



Institutional audit

University of Bath

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Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

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

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

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

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

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

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

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary and the report, without the annex, are published in hard copy. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website. The institution will receive the summary, report and annex in hard copy (*Handbook for institutional audit: England and Northern Ireland 2006 - Annexes B and C refer*).

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Bath (the University) from 24 to 28 November 2008 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

To arrive at its conclusions, the audit team spoke to members of staff throughout the University and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the University manages the academic aspects of its provision.

In Institutional audit, the institution's management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are audited. The term 'academic standards' is used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the United Kingdom (UK). The term 'quality of learning opportunities' is used to describe the support provided by an institution to enable students to achieve the awards. It is about the provision of appropriate teaching, support and assessment for the students.

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit team concluded that there was clear institutional promotion of quality enhancement, with quality enhancement firmly embedded within processes of quality assurance.

Postgraduate research students

The University provides a high quality research environment and the audit team found the policy and procedures for managing postgraduate research students to be sound and aligned with the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 2; Postgraduate research programmes*.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas as good practice:

- the use of the SAMIS student record system to provide consistent data for a range of academic processes, such as undergraduate monitoring reports and the monitoring of research student progression
- the Student Experience Strategy Group, led by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning), which is enhancing learning opportunities at institutional level

- the formulation of the University's Quality Assurance Code of Practice in a clear and accessible format which includes a series of examples of good practice to illustrate policy and procedure
- the University's effective working partnership with the Students' Union, which supports the enhancement of the student experience in a variety of ways
- the support that the Division of Lifelong Learning and the departmental link tutor role provides to collaborative partners in the initiation and oversight of Foundation Degrees
- the quality and range of support that is available to Foundation Degree and top-up honours students studying for University of Bath awards in partner institutions
- the role of the Postgraduate Research Ombudsman in offering students the opportunity to discuss with a disinterested party their concerns: an activity which has provided the ability to aggregate information from individual cases for use in enhancement.

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the team considers advisable:

- ensure sufficient externality in panel membership for periodic review (the Degree Scheme Review), in particular, a chair independent of the host faculty and an academic or other external member
- keep under review the extent to which the implementation and operation of the range of new policy initiatives (such as the assessment framework, personal tutoring, peer observation and staff appraisal) are producing the intended outcomes in terms of the management of academic standards and quality.

Recommendations for action that the team considers desirable:

- to consider whether the practice of independent assessors making the final recommendation for transfer of students from MPhil to PhD registration should be implemented across the University.

Reference points

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

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

The audit found that the University made effective use of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure, although the use of subject benchmark statements was, on occasion, variable in some processes. The University's quality assurance procedures and practices were substantially in accordance with the expectations in the Academic Infrastructure and they help ensure the management of the academic standards and quality of learning opportunities available to students.

Report

1 An Institutional audit was undertaken of the University of Bath (the University) during the week commencing 24 November 2008. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of academic standards of the awards that it offers and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. The scope of the audit included all of the University's provision including that offered through collaborative arrangements.

2 The audit team comprised Dr Chris Alder, Professor Terry Kemp, Dr Martin Lockett and Ms Helen Marshall, auditors, and Miss Denise Cooper, audit secretary. Dr D Gale, Assistant Director, coordinated the audit on behalf of QAA.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The University was awarded its Royal Charter in 1966. The University is located on a modern campus at Claverton Down, two miles from the city centre. In the academic year 2007-08, there were a total of 9,222 undergraduate students of which 277 were part-time, and 3,801 postgraduate students of which 2,253 were part-time. At the time of the audit, the University had a total of 1,035 full and part-time postgraduate research students. The University has a strong emphasis on the education of professional practitioners in sciences, engineering and technology which is reflected in the proportion, around 55 per cent, of first degree students registered on programmes that provide placement opportunities.

4 In 2008-09 the University had a range of collaborative teaching provision accounting for a total of 675 undergraduate and 98 postgraduate students registered at collaborative partners. Most of its collaborative programmes are Foundation Degrees and related honours top-up years provided by regional further education college partners. There is no overseas collaborative provision at undergraduate level. A few postgraduate programmes are delivered jointly with groups of universities, including some in Europe. A small number of, mostly recent, collaborations exist with a range of partners to facilitate the delivery of distance-learning programmes.

