciates the professional and courteous manner in which the audit was conducted and welcomes both the highlighting of areas of good practice and also the recommendations for advisable and desirable action, together with the other suggestions for improvement contained within the report. Since the audit, the University has continued with the planned reorganisation of its central services and with the closer integration of quality assurance processes for collaborative and in-house provision. Other recommendations and suggestions will be taken forward in the autumn term of 2009.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester GL1 1UB

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

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