QAA

Institutional audit

Oxford Brookes University

November 2010

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* 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 Oxford Brookes University (the University) from 8 to 12 November 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. As part of the process, the team visited one of the University's partner organisations in the UK, where it met with staff and students, and it also conducted meetings by videoconference with staff and students from an overseas partner.

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 Oxford Brookes 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.

On this occasion the team carried out a hybrid Institutional audit. The hybrid process is used where QAA considers that it is not practicable to consider an institution's collaborative provision as part of standard Institutional audit, and that a separate audit activity focusing solely on this provision is not necessary.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University's approach to quality enhancement is framed by its Strategy for Enhancing the Student Experience. It utilises a number of strategic initiatives as a means of driving through curriculum change and development of practice, in particular with respect to assessment. Quality enhancement is embedded within its quality assurance processes and there is a clear commitment to enhancing the quality of the student experience at all levels and areas of the institution.

Postgraduate research students

Overall, the audit team found that the University's processes and procedures for postgraduate research programmes make an effective contribution to its management of the quality and standards of those programmes, and that the arrangements for the management

of the postgraduate research student experience, including arrangements 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 of good practice:

- the close working relationship between the University and the Students' Union in enhancing student representation at a variety of levels within the institution
- the introduction of the Student Support Co-ordinator role as a focal point for student contact
- the structured approach taken by the University to addressing its strategic objectives through the Continuing Professional and Personal Development framework
- the structured approach to the implementation, support and monitoring of the University's initiatives to improve assessment policies and practice.

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- strengthen its quality management processes in order to provide a more comprehensive and explicit institutional oversight of the academic standards and comparability of all awards
- ensure that staff and students in all collaborative provision have clearly communicated entitlements and timely access to learning resources and support
- ensure that all postgraduate research students who participate in teaching and/or the assessment of students receive appropriate training prior to undertaking these duties
- ensure that all student handbooks provide, in a timely way, complete, consistent and current information consonant with University regulations.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- ensure that identified good practice is disseminated systematically across all areas
- ensure that liaison managers receive appropriate induction, support and development.

Reference points

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

- the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*
- the frameworks for higher education qualifications in England, Wales 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 Oxford Brookes University (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 8 November 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 of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2   The audit team comprised Dr Mark Atlay, Professor Tony Cryer, Dr Keith Gwilym, Professor Kris Spelman-Miller, Mr Mohammed Surve and Dr Carol Vielba, auditors, and Ms Alison Blackburn, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Ms Maureen McLaughlin, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3   The origins of Oxford Brookes University lie in the Oxford School of Art. From its foundation in 1865 the School grew to become the Oxford Polytechnic. In 1992, under the terms of the Further and Higher Education Act, the Polytechnic became a university and it took its name from a former Vice-Principal, John Henry Brookes. In 2000, Westminster College became a school within the University, and was renamed as the Westminster Institute of Education. Oxford Brookes University has full taught and research degree awarding powers.

4   The University currently has around 18,300 Brookes-based students, of which around 13,000 are full-time. Undergraduates account for 78 per cent of the student body. Most postgraduate students are on taught programmes; 280 students are registered for research degrees. The University has collaborative arrangements with 36 partner institutions; fourteen of these are located overseas. Just over 6,000 students are registered on collaborative programmes; three quarters of them are registered overseas. In addition, approximately 260,000 students worldwide are registered on a scheme operated jointly with the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) that allows them to top up their professional qualification to a degree. Around 2,500 ACCA students enrol on this programme annually.

5   Academic provision is organised into eight academic schools: Arts and Humanities, Built Environment, Business, Health and Social Care, Life Sciences, Social Sciences and Law, Technology, and the Westminster Institute of Education. The University operates across a number of campuses and sites, all but one of which are located around the city of Oxford. The Headington campus comprises three sites on the edge of Oxford. The Schools of Technology and Business are located on the Wheatley campus outside Oxford, while the Westminster Institute of Education is located within the city on the Harcourt Hill campus. The University also has a small campus at Swindon, which houses programmes from the School of Health and Social Care.

6   The University's mission is 'to lead the intellectual, social and economic development of the communities it serves through teaching, research and creativity that achieve the highest standards'. The University has recently developed and adopted a new forward-looking strategy, entitled 'Strategy 2020'; this identifies four sets of goals focused on enhancing the student experience; increasing the quality of the University's research; continuing its commitment to the local and wider community; and creating sector-leading, high-quality services.

7   The previous QAA Institutional audit took place in April 2005 and found that broad confidence could be placed in the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards and quality of learning opportunities of its awards. The previous audit team identified a number of features of good practice and also recommended that the

University should consider further advisable actions in a number of areas, including ameliorating the impact of introducing semesters; reviewing assessment policies; and strengthening its institutional-level quality assurance processes in order to provide more effective oversight by the Academic Board and its committees of the operation of these processes in schools. The 2005 report also made recommendations for desirable actions to improve the dissemination of good practice; improve student engagement at the institutional level in collaboration with the Students' Union; and develop a more strategic approach to the use of statistical data. The present audit team saw evidence that the University had addressed all these recommendations, although, in the case of strengthening central oversight of quality assurance processes and the formal dissemination of good practice, the audit team noted that further work was needed.

8   The report of the QAA Collaborative provision audit, which took place in April 2006, also found that broad confidence could be placed in the University's current and likely future management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. It identified good practice in the operation of the Associate College Partnership. The report made recommendations for action, which included the advisability of reviewing the role of liaison managers in periodic review; developing a coherent Human Resources framework for the role of liaison manager; reviewing processes for approving, monitoring and updating Operations Manuals; and strengthening central committee oversight of collaborative provision. The report also recommended the desirability of extending the identification of good practice across partners.

9   The present audit team saw evidence that the recommendations of the 2006 Collaborative provision audit had been addressed. However, some of the issues which underlay the 2006 recommendations, such as evaluating the equivalence of the student experience across collaborative provision or the oversight of delegated responsibilities for assessment, had not been fully addressed. The team noted that the University had strengthened its systems to identify good practice, but that systems for effective dissemination across the institution and its partners needed further development. The team also noted that, while progress had been made in strengthening support for the liaison manager role, it would be desirable for further action to be taken.

10   In the period since the last audits were undertaken, a number of changes have taken place in the University. A review of governance arrangements was commissioned, which reported in 2009 and recommended a number of changes to committee structures at school level, clarification of the division of responsibility between key committees and reporting lines, as well as changes in committee operation. Student demand and a commitment to improving the student experience have acted as drivers for a number of initiatives, which include developing the Brookes Student Learning Experience Strategy; the Assessment Compact; a review and rationalisation of the University's subject groupings; and a review of all undergraduate programmes. A new University strategy, Strategy 2020, and a revised mission were formally adopted in 2010. In order to facilitate implementation of the strategy the University is planning to reorganise its academic structures during the coming year, and is currently developing operational plans to accomplish this.

11   The audit team found that, although the University had made progress to attend to all the issues raised in previous audit reports, there were some outstanding matters to address in order to respond fully and effectively. The team found that those features which were previously identified as constituting good practice remained positive features of the University's provision. The team also found that the University had responded appropriately to the findings of the 2006 Review of postgraduate research degree provision published by QAA and to other relevant audit reports.