5 The Vision Statement, Mission Statement and Long Term Aims of the University are set out in the Corporate Plan for 2006-07 to 2008-09. The Mission of the University is to 'advance knowledge through high quality research and teaching in partnership with business, the professions, the public services, the voluntary sector and other research and learning providers'. The six Long Term Aims of the University as set out in the Corporate Plan are as follows; to:

- raise its international profile and thereby strengthen its national standing
- promote research of international excellence through appropriate investment, strategic collaborations and cutting-edge facilities
- deliver flexible, high quality teaching and professional education that is student-centred and accessible, offering equality of opportunity to anyone with the ability to benefit
- maximise the economic and social development impact of the University's knowledge and expertise for the benefit of the University and its partners locally, regionally and internationally
- develop strategic partnerships within the south-west region, including the South West Regional Development Agency, local authorities, business and industry, Health Trusts and the Lifelong Learning Network that will help foster economic growth and vibrant communities
- attract and retain high quality staff through appropriate recognition, development and promotion opportunities and effective leadership.

6 At the time of the audit, the University was structured into 15 academic departments which were grouped into three faculties (Engineering and Design; Humanities and Social Sciences; and Science). There were also two schools (Health and Management) and the Division of Lifelong Learning.

7 The University was subject to an Institutional audit in October 2003 which concluded with an overall judgement of broad confidence in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The present audit team found that the institution had either addressed or made considerable progress in addressing the recommendations of the previous audit.

8 At the time of the audit the University was in the process of implementing a number of new policy initiatives across a range of areas. In these cases, given the newness of these initiatives, the audit team considered that it was too early to reach a firm conclusion on the effectiveness of their implementation. The team appreciated that these initiatives had arisen as a result of the general reflective nature and structure of the institution and that the University was clearly aware of the challenges and responsibilities of implementing a wide range of initiatives with ownership spread across the University's academic and management structures. While there is responsibility for these changes at a senior management level, the team recognised that there was a potential lack of connection between management structures below this senior level which could mean that these initiatives may not be managed in an integrated way. This lack of an integrated approach to managing these changes led the team to consider it advisable that the University keeps under review the extent to which the implementation and operation of the range of new policy initiatives (such as the assessment framework, personal tutoring, peer observation and staff appraisal) are producing the intended outcomes in terms of the management of academic standards and quality.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

9 Although responsibility for academic quality and standards rests with Senate, responsibility for detailed oversight of the student learning experience is largely delegated. The Quality Assurance Committee is responsible to Senate for quality management of taught provision, while quality management of research degrees is delegated by Senate to the University Research Students Committee on which matters it reports and makes recommendations to the Quality Assurance Committee. The University Learning and Teaching Committee is responsible to Senate for the development and implementation of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy. It formulates new policy and procedures in response to regional, national and international developments as well as having responsibility for identifying staff development needs and promoting innovation in learning, teaching and assessment.

10 At the faculty/school/division level, the board of studies (or Standing Committee in the case of the Division) is responsible to the Senate for all matters relating to the organisation of education, teaching and research, including all examination matters. Faculty/school/division teaching and quality committees are responsible to the respective board of studies for the detailed scrutiny of the academic standards and quality of the relevant taught provision, while faculty/school research students committees perform a parallel role in overseeing research provision.

11 The University's framework for managing academic standards is set out in its Regulations and its Quality Assurance Code of Practice (the University Code of Practice). The latter provides well-defined processes for the institutional management of academic standards. This includes the roles and responsibilities of the committee structure at various levels.

12 New programmes are approved in two main stages: Initial Approval, the strategic consideration of a proposal; and Full Approval, a closer consideration of the detailed academic case for a proposal. The former is essentially an internal process while the latter includes both internal and external inputs. While agreement of faculty/school/division boards of studies and the

University's Senate is required for Initial Approval, the detailed academic scrutiny and consequent decision is delegated to an approval panel with at least one external participant. The audit team found that the operation of programme design and approval followed the processes set out by the University which met the full expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 7; Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*, published by QAA.

13 Programme amendments are divided into three categories: minor, intermediate and major. Minor and intermediate amendments are approved by the relevant board of studies while major amendments, for example, the withdrawal of a programme, are approved by the Quality Assurance Committee. Processes, timescales and approval levels were considered by the audit team to reflect their relative impact. According to the University Code of Practice, the teaching and quality committee makes recommendations to the board of studies for decisions but, in practice, the team noted the decision-making is effectively devolved to the teaching and quality committee.

14 Programme monitoring is undertaken through annual monitoring of units and programmes. This is seen by the University as a major part of quality assurance and quality enhancement. While formats have differed across the University, the processes are well embedded. In 2008-09, the University introduced a common template for programme monitoring while continuing to maintain diversity in unit annual monitoring. Annual monitoring reports are considered by the relevant teaching and quality committee which, as well as having responsibility for the quality assurance of programmes, shares good practice across the faculty/school/division. In the view of the audit team the programme monitoring process provides a coherent structure for ensuring that annual monitoring takes place and is subject to oversight as well as enabling faculty/school and institutional-level overviews of the outcomes of annual monitoring.

15 Much statistical data for use in annual monitoring and institution-level reports is available on an internal management information website. The audit team found that this provides the information required for undergraduate programmes promptly, giving benefits including time saving for academic staff and consistency of statistical reporting. The team concluded that the University made effective use of management information in relation to academic standards. In particular, it considered this use of information from the central SAMIS student records system to be a feature of good practice, as were other uses such as the monitoring of research student progression.

16 The periodic review of programmes is known as Degree Scheme Review. This should take place every five years for each programme, including collaborative provision. While the underlying process of the Degree Scheme Review has existed for some time, the processes have been updated, in particular in 2007. The audit team noted that a significant element of these changes was to increase the degree of externality in Degree Scheme Review panels.

17 Institutional oversight of the Degree Scheme Review process is provided through review of all the Panel Reports by the relevant faculty/school/division teaching and quality committee, followed by the University's Quality Assurance Committee. The audit team found the Degree Scheme Review process thorough and effective. Documentation provided evidence of a robust and reflective process, leading to thorough review, complemented by a follow-up after six months. There was generally sound institutional oversight of the process by the University's Quality Assurance Committee, including cases where the review had been delayed.

18 The audit team found, however, that the composition of the Degree Scheme Review panels did not always follow the requirements of the University Code of Practice. While there was no evidence of compromise in relation to academic standards, the team considered that the degree of externality in panels requires further attention. The team concluded that it was advisable for the University to ensure sufficient externality in panel membership for periodic review, in particular a chair independent of the host faculty, and an academic or other external member familiar with UK academic standards in relation to the programme.

19 Many programmes are accredited by professional bodies. The department concerned is responsible for the preparation of the accreditation documentation, which is then reviewed and approved by the Quality Assurance Committee before submission. The audit team considered that the process for professional accreditations provides a good balance between departmental responsibility and institutional oversight. In the view of the audit team, a strength of the University's processes and practice of quality assurance is the integration of professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements into areas such as programme approval and Degree Scheme Review. This is embodied in the section on professional accreditation in the University Code of Practice. However, it did note that there was potential to improve coordination between the scheduling of Degree Scheme Review and professional accreditations.

20 External examiners are seen by the University as a key element of its quality assurance framework by providing assurance of academic standards and comparability with other institutions. The Handbook for External Examiners makes the role of external examiners explicit with respect to academic standards and other areas. A distinctive aspect of the role of external examiners is their explicit role in enhancement.

21 The audit team found that sound processes exist for external examiners. Increasingly external examiners' reports are seen not only by staff but are also made available to students, other than a part reserved for confidential feedback. Overall, the team considered that the University had an effective system for the appointment, induction and reporting of external examiners and that appropriate use was made of their reports at both programme and institutional level. There was clear evidence of feedback from programmes to external examiners on actions taken and issues considered, and that an overview of issues raised by external examiners was considered and appropriate action taken at institutional level.

22 The University Code of Practice is the major mechanism through which QAA's Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points are integrated in policies and processes inside the University. The standard template for programme specifications includes explicit reference to the level of the programme in relation to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and subject benchmark statements. However, the audit team found that the use made of subject benchmark statements in other process, for instance, programme approval and Degree Scheme Review, was variable.

23 Another area to which the University has paid significant attention is the impact of the Bologna Process, particularly in relation to its academic credit framework which is based on the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.

24 The area of assessment regulation was one of substantial institutional change at the time of the audit team's visit to the University. In particular, after long discussion within the University, almost all undergraduate programmes will be covered by the New Framework for Assessment and its associated Assessment Regulations from 2008-09 onwards. Benefits foreseen include reduced administration of complex varying assessment regulations, faster response (for example, in production of transcripts) and a more equitable approach to classifications. Internal communication of the new assessment regulations has been extensive with substantial information on the University's website. Attention has also been paid to external examiner communication.

25 The audit team concluded that it was too early to reach firm conclusions on the operation of the New Framework for Assessment. However, the team considered that the process behind its implementation had included substantial debate among key interested parties and its introduction was well thought through. More broadly, the team considered that the institution's overall arrangements for the assessment of students were effective.