12   The University stated that the following principles underpin its framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities: integration of the approval, monitoring and review of academic provision with academic planning processes; externality; student engagement; shared responsibility, in which schools and directorates exercise responsibility and operate their own procedures within a centrally agreed framework; and enhancement through embedding the identification and dissemination of good practice within the processes of quality assurance.

13   On the deliberative side, responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities is vested in the Academic Board, which is responsible to the Board of Governors. Academic Board is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. It delegates significant authority to the Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee, with respect to taught provision and for oversight of the quality and standards of collaborative programmes of study, and the Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee, with respect to research degree provision. The Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee has a subcommittee that focuses on taught postgraduate students (Postgraduate Taught Sub-Committee) and the Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee is assisted by the Research Degrees Sub-Committee. The Learning Partnerships Advisory Group, which reports to the Executive Board, approves, monitors and reviews the University's partnerships for collaborative provision.

14   Schools have delegated responsibility for the delivery of the University's academic provision and the implementation of University policy, including the operational safeguarding of quality and standards. Central policies and procedures provide a framework and guidance for action, but the audit team found that the limits of permitted variation to meet local needs and preferences is frequently wide. Schools have committee structures which, to a large extent, mirror those at university level; proposed changes will standardise school-level committees. There is overlapping membership between local and university-level committees. Individual members of staff are also expected to have due regard for academic quality and standards in the discharge of their responsibilities.

15   In terms of executive responsibility, the Vice-Chancellor, as chair of Academic Board, is responsible to the Board of Governors for the quality and standards of the University's awards. As the institution's Chief Executive she is supported in this role by an Executive Board, which comprises the Registrar, pro vice-chancellors, heads of directorate, and deans of school. The Board of Governors delegates executive powers to the Executive Board for the strategic and financial planning and operation of the University.

16   Schools are headed by deans, who have considerable budgetary and executive autonomy. They are assisted by associate and assistant deans and heads of academic departments. The new organisational structure being implemented during the current year will see deans replaced by four pro vice-chancellors, each assisted by three associate deans responsible respectively for strategy and development, student experience, and research and knowledge transfer. Each academic sub-unit will be led by a departmental head with a revised and enhanced role. Under the new structure the four pro vice-chancellors who head faculties, together with pro vice-chancellors for student experience and research and the Registrar, will form the senior management team under the chairmanship of the Vice-Chancellor. The current service directorates will be grouped under the Registrar, as at present.

17   The University employs a number of means by which it assures the standards and quality of its provision. These include:

• use of the Academic Infrastructure
• the University's academic regulatory framework

- a system of examination boards with associated regulations
- external examiners appointed to all provision
- a Quality and Standards Handbook
- University policies for quality assurance and enhancement
- a programme of themed audits
- a central quality assurance unit, the Academic Policy and Quality Office.

18   The University has recently adopted a ten-year strategic plan, which will be supported by sub-strategies such as the Student Learning Experience Strategy (from 2010 this was superseded by the Strategy for Enhancing the Student Experience). The University intends that these strategies will be implemented with the aid of strategy maps and through Faculty and Directorate plans, and will build on existing initiatives such as the Assessment Compact and the Academic Progression Initiative.

19   The audit team found that the institution's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities was appropriate and broadly effective. In terms of the stated underpinning principles, the team found that both externality and student engagement were generally positive features of the framework. The team noted examples of integration of quality assurance and academic planning processes. However, the team observed that the exercise of shared responsibility between schools and the central institution did not always occur within clearly defined limits and was not always subject to effective central oversight; these areas are explored in more detail in Sections 2, 3 and 5 of the report. To this end, the team advised that the University should strengthen its quality management processes in order to provide a more comprehensive and explicit institutional oversight of the academic standards and comparability of all awards. Illustrative examples of this are found in this report (see paragraphs 23, 24, 27, 34, 87, 88 and 92). With respect to the principle of enhancement, the team noted opportunities for the identification of good practice within the quality assurance, but identified fewer instances of effective dissemination of good practice. This aspect is explored in further detail in Section 4 of the report.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

20   The University publishes clear and full guidance on its expectations of schools in relation to their delegated responsibilities for programme approval, monitoring and review. Synoptic reports arising from these school-based processes are considered by the schools' Academic Enhancement and Standards Committees before being received and noted by the University Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee, which informs Academic Board, through its minutes, of their status.

21   The academic approval of new programmes relies primarily on the consideration by a panel with external representation of a draft student handbook, the programme specification, and module descriptions that include details of the assessment strategies to be used. Although aligned with process requirements, approval reports read by the audit team did not consistently and explicitly demonstrate how academic standards were evidenced, and how external reference points such as subject benchmark statements had been used in their definition. Panel reports are received by the Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee, which also considers school responses to any conditions or recommendations made by the panel. Minor changes to programmes formally require both school and university-level approval through clear and rigorous procedures. Major changes require the involvement of an approval panel, which in turn requires the involvement of external advisers in the development of new provision and of external panel members for programme approval and periodic review events.

22   The monitoring of programmes leads to the preparation and consideration in schools of Annual Programme Review reports, drawn from module level considerations and

which address a limited range of student data. The reports are aligned with process requirements and form part of the information used to prepare School Annual Review reports. These reports are wide-ranging in content, with the template in use prompting a relatively limited insight into the explicit assurance of award standards. The school reports are considered by the Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee, which seeks to identify issues for further consideration by the schools and the institution.

23   The outcomes of the six-yearly periodic review process, which encompasses the approval and reapproval of programmes, including those delivered collaboratively, are considered in subject or disciplinary groupings. The key evaluation available to the University arising from periodic review takes the form, substantially, of a record of the review panel meeting with the relevant staff and students. The audit team found that the reporting format made the demonstration of the explicit assurance of academic standards less than clear. Reports are received and noted by the Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee, which also receives responses from schools to the relevant periodic review reports. The presence of professional, statutory and regulatory body representatives on panels, and reference to professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements, strengthens the approach to quality assurance and the externality of reviews in the relevant areas. Periodic review and approval events and their outcomes are the subject of a general overview report received by the Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee.

24   In relation to the approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes the audit team formed the view that schools address the requirements of the extensive processes involved conscientiously and comprehensively. However, the reporting outcomes from these processes are structured and reported in such a way as to dilute the value they could bring to the institution-level oversight of the assurance of academic standards.

25   The University places great reliance, across all its provision, on external examiners for the assurance of its award standards. The University also takes steps to ensure, through ongoing review, that its policy statements and requirements of external examiners remain current and in line with external expectations, including Section 4 of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*) published by QAA. The University follows comprehensive and thorough procedures for the nomination and appointment of its external examiners, who demonstrate a diligent commitment to the undertaking of their specified duties, including reporting.

26   The University provides external examiners with a template for their reports, which guides them in their consideration of assessment and the standards of awards. Based on the reports read by the audit team, external examiners overwhelmingly align their reports with the University's stated reporting requirements and endorse clearly the standards that are achieved and their general equivalence with national comparators. External examiner reports are made available to the relevant staff and students, together with the responses from schools. Reports are also reviewed during annual programme monitoring after the receipt by examiners of school responses.