26 Overall, the audit team concluded that confidence could reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

27 The processes outlined above in relation to academic standards for programme approval, modification, monitoring and review simultaneously contribute to the management of learning opportunities. In particular, the programme approval process includes explicit consideration of resourcing needs and integration with overall planning. As a result, the audit team was satisfied that the planning and approval processes were managed to take full account of resources for learning. The team also concluded that the University's annual monitoring process contribute effectively to the management of learning opportunities.

28 The University offers students a wide range of opportunities to contribute to the ongoing process of enhancement of their experience. The audit team found evidence that the University is committed to working in partnership with students as citizens within the academic community. For instance, student representatives are key participants in key quality management process such as Degree Scheme Review Panels. From its discussions with undergraduate and postgraduate students and staff, the team formed the view that the University has developed a culture of engagement with student opinion. In particular, the team considered that the University's effective working partnership with the Students' Union, which supports the enhancement of the student experience in a variety of ways, as a feature of good practice. The team concluded that arrangements for student representation at university and faculty/school/division levels are effective and productive.

29 The University values and promotes links between teaching and research and considers this as an important characteristic of its programmes. The University has recently held (May 2007) a 'Good Practice Discussion' on the theme of Linking Research and Teaching. Many good examples of the influence of research on both curriculum design and teaching were provided as well as examples of ideas for new courses. The University encourages staff from partner organisations to register for higher degrees by offering a generous discount scheme and has recently made available a Scholarly Activity Fund to support the development of scholarship within the partner college network.

30 The University regards e-learning as an important additional means of delivery but advocates its adoption only where it is academically appropriate and where there are demonstrable enhancements to teaching and learning; consequently e-learning is part of the overall Learning and Teaching Strategy of the University. The e-learning team exists to support academic departments in making informed pedagogical choices about the use of e-learning as another means of delivery. At programme level, e-learning is monitored and reviewed through standard quality management processes. Students who have experience of the Moodle-based virtual learning environment are very positive about the contribution it makes to their learning. Additionally, the University has a small portfolio of distance-learning programmes where the approach taken is generally one of blended learning, and learning at a distance is usually supported through intensive campus conferences. External examiners' reports indicate that these are well managed. The audit team concluded that there are sound examples of e-learning in place and that there is a substantial infrastructure of both technology and staff development to support increased use of e-learning.

31 Placement and work-based learning are a feature of the University's academic provision. The University Code of Practice, recently updated to take account of the revised *Code of practice*, published by QAA, makes explicit the principles for the support of students during work-based and placement learning. Placement provision is monitored through annual monitoring and Degree Scheme Review, and there is a peer network of placement tutors that provides an informal forum for sharing good practice. In discussions with staff and students the audit team noted variations in practice between departments. The team noted examples of good practice, such as the use of 'conference days' for students held at Bath or key locations around the country, and the publication of a newsletter to keep students in touch with what was happening at the University, were not universally practiced. While many of these could be explained by discipline needs and differences between the University's standard and enhanced categories of placement

provision, it was evident that opportunities for sharing good practice were not always exploited in full. Students reported that they received good support during their period away from the University. The team encourages the University to consider bringing all of its placement practice in line with the expectations set out in its own Code and to exploit in full opportunities for sharing good practice.

32 There is an institutional strategy for the development of the University's Estate, as well as plans for the development of major services. A planning cycle is in place at departmental level to provide appropriate levels of human and physical resources to deliver the curriculum. In addition, ad hoc capital purchases can be made to cover unexpected problems via this funding stream. The University's policy is to provide a physical environment that supports a high quality student learning experience. This policy needs to be read in the context of current pressures on space following significant growth in student numbers, limited space for expansion and the legacy of 1960's and 1970's buildings with significant maintenance requirements. The University is addressing these issues in a comprehensive manner via the implementation of a 12-year Master Plan (2008-2020) which will provide 'additional academic, social and residential space while improving the overall environment of the campus'.

33 The 1960s and 70s buildings were not designed with good levels of accessibility for disabled students. A recent review of levels of accessibility has been undertaken by the University in partnership with Disability Go. A very detailed analysis of levels of access on a building-by-building basis is provided on the Disability Go website. This shows that although the University has undertaken and continues to undertake works to improve accessibility, work remains to be done to ensure ease of access to all teaching and social space as well as suitable conditions once access has been gained.

34 The Library and Learning Centre provides a 24-hour service to students. Each academic department nominates a member of academic staff to act as a formal point of liaison with the Library. Departments are also assigned a senior member of Library staff who acts as subject librarian and is responsible for the delivery of Library services to the department. The audit team observed that there are good and effective working relationships between the Library and the academic community. Students at partner colleges have access to the library at the Claverton Down Campus as well as access to the electronic resources from remote sites. Students who met the audit team were very positive about the resources available from the University as well as the support from library staff in library induction sessions which are available at the partner college or at the Claverton Down Campus.