27   Themes and issues arising from external examiner reports are reviewed in a report to the Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee. However, the irregular production of the report and its descriptive focus limits its additional value to the assurance of standards provided by the reports themselves. Although well provided for in relation to information sources, external examiner induction is limited to school-level briefings.

28   The audit team confirms that the operation of the external examiner system within the University is well established and provides for the general assurance of academic standards, and that examiners overwhelmingly judge the standards that are attained to be appropriate to the level of the awards made.

29   The University's overall framework for the assurance of standards has been aligned with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and the *Higher education credit framework for England*. These and other external reference points are inherent in its processes and in general the audit team formed the view that externality was a feature of the University's assurance of standards.

30   The University's objectives for assessment have recently been clarified and developed through concerted actions. These have been informed by the Brookes Student Learning Experience Strategy, its associated Assessment Compact, and through the implementation of an Academic Progression Initiative and related structural and regulatory developments. All programmes have been reviewed within this context, with the annual and periodic review processes being used to continue the actions.

31   The majority of the University's undergraduate programmes are located within the Undergraduate Modular Programme, with the exception of Foundation Degrees, collaborative provision and some professional provision. Although the University considers overview reports on the operation and academic outcomes from some of these areas, the information is not readily comparable between the areas. As such, the audit team formed the view that the University has a limited overarching qualitative and quantitative information base upon which to undertake analysis of the comparability of awards across all its relevant provision.

32   The University operates a two-tier examination committee system for its Undergraduate Modular Programme provision, with single-tier boards addressing the remainder. All are subject to external examiner involvement and operate within the clear regulations governing them. The data they receive is sufficient for their decision making, and the university-level committee relating to Undergraduate Modular Programme awards brings value to the assurance of process and of standards. The University conscientiously keeps under review the operation of the examination system and its regulations. The audit team also found that the conduct of assessment operated effectively, with student experience being fully considered.

33   The load and timing of assessment has received serious attention from the University and has been addressed progressively as part of a concerted strategic approach to assessment. The audit team heard that the benefits of this approach are fully recognised by students, although the University is aware that more needs to be done to achieve full implementation across all its areas.

34   In 2008-09 the University undertook a themed audit of the use made of student data in the quality assurance of its provision, and came to the conclusion that this use was limited not only because of the lack of appropriate guidance but also because of the form in which the data was held. Consequently, a Business Intelligence Project has been initiated. A key objective of the project is to ensure that student data reports are available to support a wide range of review assurance processes. Although at a relatively early stage, the audit team saw that, in its pilot stage, the project has made significant progress on the quality of the student data reports. The team formed the view that this progress needs to be sustained if the full benefits of the pilot are to be capitalised upon in support of a greater capability of the University to assure the standards of its awards and to provide a sound basis for comparability across all of its provision.

35   The audit team concluded that confidence could be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of academic standards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

36 The University's Quality and Standards Handbook states that the aims of the programme approval process are to ensure, among other things, that a programme's curriculum and learning experiences will allow students to achieve the stated learning outcomes, and that the design and delivery of the programme will reflect best practice and achieve the required academic standards and quality. The key processes involved are the initial sign-off by deans at school level, the work of the Programme Development Team, and the consideration by a panel that gives final approval to a new programme. Independent external advice and student input are required elements of the process. The reports of final approval panels are received as a standing item at meetings of the Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee.

37 All programmes participate in the Annual Programme Review process. Reports include critical commentary on the programme's curriculum, teaching and learning, and learning resources. The data utilised in compiling these reports includes student feedback, external commentary and statistics on student progression and achievement. Reviews are required to contain action plans. Programme reviews feed into the School Annual Review process and the resultant reports feed into the planning process through an annual Challenge Meeting. The Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee receives and discusses the School Annual Review reports, together with a summary of issues arising which require action by the University. The issues emerging from school annual reviews are also reported to the Senior Management Team.

38 Periodic review of provision takes place on a six-year cycle and focuses at the level of subjects or disciplines. The process covers the review of a number of aspects of learning opportunities, including curriculum; learning, teaching and assessment; student support; physical resources and human resources. It involves input from both externals and students. The outcome of the process is the reapproval, or otherwise, by a panel of the provision within the cognate area. Reapproval may be conditional and may also include recommendations for future action. The Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee receives periodic review reports as a standing item and also receives responses to periodic reports one year on. An overview report on good practice and issues emerging from all approval and monitoring activity is also received annually by this committee.

39 Matters relating to the quality of learning opportunities for research students are considered through the annual report of the Research Degrees Sub-Committee. The University also operates a system of theme-based reviews of practice. Recent reviews have focused on student participation, and the use of student data in approval, monitoring and review.

40 The audit team concluded that, with respect to the maintenance of the quality of learning opportunities, the University's systems for approval, monitoring and review are sound.

41 The University states that its quality management policies and processes are underpinned by the Academic Infrastructure and the expectation that programme development teams and staff responsible for quality within schools are familiar with relevant components of the Academic Infrastructure.

42 The Academic Quality and Policy Office has mapped the University's practice against the 10 sections of the *Code of practice* and noted areas where action is needed. The mapping is updated when new editions of sections of the *Code of practice* are issued. However, the audit team noted that the mapping of some areas was not up to date. The lack of currency of these mappings detracts from their utility to staff responsible for managing

learning opportunities. In discussions with staff involved in delivering services relevant to the quality of learning opportunities, the team found limited awareness of either the mappings produced by the Academic Quality and Policy Office or the expectations of the *Code of practice* on which they were based. Staff rely on those responsible for the design of processes and services to take account of the demands of the Academic Infrastructure.

43   The audit team found that the quality assurance processes it explored aligned with the *Code of practice*. In conclusion, the team found that the University generally made effective use of the *Code of practice*, but could benefit further from ensuring that its reviews of practice were up to date and staff made more aware of the *Code of practice*'s precepts and guidance and other elements of the Academic Infrastructure and how they have shaped University processes and procedures.

44   The University uses a range of mechanisms to gather feedback from students, which includes module evaluation questionnaires, committee meetings and directly through teaching staff. Module leaders write reports based on the module evaluation questionnaires, which feed into the Annual Review process. The module evaluation questionnaire reports are also discussed at Programme Committee meetings, where student representatives are present. The University recognised that it had to find alternative ways to gather feedback from postgraduate research students, which led to the Graduate Office issuing an annual questionnaire to this group of students. The postgraduate research students whom the audit team met commented that staff were generally approachable. Students on distance learning programmes participate electronically in quality assurance processes, either via student representatives or as a whole cohort. Feedback mechanisms are clearly communicated to students through student handbooks and Students' Union officers. Programme Committees meet once in the first semester and twice in the second semester, bringing together members of staff and student representatives. Student representatives are encouraged to relay the outcome of meetings back to their peers.

45   The Students' Union is responsible for training student representatives. The Students' Union Representatives' Co-ordinator works with schools to recruit, train and brief student representatives. The Students' Union also provides undergraduate and postgraduate student representative handbooks specific to schools, and has web pages dedicated to student representatives. The institution monitors arrangements for student representation through the Annual Review process.