35 The Computing Service provides institutional access to information technology (IT) facilities. Computer provision in the Library and Learning Centre is supplemented by additional IT laboratories that are bookable for teaching purposes. The Student Residences Network (ResNet) supplies services to all student rooms on and off-campus, and enables students to connect (using their own PCs/laptops) to a similar set of services as are available in the Library. The University has also established a wide coverage wireless network environment so that any student with a wireless-enabled laptop may readily connect to central services. In order to understand user expectations, the Computing Service undertakes an annual user survey that alternates between surveying staff and students; participates in the Information Services User Forum; and has a series of 'IT supporters' in academic departments who help to inform service development. Students who met with the audit team expressed general satisfaction with available access to IT provision.

36 The University operates an admissions policy that aims to support equality of opportunity to anyone with the ability to benefit from its programmes. The University's commitment to widening access is demonstrated by the fact that, in 2007, nearly one-third of students who entered the University did so with qualifications other than A-levels. All undergraduate and taught postgraduate admissions, including admissions to courses delivered at the partner colleges, are handled centrally by the Recruitment and Admissions Office in the Registry in conjunction with department and college admissions tutors. Appropriate training is offered

regularly to all admissions tutors. The audit team considered that the University's admissions policies and procedures are clear, and effectively implemented and managed.

37 Students who have special learning needs are identified during the admission process and are invited to attend a meeting with staff from student services. Students can be referred for a professional assessment and the University continues to provide support to ensure they receive appropriate equipment and financial support to embark on their studies. Ongoing support is available to students throughout their course to ensure that any arrangements remain appropriate and effective. Students reported good levels of satisfaction with the individual arrangements for support.

38 At departmental level, personal tutors play an important role as a first point of contact for pastoral and academic support and in signposting the wider network of institutional academic and pastoral support. In response to feedback from students about the perception of variability in levels of support, the University has reviewed the operation of the personal tutorial provision to ensure that an agreed minimum set of expectations will be offered by all departments. At the time of the audit it is too early for the audit team to assess the effectiveness of the new arrangements. Additionally, students can access a range of university-level support services which include skills and careers, counselling and health, learning support and disability, financial support, accommodation and immigration. These are delivered through a network of structures provided by Student Services, the Students' Union, and the Registry (through the Careers Advisory Service, the International Office and the Graduate Office). Students reported to the team good levels of satisfaction with the central support services.

39 New staff are required to take the University's own Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Professional Practice unless they have extensive experience of teaching in higher education. This course seeks to develop many aspects of academic practice, equipping staff to tackle the challenges of managing research, leading academics and managing change, as well as promoting the development of learning and teaching. Staff confirmed that the new model is better aligned with their needs as developing teachers and researchers. A new appraisal system has been agreed for academic staff for 2008-09. Early signs indicate that take-up is much higher than the previous scheme but it is too early for the audit team to report on the effectiveness of the new process.

40 In February 2008, the Senate approved a new Academic Career Progression Scheme. The new Scheme sets out clear criteria for promotion for staff and has increased the focus on teaching as a criterion for promotion. The Scheme includes annual promotion rounds as well as a facility to apply for a personal chair at any point in the academic year. The criteria for the new Scheme give greater prominence to contributions in learning and teaching as well as leadership and management. At the time of the audit it was too early for the audit team to judge the effectiveness of the new Scheme.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

41 The University states that it has no enhancement strategy as such. It states that its approach to quality management 'encourages ownership of enhancement activity by staff and students at the level of the discipline, whilst providing institutional structures through which enhancement can be supported and disseminated'. The University describes itself as taking 'an integrated approach to quality assurance and quality enhancement, encompassing both academic standard and quality of learning opportunities'. The Briefing Paper continues 'the institutional quality management principles - reliance on sound academic principles, peer review and the informed student voice - underpin our approach to quality management'.

42 The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office has a specific remit for disseminating good practice and does so by a number of mechanisms, including published guidance and resources and organisation of a 'wide-ranging programme of events'. The audit team read examples of these reports and noted that they incorporated contributions at

departmental/school, faculty and institutional levels. Representation of Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office and cross-membership between the Quality Assurance Committee and the Learning and Teaching Committee ensures that quality assurance and enhancement are integrated across the committee and reporting structures of the University.