46   The University seeks student opinion using a range of surveys, which include institution-wide surveys such as the Brookes Student Satisfaction Survey and external surveys such as the National Student Survey. The audit team saw examples of actions arising as a result of consideration of these surveys, such as the instigation of the Assessment Compact.

47   The University sees its approach to managing the quality of learning opportunities as embracing strong student involvement through student representation across the institution and through the course representation structures. Periodic Review panels also have a student member. The University works closely with the Students' Union on projects such as the Assessment Compact. The Students' Union provides training for those representing students at a school or institutional level. The Students' Union Representatives' Co-ordinator in the Students' Union plays a key role in briefing and debriefing student representatives who sit on University committees and Periodic Review panels.

48   The audit team met a number of student representatives, who spoke positively about the close working relationship between the University and the Students' Union. The team reviewed documentation and met students, which supported the view that the relationship between the University and the Students' Union had improved over the past four

years. Student representatives were particularly positive about the effective relationship between the Students' Union and the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) and the enhancement of the student representation system this had supported. The team identified the close working relationship between the University and the Students' Union in enhancing student representation at a variety of levels within the institution as a feature of good practice.

49   The University emphasises the importance of research-informed teaching and learning through its Strategy for Enhancing the Student Experience. Undergraduate students are also encouraged to undertake small-scale research projects. The Reinvention Centre, which was one of the University's Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, supported the development of research-based learning for undergraduates. The principles of the Reinvention Centre have been embedded across all undergraduate programmes. Furthermore, the Undergraduate Research Scholarship Scheme provides funding for students to undertake extra-curricular research projects.

50   Staff who support learning are required to undertake professional development on an annual basis to ensure that their practice is informed by the scholarship of teaching and learning. They also have to ensure that scholarship and research informs their teaching. Furthermore, Human Resources policies link research and teaching through promotion and 'teaching professorships'.

51   Links between scholarly activity or research and learning opportunities are primarily monitored through the Annual Review process. The report template includes a section on how research and scholarship have influenced the curriculum. The audit team found a variety of ways in which research and scholarly activity influence the curriculum. Programme proposals at undergraduate level in Law, for example, have been developed on the basis of the research interests of Law staff.

52   The University's Quality and Standards Handbook sets out the key factors to be considered in the delivery of programmes through flexible and distributed methods. If proposed programme(s) of study are to be delivered largely using distance or e-learning or blended learning, the Programme Development Team must include a member with experience of designing and delivering such programmes. The Centre for e-Learning must be consulted during programme development. The University ensures that the delivery system for study materials is fit for purpose through the programme approval process.

53   Programme Development Teams have to take into consideration a number of factors when developing a flexible and distributed learning programme. These include the use of IT, admissions processes, student support, an assessment strategy, and student participation in the delivery and development of the programme. Students on flexible and distributed learning programmes have access to online tutorials and, in some cases, staff delivering courses in flexible and distributed learning mode offer online office hours. The Programme Development Team is required to include a member with experience of designing and delivering flexible and distributed learning programmes, and the Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development provides additional support by engaging with the Programme Development Team at an early stage of the programme development process.

54   Decision-making power on the allocation of learning resources lies with the Executive Board. The Director of Learning Resources is a member of the Executive Board as well as the Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee and Academic Board. The priorities and allocation of learning resources are decided on an historic basis and taking particular account of the previous year. Spending on learning resources is not currently measured against external benchmarks. Subject librarians can also submit a bid to the development fund for new initiatives. The operation of internal providers of learning

resources is monitored through the annual review process, and subject librarians attend School Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee meetings to keep up to date with developments.

55   It was clear to the audit team that the Library places a great deal of emphasis on user feedback mechanisms. The Library uses a number of mechanisms to gain feedback, including the National Student Survey, the Brookes Student Satisfaction Survey, the biannual Library survey, suggestion boxes, programme representatives and regular liaison meetings with the Students' Union. Students told the team that they were satisfied with the feedback mechanisms in place and with how the Library responds to the feedback.

56   The audit team was given a demonstration of Brookes Virtual, responsibility for which rests with Learning Resources. The academic departments use Brookes Virtual in a variety of ways to support learning, which include wiki pages and the virtual learning environment. Students spoke positively about Brookes Virtual as a learning resource.

57   The University's Admissions Policy states that responsibility for managing and coordinating the general university-wide admissions process for undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes lies with the Academic Registry. Assessing the suitability of applicants is primarily the responsibility of admissions tutors. There is no formalised support for staff undertaking admissions. However, there are meetings for undergraduate admissions tutors two to three times per year, which are chaired by a member of the Registry team. Admissions tutors are mentored within schools, and postgraduate taught admissions tutors work closely with course leaders.

58   The institutional Briefing Paper states that the University is committed to attracting students from a diversity of backgrounds. The audit team found a number of mechanisms in place to support the University in implementing its Widening Participation Strategy. The Widening Participation Advisory Group advises the Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee on strategies and activities to support widening participation activities and is responsible for facilitating engagement with, and the embedding of, widening participation throughout the University.

59   A new student support structure has been in place since 2009 as a result of the 2008 Laycock Review. University policy regarding the nature and extent of academic support and guidance for students is clearly communicated to staff through the Supporting Students Staff Handbook. The audit team met a number of support staff during the audit visit, who commented that the new Associate Dean (Student Experience) role should further facilitate support for students. Student entitlement to academic support and guidance is primarily communicated to students through handbooks. Students can also access information through their Personal Information Pages. Every student has an Academic Adviser, whose role is solely focused on academic support. Some of the students that the team met said that the level of support they receive from academic advisers varies, particularly in relation to ease of contact.

60   The University takes account of different student categories with regards to support services. The part-time students met by the audit team indicated that they were satisfied with contacting their Academic Adviser by phone and email. The University also has a dedicated Mature Students' Officer and support mechanisms in place for students with disabilities through the Student Disability and Dyslexia Service.

61   Student Support Co-ordinators are in place in all schools and provide general support to students. The role is focused on providing students with pastoral support and being a key point of contact for student representatives. Students spoke positively about the impact of the role of the co-ordinators and advised the audit team that the Student Support Co-ordinator would usually be the first point of contact for inquiries and effectively

signposted students in the right direction if the query was outside their immediate ambit. During the audit visit, students commented positively about receiving weekly emails from their co-ordinators regarding office hours. The team identified the introduction and implementation to date of the role of Student Support Co-ordinator as a feature of good practice.

62   Information on academic conduct is available in student handbooks, and the University has a policy on the submission of assessed work using Turnitin. The institution is now moving towards making Turnitin available to students as a formative development tool. The Library has invested in the computer-aided instruction programme more commonly known as Programmed Logic for Automated Teaching Operations (PLATO) to help students understand the difference between collaboration and collusion. The student written submission states that students are satisfied with the support they receive on academic conduct. Students were particularly positive about the investment in PLATO and commented positively about the 'Upgrade' study skills support provided by the University.

63   The University provides various support mechanisms for those studying abroad and those who go out on placements. Pre-departure meetings for students studying abroad include a meeting arranged by the Erasmus Co-ordinator, which is attended by ex-Erasmus students. During their year abroad students receive regular emails from the University, and in some instances lecturers visit students to advise them on returning to the University. Students who go out on placements attend a pre-placement meeting, where they are given presentations on what is expected of them during the placement. Students have a named academic member of staff as a point of contact during their placement. Prior to returning to study at the University students are invited to a recall conference, where information is given on reorienting back into studying. However, students found the effectiveness of these arrangements in facilitating the transition from work to study variable.