43 The comprehensiveness, design and layout of the University Code of Practice, developed by the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office, was found by the audit team to provide an example of the promotion of good practice in University procedures. Many elements of the Code are interspersed with boxes illustrating good practice in implementing that particular element. The team also noted the clarity and accessibility of the format of the elements of the Code, which together with the embedding of examples of good practice, led the team to consider this a feature of good practice.

44 The development of an overview report of external examiners' reports had, in the view of the audit team, led to the University giving serious consideration at institutional level of issues raised in individual reports, for example, the desirability of considering appointing an independent chair or convenor to examination boards for research degrees.

45 The audit team noted that students have the opportunity to contribute to the enhancement agenda in a variety of ways, not least via various forms of student feedback. The team noted, in particular, the level of collaboration between the Students' Union and the University, and student membership of panels in Degree Scheme Review events. The team regarded this as a further example of the University's effective working partnership with the Students' Union, a feature that contributed to the feature of good practice identified by the team.

46 The audit team concluded that there was clear, consistent and sustained institutional promotion of quality enhancement, and the claim that quality enhancement was embedded within quality assurance was justified. The team further noted the key role played by the Student Experience Strategy Group, led by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning), in enhancing learning opportunities at the institutional level. This was an element considered as a feature of good practice by the team.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

47 Foundation Degree programmes have been an area of substantial development since the previous audit in 2003. This development has taken place as part of a regional collaboration involving other higher education providers, further education colleges and employers. The University does not now plan to make significant increases in collaborative taught provision except in the area of professional engineering doctorates and Foundation Degree programmes. It considers support for partnerships at disciplinary level a prerequisite for a successful partnership, but, ultimately, it is Senate that is responsible for approving new partnerships.

48 The University applies the same principles of quality management to its collaborative provision as for all its programmes. It is covered by a separate section of the University Code of Practice which contains an institutional definition of collaborative provision that matches that of the *Code of practice, Section 2; Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, published by QAA. This section of the University Code was substantially revised in 2006-07 and, at the time of the audit visit, associated guidance documents were under review. In the view of the audit team the University Code contains a comprehensive description of the various processes, roles and responsibilities relating to the complete lifecycle of both partnership arrangements and collaborative programmes. A central register of collaborative arrangements is maintained by the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office, and is received annually by Senate.

49 The Learning Partnerships Office within the Division for Lifelong Learning manages Foundation Degrees and their associated honours years. These are a large majority of the programmes delivered by partner institutions. Management of these collaborative programmes is via the same structures as for other programmes with the exception of the Standing Committee

of the Division taking the role of a board of studies. Standing Committee membership includes faculty and school representatives. Disciplinary contribution and commitment is represented via the departmental link tutor who is appointed upon initiation of a collaborative programme with a partner outside the higher education sector. The Learning Partnerships Office is responsible for quality assurance of these programmes. It is a primary responsibility of link tutors to monitor academic standards. The audit team considered that the support the Division of Lifelong Learning and the departmental link tutor role provides to collaborative partners in the initiation and oversight of Foundation Degrees to be a feature of good practice.

50 External examiners for collaborative provision are appointed by, and report to, the University, operating on the same basis as other external examiners. For provision via the Learning Partnerships Office there is the additional input of the link tutor and consideration by the Standing Committee in the appointment process. Induction material is provided both centrally by the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office and locally, with the expectation that external examiners will attend an annual induction event as well as holding informal discussions with the partner organisation. The audit team heard that the initial external examiner was often the same person as was employed to provide externality in the programme approval process. The team thought that the University would benefit by the consistent use of external examiners independent of the approval processes, thus providing another perspective on the proposed programme.

51 The processes for approval of new programmes in collaborative provision are the same as those described in Sections 2 and 3 (above), except that in the case of new partners the strategic approval and the full approval of the partner to deliver a programme can be undertaken in parallel with the initial and full programme approval process. The University Code of Practice provides details of which University bodies are involved in strategic and detailed consideration according to the particular combination of circumstances; that is, new programme or new or existing partner. An innovation in 2008 was the introduction of the Collaborative Provision Approval Panel to scrutinise new provision through partners, proposed or current, of existing programmes. The development of a new partnership programme is supported by the establishment of a Curriculum Working Group that includes representatives from the University, partner college(s) and other relevant stakeholders. In the view of the audit team, these groups provide an example of the opportunities for informal professional development that are available to staff in partnership organisations. The team concluded that the University's procedures were conscientiously followed and that partners received considerable support in their collaborations.