64   The Human Resources Department has a comprehensive set of policies in place covering all aspects of employment, including recruitment, induction, appraisal, promotion and workload management. These policies are available to all staff through the Employment Handbook, which is available on the web. Staff who met the audit team stated that they were aware of the University's policies and that their experience of them was positive. Staff in collaborative provision are subject to the human resource policies of their local employer.

65   Teaching performance is taken into account in the promotion process and, as mentioned in paragraph 50 above, the University has a professorial track based on teaching. Workload planning takes place at school level within a centrally agreed framework and tariff. All teaching staff receive a time allocation for scholarly activity and can also receive a further time allocation for research.

66   Staff development opportunities are extensive. The Oxford Centre for Staff Development and Learning supports staff through training, research and publications. New teaching staff on at least a 0.5 appointment and with less than five years' teaching experience in higher education are required to undertake the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education. An MA in Education is also available which builds on the certificate course. Part-time staff involved in teaching and learner support are able to take the Associate Teachers' course, which provides an introduction to teaching and learning in higher education. However, the audit team noted that research students could be involved in teaching and assessment without completing any formal training, which was seen as having the potential to undermine the academic standards of the awards on which they were teaching and assessing and the quality of the students' learning opportunities. The University provides mandatory training for those involved in research degree supervision; this provision is described in Section 6.

67   In addition to the programmes described above, the Oxford Centre for Staff Development and Learning offers a broad range of short courses and seminars. The Centre is represented on School Academic Enhancement and Standards Committees, and bespoke programmes have been developed to meet the needs of particular areas. Programmes have also been developed to support University initiatives such as blended and technology-enhanced learning, internationalisation of the curriculum, and course and assessment redesign. These initiatives and their associated development and learning schemes are discussed further in Section 4. The University has invested in research and development focused on the scholarship of teaching and learning. It has been part of two Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning, one focused on assessment and the other on research in the undergraduate curriculum. Five staff of the University have become national teaching fellows. The University also awards its own teaching fellowships and has created a networking group, Minerva, for them to share practice.

68   As discussed below in Section 5, the degree to which staff in partner institutions are supported by the University through staff development is variable. Further education college staff teaching on University programmes have access to training through the Associate College Partnership. The development opportunities offered to staff in other partnerships is variable in form and quantity and dependent significantly on the actions of the particular liaison manager.

69   A stated goal of Strategy 2020 is to improve the quality of teaching and research at the University, and there is a commitment in the Strategy for Enhancing the Student Experience that all staff involved in teaching will undertake annual professional development. The link between the University's goals and priorities and individual review and development needs is the School Learning and Development Plan. These are rolling plans drawn up by the School's senior management, with the assistance of the School Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee and the school's Human Resources Business Partner. The audit team saw examples of these plans and noted that they contained detailed, costed proposals for action clearly linked to school and University objectives.

70   In 2010 the University adopted a new framework for development for staff involved in teaching and learning support: the Continuing Professional and Personal Development framework. The framework builds on existing appraisal and review processes including the planning processes described above. As part of the implementation of the framework the University is intending to revitalise its peer observation processes in order to make them broader and more enhancement focused. The core individual element is the Personal Development Review, which brings together individual feedback and reflection and is subject to critical review. Engagement with the Personal Development Review process is required and monitored through Human Resources audits.

71   The audit team considered that the University's arrangements for support and development of its own teaching staff and research degree supervisors were appropriate and effective. An exception to this is the lack of systematic support for and development of research students who teach and assess, which is explored in more detail in Section 6 (paragraph 110). With respect to staff teaching on University programmes in partner institutions, the team concluded that their entitlement to staff development was unclear; this is explored in more detail in Section 5 (paragraph 95). However, the team considered that the structured approach that the University was taking to addressing its strategic objectives through the Continuing Professional and Personal Development framework of its own staff constituted a feature of good practice.

72   The audit team concluded that confidence could be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

73   The University's approach to quality enhancement is framed by its Strategy for Enhancing the Student Experience, which sets out its priorities to ensure 'a challenging, relevant and internationalised curriculum' with a focus on graduate attributes, 'engaging students in the life of the University', and ensuring 'evidence-based policy development and evaluation'.

74   In line with these priorities, the University has established a number of initiatives, such as the Academic Progression Initiative and Assessment Compact. The Academic Progression Initiative focuses on the restructuring of the undergraduate programmes to ensure clearer academic progression, the introduction of research work in honours programmes, and strategic approaches to internationalisation and to assessment. The audit team found evidence of the positive impact of the Assessment Compact on the student experience, particularly in its focus on assessment load, feedback and timing.

75   These initiatives are driven and supported through the central provision of documentation outlining aims, procedure and planned implementation, and the involvement of the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning: ASKe (Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange) and the Reinvention Centre, the Centre for International Curriculum Inquiry and Networking and the Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development. Monitoring and evaluation of the progress of these initiatives takes place through the Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee, and roll-out to collaborative provision is anticipated as appropriate.

76   The audit team found substantial evidence of institutional support for the development of these initiatives, and concluded that the structured implementation, evaluation and support of the initiatives related to assessment constituted a feature of good practice.

77   Enhancement is fostered and supported institutionally through a range of means: programme-related staff development events (Course Design Intensives), and other courses, resources and publications, including those available through Research Archive and Digital Asset Repository. As discussed in Section 3, link staff in the Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development liaise with schools and directorates to support enhancement. Individual and school development needs are articulated through the School Learning and Development Plan. Access to learning and development support, and therefore to resources relating to enhancement, varies with respect to the experience of staff in collaborative partner arrangements.

78   Themed audits are also used to address areas and issues across the institution. An example is the audit of student data, which has led to the development of the Business Intelligence Project.

79   The University claims that there is effective integration of quality enhancement and quality assurance, as evidenced within programme approval, periodic review and programme monitoring. In each of these processes, explicit attention is given to the delivery and assessment of programmes, the research-teaching interface and internationalisation. The annual programme review report draws together information concerning the learning experience strategy, the influence of research and scholarship and staff development on the curriculum, and examples of good practice for wider dissemination.

80   While these enhancement themes are clearly addressed within programme documentation, they are not given prominence at higher institutional levels of reporting. Reports of programme approvals and periodic reviews are received and noted at the Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee, but with limited focus on specific areas of enhancement. Similarly, issues from annual programme reviews are condensed, with varying degrees of detail, into School Annual Review reports, which themselves are reported up to Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee. Through this process the audit team found that there is limited opportunity to highlight and disseminate good practice. The team formed the view that it was desirable for the University to consider ways in which it could ensure the systematic identification, reporting and dissemination of good practice across all areas of its activity, including its collaborative provision (for this latter point, please see paragraph 93).

81   The audit team found that the University has established a comprehensive range of mechanisms to promote enhancement in support of the institutional objectives and succeeded in engaging large numbers of staff in enhancement activities. The team concluded that the institution has an integrated and strategic approach to quality enhancement, and a clear approach to embedding pedagogic research, expertise in key areas such as assessment, student research skills, e-learning and internationalisation within programme design and delivery.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

82   As mentioned in paragraph 4, the University has collaborative arrangements with 36 partner institutions: 14 of these are located overseas. Just over 6,000 students are registered on collaborative programmes, three quarters of whom are registered overseas. As part of the hybrid Institutional audit process, the audit team conducted partner link visits to two of the University's collaborative partners (one based overseas, where the visit was conducted by videoconference link, and one based in the UK, where the visit was conducted on a face-to-face basis). Essentially, the University applies the same quality assurance processes to its collaborative provision as to the rest of its provision. Management, approval, review and operational processes are set out clearly in the Quality and Standards Handbook. The strategic and financial overview of Collaborative Provision, including the approval of new partners, is the responsibility of the Learning Partnerships Advisory Group, while the Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee has responsibility for quality and standards. The Academic Policy and Quality Office supports school teams during partnership development and participates in a meeting of a subcommittee (known at the University as the mini Learning Partnerships Advisory Group) of the University Learning Partnerships Advisory Group, which considers initial proposals. Some schools have established dedicated committees or advisory groups to monitor and support collaborative provision. A liaison manager is assigned to each partnership or programme. Liaison managers support partners in delivering their programmes and in following the University's processes, and monitor the partner's quality and standards on behalf of the University. A formal agreement and an Operations Manual is required for all collaborative programmes.

83   Through discussions with staff at the University and in collaborative partners, and from reviewing documentation, the audit team found that clear responsibilities are defined for the management of collaborative procedures and these are generally well understood by the relevant staff. However, the team concluded that it would be desirable for the University to implement fully its plans to ensure that liaison managers receive appropriate induction, support and development.

84   The University applies a three-stage process for new collaborative provision. Responsibility for partner approval resides with Learning Partnerships Advisory Group, while the Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee has responsibility for the approval of

programmes. The audit team was able to confirm that processes for partner and programme approval operated effectively.

85   Approval is given for five years, and reapproval of a partner normally occurs alongside re-approval of courses. The developing complexity of the University's arrangements means that a range of programmes have been approved at various times within the initial five-year period of partner approval, and some programmes operate with multiple partners, making the linkage of institutional and programme approval difficult to map and to implement. The audit team encouraged the University to review ways to address the issues surrounding the alignment between programme and partner approval.

86   The audit team found limited awareness in some partner organisations of subject and related benchmarks and, as noted previously in paragraph 21 in relation to home provision, there was limited evidence in the reports of their consideration as part of approval. The team considered that reference to these benchmarks was particularly important when working with collaborative partners and in ensuring comparability of standards. The team encouraged the University to ensure that there is clear evidence that subject and related benchmarks are consistently and appropriately used as part of the approval process.

87   As with non-collaborative provision, the Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee receives but does not closely scrutinise the reports of approval events for collaborative arrangements. However, it regularly reviews the progress of the approval process for collaborative arrangements through to the satisfactory meeting of any conditions or recommendations. The audit team considered that, although there was effective institutional oversight of the approval and periodic review of partners and programmes at the school level, demonstration of institutional oversight and assurance through the consideration given to the reports by Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee, as noted in Section 2 of this report, could be strengthened.

88   Prospective external examiners for collaborative provision are identified prior to approval events and appointed through the standard procedures once approval has been given. From its scrutiny of the evidence and its discussions, the audit team concluded that there were generally effective systems in place for the appointment of external examiners and that they were carrying out their role appropriately. There is further scope to improve their appointment and reporting functions where programmes operate across multiple sites to help ensure the comparability of standards.

89   Where collaborative programmes are taught and assessed in a language other than English, finding an external examiner who is an experienced academic, has relevant subject knowledge and is fluent in English and the language of assessment presents some challenges to the University. The audit team found that the Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee could be more explicitly involved in considering how the academic standards for such provision are assured.

90   Procedures covering the setting, marking, moderation and external examining of assessments, including the arrangements for the Examination Committee, are set out in the relevant Operations Manual. Examination committees are chaired by a senior member of staff of the University and may take place in the University or at partner's premises, depending on the location. The audit team confirmed that these operated effectively, although it found that in one of the collaborative partnerships it was not common practice to send draft examination questions or assignments to the external examiner for approval in line with University policy.

91   In discussions with students at partner institutions, the audit team heard that it could sometimes take in excess of six months for assessed work to be returned. In the opinion of the team this disadvantaged students who submitted assessed work on time, and the team

encouraged the University to monitor the impact of the implementation of the Assessment Compact in collaborative partners to ensure that all students receive timely feedback on assessed work. From its discussions with partners, the team heard differing views about the extent to which issues of plagiarism were addressed. It concluded that the University could do more to ensure that its expertise in dealing with issues of academic integrity was disseminated to partners and that plagiarism was appropriately understood and addressed in all collaborative provision.

92   Collaborative programmes are subject to a similar annual review process to those for programmes based at the University. Routine monitoring, including the presentation of annual review reports, is carried out by the liaison manager. From its review of the documentation and its discussion with staff, the audit team saw examples of robust and effective monitoring of programmes and modules from collaborative provision at the school level, in line with University procedures. Reports from schools to the Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee were variable in terms of the detail provided to assure the committee that standards are maintained and that the quality of the learning experiences for students in collaborative provision is secured. While some schools provided useful summary information on developments, issues and actions, in other reports information was limited. The audit team concluded that the current reporting arrangements did not fully enable the Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee to discharge its responsibility for quality and standards, and that opportunities for institutional consideration of issues and actions that might have wider benefit were being overlooked. No data analysis is provided to the Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee to enable comparison of the performance of students studying at the University with those in all its collaborative partners. The audit team considered that the University should strengthen its procedures to ensure that the Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee has greater and more explicit oversight of the academic standards of awards at collaborative partners and their comparability with those at the University.

93   The Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee occasionally receives a paper on areas of good practice and for further action identified during the periodic reviews of collaborative partners. However, it was unclear to the audit team how the features identified in this report had been disseminated more widely to the University and its partners. In those schools where they operated, liaison managers commented on the effectiveness of collaborative groups in disseminating good practice. However, the team found through its discussions that the University's liaison managers' forum and associated newsletter were not yet working effectively in aiding the systematic dissemination of good practice. In discussions with the team, partner institutions welcomed the support provided by liaison managers, but requested more information on good practice identified elsewhere in the University and asked to be more involved in institutional developments. As noted in the desirable recommendation in paragraph 80, the team considered that the University should consider how the features of institutional good practice, wherever and however identified, could be systematically disseminated across all areas.

94   The role of students in quality assurance and providing feedback is specified at approval and agreed arrangements are detailed in the Operations Manual. Feedback is normally gathered at the module level and this informs the annual monitoring process. Students are represented on programme committees. From its discussions with students, the audit team was able to confirm that a range of mechanisms were in place by which students could raise concerns, and that issues were generally responded to in a timely and appropriate manner.