52 Collaborative provision is monitored and reviewed using the same basic processes (see Section 2 above) as for all other programmes with some additional elements. For example, link tutors comment upon the relevant annual monitoring reports through a separate report template for collaborative programmes. Overseas collaboration is also monitored by the Study Abroad Office who bring issues to the relevant department/school/faculty/division. The Quality Assurance Committee receives the first Annual Monitoring Review of a new collaborative programme. Collaborative arrangements are subject to a five-yearly review that would normally be informed by a Degree Scheme Review held in the preceding year.

53 The audit team was told, by both staff and students, of a rich variety of support and resources available within the context of collaborative provision. Students at partner institutions may use a variety of campus facilities and access specialist support services, including a dedicated librarian. Staff at partner institutions are able to access a wide range of development opportunities, from the informal through to registering for research degrees at preferential rates. Programme leaders from partners may attend dedicated development events, receive a newsletter, and have access to an online support portal. The wide range of resources and support provided for students and staff in partner institutions by the University contributed to the feature of good practice identified by the team in relation to the support provided to collaborative partners.

54 The University has very little distance learning that can be considered to fall within the scope of the *Code of practice, Section 2*. However, through exploring a significant example, the audit team considered that the University had demonstrated its ability effectively to manage such a programme, maintaining comparability of standards across cohorts and sensibly accommodating annual monitoring to the needs of flexible provision.

55 The audit team considered that the sections of the University Code of Practice relating to collaborative provision fully engaged with the *Code of practice, Section 2, Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. The University Code and associated paperwork made proper reference to relevant parts of the Academic Infrastructure. Some collaborative provision is scrutinised by external agencies and the Quality Assurance Committee receives and considers reports from such bodies. Overall, the team had confidence in these arrangements for managing the academic standards and quality of learning opportunities available for students in its awards delivered by collaborative partners.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

56 Postgraduate research students play an important role both in the research activity of the University and in providing a valuable resource in support teaching. In 2006, QAA's Review of research degree programmes concluded that the University's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its provision was appropriate and satisfactory. The team regards the recommendations made in the Review as having been met in full.

57 Responsibility for the institutional oversight of research degree programmes is vested in the University Research Students Committee, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), while faculty/school level monitoring of the quality and standards of provision is the responsibility of the corresponding faculty/school research students committee. Day-to-day management of the postgraduate research student experience is vested in directors of studies. The framework for the quality management of research degree programmes is set out in the University Regulations and the University Code of Practice; the latter was strengthened following the 2006 QAA Review, for example, in requiring two members of staff to be involved in making decisions on admissions. Administration of graduate affairs at institutional level is carried out by the Graduate Office.

58 The University has a high-quality research environment and achieves very high completion rates for both home and overseas research students. The University is investing in a new graduate centre and it supports the work of the Postgraduate Association, part of the Students' Union, in various ways. Students met by the audit team thought that the information given to them at the time of application and admission had proved reliable.

59 A majority of research students are supervised by a supervisory team led by a principal supervisor; the 'team model' has become more widely accepted in the last two years. The University's expectations of student and supervisor are set out in the University Code of Practice with admirable clarity, contributing to the team's consideration of this Code as a feature of good practice. If the lead supervisor is still under probation the supervisory team must include another member of the University's academic staff who is not under probation,

60 One area where the audit team found a degree of interfaculty variation was in the process of transfer of registration from MPhil to PhD. Whereas in one faculty the recommendation for transfer is made by two persons independent of the supervisor after receiving reports from the supervisor and student, and an interview of, or presentation by, the student; in a department in another faculty the supervisor is one of the two persons making the recommendation. The team considered the procedure in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, whereby the roles of supervision and assessment are separated, as an example of good practice. The team therefore considers it desirable for the University to consider whether the practice of independent assessors making the final recommendation for transfer of students from MPhil to PhD registration should be implemented across the University. Other aspects of the processes of monitoring the progress

of research students and their examination were considered by the team to be satisfactory; the team noted in particular the compilation of an annual overview report of the reports of external examiners.

61 The comprehensiveness of the training of students in research skills had been noted as good practice in the 2006 Review of research degree programmes; this aspect has since been enhanced by the appointment of a Postgraduate Skills Training Coordinator. The audit team learned that training of research students for any role they might have in teaching is now mandatory.

62 A feature that the audit team considered as one of good practice was the role of the Postgraduate Research Ombudsman in offering students the opportunity to discuss with a disinterested party their concerns: an activity which has provided the ability to aggregate information from individual cases for use in enhancement. The Ombudsman makes an annual report and it is clear that discussions with faculty staff over reoccurring issues had helped to stimulate changes and reduce student concerns.