95   Learning resources are considered as part of approval and review events and as part of the annual monitoring process. In one of the partners visited, students were critical of the limited access to learning resources they had for their studies, particularly at master's

level. The students also reported that there had been extensive delays in the issuing of University cards, which would enable them to access University facilities including learning resources. The audit team noted that, although the students were 'enrolled' with the University, the agreement and Operations Manual clearly specified the partner's full responsibility for learning resources. However, the student handbook implied that students would have ready access to University facilities and this was the expectation of University and partner staff in respect of 'enrolled' status. As noted in paragraphs 68, 71, 91 and 98, the team concluded that it was advisable for the University to ensure that staff and students in all collaborative provision have clearly communicated entitlements and timely access to learning resources and support.

96   All students on partner programmes receive student handbooks, which are considered initially as part of the approval process and reviewed by liaison managers on an annual basis. Where the language of tuition is other than English, the audit team heard that the approved handbook for the partnership was translated before being augmented with relevant details by the local partner. The team concluded that it was advisable for the University to ensure that all student handbooks provide, in a timely way, complete, consistent and current information consonant with University regulations (see paragraph 113).

97   From its review of the handbooks and discussions with students the audit team concluded that handbooks were generally accurate and comprehensive documents that were of use to students. However, in some instances they could be more detailed in respect of the process to be followed for appeals, might be more helpful to students in specifying entitlements and could be issued consistently in a timely fashion.

98   Staff development occurs primarily through the regular visits of the liaison managers. Partners commented on the value of this process and of their desire to be more involved in the academic community of the University. The audit team heard from staff in partner institutions and from some University staff of the possibility of 'affiliate status' for staff teaching the University's students in partner institutions. However, the team found that understanding of the nature of 'affiliate status', its application and entitlements was limited and did not feature in the Operations Manual or other related partnership material. As noted in the advisable recommendation in paragraph 94, this is a particular example where the University should clarify and communicate to its collaborative partners the entitlements of 'affiliate status'.

99   The audit team was able to view transcripts and certificates, which clearly indicated the name of the partner organisation and location of study. Although students were unclear as to the format of their transcripts and certificates and would welcome further details, the team concluded that the University had in place appropriate systems for the timely and accurate issue of transcripts and certificates.

100   It is primarily the responsibility of the liaison manager to ensure that publicity and marketing material is appropriate and accurate. From its review of the available material and its discussions with staff and students the team concluded that the liaison managers were effective in undertaking this role.

101   A register of partners is maintained by the Academic Policy and Quality Office. However, this differed from the collaborative course listing provided to the audit team in a number of respects. From discussions with staff, it did not appear that the register provided a prime reference point for activities. The team concluded that the University might usefully review the role and function of this resource and the mechanisms by which it is kept comprehensive and accurate.

102   Liaison managers have access to appropriate management information to enable them to write annual reports and to monitor partnership operation. The audit team concluded that the quality of management information was currently adequate, and that the Business Intelligence project (see paragraphs 35 and 82) had the potential to assist with the provision of timely, detailed and focused management information to support the operation and monitoring of collaborative provision. As noted in paragraph 92, the University might make better use of the information available to it to compare the performance of students on collaborative and non-collaborative provision.

103   The audit team formed the view that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of its collaborative provision in terms of the academic standards of the awards that it offers and the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

104   The University has recently approved a new Strategy 2020, one element of which is a desire to improve the quality of research by investing in areas of strength, encouraging interdisciplinary research and promoting research around particular broad themes. All postgraduate students, both taught and research, belong both to their school and the University Graduate School, supported by the Graduate Office. The Graduate School arranges central induction events, skills training and a range of networking and social events to encourage a research community. It also runs the annual three-day skills summer school. At the time of the audit, the University had 150 full time and 130 part time research students. The postgraduate research students met by the audit team commented that they felt part of a postgraduate community and made particular mention of the networking events and the summer school.

105   The Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee is responsible for policy and processes for research and knowledge transfer, research students and the quality, standards and operation of research programmes and degrees. The committee delegates responsibility for research students and the quality and standards of research programmes and degrees to the Research Degrees Sub-Committee. Each of the committees has appropriate membership for the functions it exercises, with both having student representation. This structure is reflected in the schools, with each school having a Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee and subcommittees as appropriate reporting on postgraduate taught and research student matters. Reporting is formally up through the committee structure, with cross-membership being the mechanism by which decisions are reported downwards. The audit team formed the view that this reliance on individuals has the potential for matters to be differentially reported or missed altogether. Not all of the recommendations from the Research Degrees Sub-Committee to change regulations in 2006 had been formally implemented at the time of the audit, and staff in the schools met by the team were unaware of the changes that had been agreed.

106   The Dean of School is formally responsible for the admission of postgraduate research students to the school, but this responsibility is usually delegated to the Postgraduate Research Tutor. Students currently apply directly to the school, but from January 2011 all applications will be submitted through UKPASS to the Graduate Office. Induction events for enrolled students are held centrally by the Graduate School and in the schools. Although the Graduate School/Graduate Office website advises that induction sessions are compulsory, other sources of advice for new students, such as the postgraduate research student handbooks, are contradictory regarding the mandatory nature or otherwise of the central induction sessions. However, postgraduate research students met by the audit team commented positively on both the application and the induction process.

107   Enrolled full-time students spend the first three months and part-time students spend up to nine months of their first year preparing an application to register for their research degree. Applications are made to the Research Degrees Sub-Committee. In particular, the application contains details of the programme of research to be undertaken and the supervisory arrangements.

108   The University has a well-developed structure for the supervision of research students. All students have a supervisory team, which includes as a minimum a Director of Studies (first supervisor) and a second supervisor, both of whom must have completed key components of the Supervisor Training Course. The Director of Studies will normally have supervised at least one student to completion. The University gives a guideline of 44 hours per year (one hour per week) supervision for full-time students, but recognises that this will vary from discipline to discipline. The students met by the audit team had experienced different levels of supervision but were satisfied with both the nature and level of supervisory support offered.

109   The University requires research students to maintain a record of both their research and generic skills development. To aid students in the latter, a Personal Development Planner is available on the Graduate School website. The audit team found this to be an informative and effective document, but the information available to students does not make its use clear. The research students met by the team were keeping a log of the skills acquired. The team saw evidence of sound operational practice where a meeting took place between supervisor and student at the beginning of the year to assess training needs. This was monitored throughout and reviewed at the end of the year. The Graduate School/Graduate Office provides a central research methods course, but the majority of research skills training is located in the schools.

110   The Research Degree Regulations state that full-time postgraduate research students may undertake teaching, provided that the total demand on their time does not exceed 6 hours per week averaged over 30 weeks. Schools are encouraged to provide opportunities for students to teach. Students who are in receipt of a studentship where the maintenance grant includes payment for a fixed number of hours teaching are required to undertake teaching as directed by the school. The University requires research students undertaking 50 hours or more of teaching and learning support to receive appropriate training. Although this requirement is stated in the University's Code of Practice, it is not explicitly articulated in any of the University regulations seen by the audit team and is not uniformly expressed in postgraduate research student handbooks. Students met by the audit team did not think that the programme was mandatory and staff were unclear about its status. There is no official training for students who teach fewer than 50 hours and those who do only receive the training after they have begun their teaching. The team did not find any evidence of arrangements in place to ensure that there is additional moderation of work assessed by postgraduate research students. As previously noted in paragraphs 66 and 71, the team concluded that it is advisable that the University ensure that all postgraduate research students who participate in teaching and\or assessment receive appropriate training prior to undertaking these duties. Furthermore, the University is encouraged to develop and establish appropriate mechanisms to monitor this.

111   The progress of students is closely monitored. Students are required to complete a brief annual written report on their research progress, although the details contained in the postgraduate research student handbooks on this requirement were inaccurate. The Director of Studies also submits an annual progress report for each student they are supervising. A comprehensive report covering all aspects of the postgraduate research student programme is produced by the Research Degrees Sub-Committee and considered by the Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee.

112   The requirements for transfer from MPhil to PhD are clearly specified; students wishing to transfer complete a full progress report, for which the regulations specify 3,000 words, on the work undertaken. Although the Research Degree Regulations set out the minimum requirements on word limits for these reports, the audit team found that this allowed for a considerable and potentially confusing variability of information relating to word limits in the postgraduate research student handbooks.

113   The audit team heard that the school postgraduate research student handbooks are scrutinised annually by the Graduate Office to ensure they correspond to the University's regulations. However, the handbooks viewed by the team did not demonstrate effective institutional oversight of the information contained therein, as they were found to be variable in quality, consistency, accuracy, implementation of agreed policy and alignment with University regulations.

114   The University uses both formal and informal methods to gather student feedback. Research students are members of all the relevant committees, and there is a Research Students' Forum consisting of representatives from each school. The research student representatives are aware of the challenges associated with gathering feedback from research students because of the individual nature of the students' work, and a Facebook social network group has been established partly in response to this. The University runs an annual research student questionnaire, the results of which are analysed in the annual report produced by the Research Degrees Sub-Committee. The Students' Union Postgraduate Society was formed in 2008 and organises social events for postgraduate students, both taught and research. The students met by the audit team expressed satisfaction with the opportunities afforded to them to raise issues and concerns, and, with one exception, with the responsiveness of the University when issues were raised. The ongoing and exceptional issue of concern, raised repeatedly by the students, related to the study space afforded to them. This matter has been raised over several years but has yet to be resolved satisfactorily. The University is encouraged to continue to work towards a resolution of this issue.

115   The assessment of research degrees is clearly articulated and follows a similar pattern to those of other UK universities. The examining team consists of an internal examiner, not the candidate's supervisor(s), and one or two external examiners. In certain well-defined situations an independent chair is appointed for the viva. Examining teams are formally approved by the Research Degrees Sub-Committee. Separate reports are written by the examiners on the dissertation and a single joint report is produced following the viva. The Research Degree Regulations define specific time periods for each step.

116   The University has comprehensive complaints procedures set out in the University's Student Complaint Procedure; this is referred to in the Research Degree Regulations, where full details of the appeals process is articulated. Students met by the audit team displayed awareness of the complaints and appeals procedures.

117   Overall, the audit team found that the University's processes and procedures for postgraduate research programmes make an effective contribution to its management of the quality and academic standards of those programmes and meet the expectations of the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes.*

Section 7: Published information

118   The University produces a range of published information in both electronic and hard-copy format for its current and prospective students, staff and external audiences. A variety of publications on institutional developments is regularly produced. The University has defined responsibilities for the collation and maintenance of its published information

and makes relevant information available in line with Annex F of HEFCE 06/45, contributing appropriate data for compilation on the Unistats and UCAS websites.

119   While the core website is maintained centrally, individual academic schools manage information on their own websites. Publicity and programme materials for collaborative partnerships are checked by the relevant liaison manager prior to publication. Programme specifications are not available online, and students access programme details via student handbooks. The Personal Information Portal provides electronic access to programme and module information, although this information is not consistent for all programmes.

120   The audit team noted that information published by schools in handbooks is not overseen centrally. Although in general handbooks were felt to be accurate and useful, students noted a lack of certainty about access to definitive versions of programme information. The University website contains a broad range of information on University policies, procedures and regulations, although students' experience of accessing this information was not clearly or consistently reported. With respect to the comments made by collaborative partner students, the issue of timely access to handbooks was also raised with the audit team.

121   Although the audit team found a number of aspects that required attention in the management of published information, the team found that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information the University publishes about the quality of its provision and the standards of its awards.

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

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

- the close working relationship between the University and the Students' Union in enhancing student representation at a variety of levels within the institution (paragraph 48)
- the introduction of the Student Support Co-ordinator role as a focal point for student contact (paragraph 61)
- the structured approach taken by the University to addressing its strategic objectives through the Continuing Professional and Personal Development framework (paragraph 71)
- the structured approach to the implementation, support and monitoring of the University's initiatives to improve assessment policies and practice (paragraph 76).

Recommendations for action

123   Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- strengthen quality management processes in order to provide a more comprehensive and explicit institutional oversight of the academic standards and comparability of all awards (paragraphs 19, 23, 24, 27, 34, 87, 88 and 92)
- ensure that all postgraduate research students who participate in teaching and\or the assessment of students receive appropriate training prior to undertaking these duties (paragraphs 66 and 110)
- ensure that staff and students in all collaborative provision have clearly communicated entitlements and timely access to learning resources and support (paragraphs 68, 91, 95 and 98)

- ensure that all student handbooks provide, in a timely way, complete, consistent and current information consonant with University regulations (paragraphs 96 and 113).

124 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- ensure that identified good practice is disseminated systematically across all areas (paragraphs 19, 80, 91 and 93)
- ensure that liaison managers receive appropriate induction, support and development (paragraph 83).

Appendix

Oxford Brookes University's response to the Institutional audit report

The University welcomes the audit report and its confirmation of the soundness of the University's management of the academic quality and standards of its provision. We were pleased to note the audit team's acknowledgement of the progress made in respect of recommendations from previous audits. The University continues to build upon this work, recognising the need to address the matters to which the 2010 audit team's recommendations refer. We had already identified many of these issues as areas for further development at the time of the audit and were taking action to address them, in particular through a greater consistency of approach to quality management to be achieved through the creation of the new faculty structure, and through the current programme of academic development projects.

The University was also pleased to note the report's confirmation of the soundness of its systems for assuring the quality and standards of its collaborative provision. The University highly values the work carried out by its collaborative partners, and its commitment to an excellent learning experience extends to provision delivered in partnership with other organisations. We intend to work with our partners and liaison managers to address the points made in the audit report.

The University particularly welcomes the identification of several features of good practice which we believe reflect the University's firm commitment to a student-centred approach to all aspects of its provision. The University is also pleased to note the audit team's recognition of the University's strategic commitment to the enhancement of the quality of the student experience. We take pride in our approach to staff and learning development, which is aimed at enabling staff at Brookes and its partners to provide students with learning opportunities of the highest possible quality, and we will continue to take action to enhance the effective dissemination of good practice in teaching and support for learning across the University's provision.

A detailed action plan to address the recommendations in the report will be drawn up by the University, in partnership with the Oxford Brookes Students' Union. This action plan will be monitored by the Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee and, in respect of postgraduate research student matters, the Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee.

We would like to thank the audit team for their careful consideration of the evidence provided for the audit, and for their constructive engagement with staff and students at Oxford Brookes and at the partner organisations they visited.

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