63 The audit confirms that, in general, the University's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree provision is appropriate and satisfactory, and that the University has put in place effective procedures for the management of its research programmes which meet the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*. The audit team made one recommendation concerning the commonality of process in transferring from MPhil to PhD programmes to incorporate use of independent scrutiny.

Section 7: Published information

64 The University manages information within the context of a brief Information Strategy. Implementation of this Strategy has led to the availability of a range of material in accordance with national guidelines on Teaching Quality Information. Responsibility for published information is distributed between departments and the institution. Registry is the main provider of statistical data regarding students which is made available on the intranet. The Recruitment and Admissions Office and the International Office liaise with departments to produce both printed and online prospectuses. Heads of departments/schools/division have responsibility for the relevant web presence and printed material, including detailed recruitment information, programme handbooks and programme specifications. More generally, the audit team viewed the information available via the University website as comprehensive.

65 Students were in the main positive about the accuracy and range of information provided by the University. However, there was evidence that there were cases where information for students could have been clearer. Examples are prerecruitment information on facilities relevant to students with disabilities; prerecruitment information on potential barriers to placements faced by overseas students; details in programme handbooks pertaining to some joint degrees; and the use of the term 'ECTS [European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System] credit' in regulatory documentation.

66 A feature of the University's programmes is that all students receive handbooks with a defined and comprehensive minimum content. The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office provide template content common to all programmes. Handbooks contain programme specifications, or a key subset, and the latter are produced to guidelines provided in the University Code of Practice. The audit team considered the coverage in these handbooks and the use made of the standard text provided by the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office to be both extensive and thorough. Other sources of information are the online databases of programme and unit specifications maintained by the Student Records and Examinations Office. The latter are particularly used by students.

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

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

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

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

Features of good practice

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

- the use of the SAMIS student record system to provide consistent data for a range of academic processes, such as undergraduate monitoring reports and the monitoring of research student progression (paragraph 15)
- the University's effective working partnership with the Students' Union, which supports the enhancement of the student experience in a variety of ways (paragraphs 28 and 45)
- the formulation of the University's Quality Assurance Code of Practice in a clear and accessible format which includes a series of examples of good practice to illustrate policy and procedure (paragraphs 43 and 59)
- the Student Experience Strategy Group, led by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning), which is enhancing learning opportunities at institutional level (paragraph 46)
- the support that the Division of Lifelong Learning and the departmental link tutor role provides to collaborative partners in the initiation and oversight of Foundation Degrees (paragraph 49)
- the quality and range of support that is available to Foundation Degree and top-up honours students studying for University awards in partner institutions (paragraph 53)
- the role of the Postgraduate Research Ombudsman in offering students the opportunity to discuss with a disinterested party their concerns: an activity which has provided the ability to aggregate information from individual cases for use in enhancement (paragraph 62).

Recommendations for action

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

71 Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- keep under review the extent to which the implementation and operation of the range of new policy initiatives (such as the assessment framework, personal tutoring, peer observation and staff appraisal) are producing the intended outcomes in terms of the management of academic standards and quality (paragraphs 8, 25, 38, 39 and 40)
- ensure sufficient externality in panel membership for periodic review (the Degree Scheme Review), in particular a chair independent of the host faculty and an academic or other external member (paragraph 18).

72 Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- to consider whether the practice of independent assessors making the final recommendation for transfer of students from MPhil to PhD registration should be implemented across the University (paragraph 60).

Appendix

The University of Bath's response to the Institutional audit report

The University of Bath is pleased with the outcome of the institutional audit and the judgement that confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of both the academic standards of its awards and the quality of learning opportunities available to its students.

The University welcomes the recognition by the auditors of the high quality research environment it offers to postgraduate students and of a considerable number of features of good practice across the range of its provision, particularly:

- its strong and effective working relationships with the Students' Union, with partners and between academic services, which contribute to our capacity for enhancing the learning experience for our students
- dynamic institutional-level leadership of quality enhancement through structures in which students are full participants
- the strength of our core systems and policies to support quality management, including the student records system and the University's QA Code of Practice
- structures that are effective in supporting quality management of programmes offered offsite by our partners.

The University is committed to action that puts improvements to the learning experience for all students at the centre of its review and evaluation processes. The University will engage constructively with the audit team's direct recommendations and other suggestions for improvement in order to maintain the highest standards.

This highly positive audit outcome, taken together with other indicators such as strong student satisfaction, high student retention rates, excellent student employability and high completion rates for research degrees, illustrate the quality and breadth of the student learning experience at Bath and the firm foundation from which the University will continue to develop our learning and teaching and quality management framework.

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