QAA

University of Chichester

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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 (*Institutional audit handbook: 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 Chichester (the University) from 5 to 9 November 2007 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

Overall, the audit team found that the University was committed to enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities, and is taking steps to promote this approach through its quality procedures. However, there is scope for the development of a more formal and strategic approach at the institutional level.

Postgraduate research students

The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for its postgraduate research students met the expectations of the *Code of practice for assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes.*

Published information

The audit team concluded that reliance could reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution published about its educational provision and the standards of its awards, with the exception of information on joint and combined degree programmes, where the award requirements as intended by the University are generally not clearly identified.

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following areas as good practice:

- the use made by the University of the external examiner system in securing the standards of its awards

- the full engagement with the Academic Infrastructure

- the role of the external adviser to the Collaborative Programmes Quality Committee in supporting the development of collaborative provision

- the 'Probationer MPhil' scheme designed to prepare students for a higher degree programme.

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- review the role of the external adviser in the programme approval process to ensure that there is appropriate impartial and critical scrutiny, including with respect to resources for learning

- ensure that periodic review takes place every five years in line with the University's requirements

- review the definition and coherence of joint and combined honours programmes

- review the approval and periodic review processes for programmes that involve significant amounts of flexible and/or distributed learning to ensure appropriate specialist scrutiny

- review procedures for the registration of students on collaborative programmes in order to ensure that they have timely access to learning resources

- ensure that the University's transcripts or award certificates indicate the location of study in respect of collaborative partners.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- ensure that annual monitoring includes specific consideration of learning resources

- ensure that postgraduate research students are given appropriate training prior to undertaking a teaching role

- review the institutional processes for the oversight of quality enhancement and the dissemination of good practice.

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 full account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students to the extent that the audit team identified this as a feature of good practice.

Report

1   An institutional audit was undertaken of the University of Chichester (the University) during the week commencing 5 November 2007. 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 Professor C Clare, Professor M Davies, Mrs J Hare and Dr M Wing as auditors, and Ms R Lucas as audit secretary. Dr D Gale, Assistant Director coordinated the audit on behalf of QAA.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3   The University of Chichester was granted University title by the Privy Council in October 2005. The University is located on two sites, the Bishop Otter Campus and the Bognor Regis Campus. In the academic year 2006-07, there were 4,275 full-time equivalent students enrolled with the University. Postgraduate research provision is delivered under an accreditation agreement with the University of Southampton. At the time of the audit there were 68 part-time and 12 full-time students on research programmes at the University of Chichester. The University has a small amount of collaborative provision. There are six partnerships delivering eight programmes, with approximately 42 full-time and 90 part-time students registered for University of Chichester awards. One of the collaborations is with the University of Brighton to deliver a Certificate in Policing in the Communities and these students are based at Bognor Regis Campus. In addition the University is involved in the joint delivery of two programmes delivered overseas (Japan) with the International Diploma Council to Teachers of English. The University currently has no plans to increase its overseas commitments.

4   The Vision, Mission and Values of the University are set out in the Corporate Plan for 2005-09. According to the Mission Statement, 'The University is dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge in which individuals exceed their expectations, strive to achieve academic excellence in teaching and scholarship and are committed to lifelong learning and an enhanced contribution to society'.

5   The Corporate Plan also sets out a number of principles against which the University monitors its progress. These are to:

●   develop flexible and innovative educational programmes informed by contemporary scholarship and research

●   provide an environment to enable students to achieve their educational goals

●   extend higher educational opportunities within the region

●   enrich the local communities of the arts, business, culture, sport, leisure and public services

●   embrace organisational procedures that support institutional excellence.

6   At the time of the audit, the University was structured into six academic schools: namely Cultural Studies; Physical Education; Social Studies; Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences; Teacher Education; and Visual and Performing Arts. Each School has its own strategic plan that demonstrates how the objectives of the Corporate Plan are to be achieved through the academic work of the School.

7   The University (as the then University College Chichester) was subject to an institutional audit in February 2003 which concluded that confidence could be placed in the soundness of the University College's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic

programmes and the academic standards of its awards. In the area of collaborative provision, the report concluded that more limited confidence was justified. The University prepared an action plan in response to the findings of the audit in September 2004 and QAA accepted that appropriate action had been taken to address the recommendations, and the audit was formally signed off by the QAA Board. The present audit team confirmed that the University had given careful consideration and responded appropriately to the report of that audit, and had fully implemented the action plan so that the management of collaborative provision was secure, as reflected in the findings of the audit.

8   At the time of the last audit, the University was undertaking a review of its quality assurance procedures. New systems have been introduced in response to the audit report and included in the Quality Handbook. The revised processes were considered by the current audit team to be effective and appropriately devolved to School level.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

9   The University's Board of Governors delegates responsibility for academic quality to the Academic Board, which is the final decision-making body for all issues relating to the academic provision of the University. Responsibility for operating the systems for the assurance of academic standards and quality is delegated by the Academic Board to the Academic Standards Committee. There is a clear subcommittee structure that manages the operational aspects of the University's provision. There are two School quality committees, each responsible for the provision in three academic schools, and a Collaborative Provision Quality Committee.

10   The Academic Standards Committee plays a pivotal role in monitoring the application of the University's systems for securing the standards of its awards and an annual report is submitted by this Committee to the Academic Board and Board of Governors. Minutes of the Committee demonstrated that a broad range of topics was discussed and the audit team concluded that the Committee discharged its responsibility well.

11   Since the last audit, the University has reviewed its processes for programme approval as well as, annual monitoring and review, in part to increase ownership of those processes among University staff. The audit team agreed with the University that this had been successful.

12   New programmes are formally approved by the Academic Board, although responsibility for the process lies with the Academic Standards Committee. Proposals come to the Senior Management Group, which checks the fit with the strategic direction of the University and conducts a resource-scheduling exercise. The Committee then assigns an external adviser to assist the programme development team. The approval process focuses on the development of the student programme handbook. An approval panel, which includes the external adviser, receives the handbook and enters into dialogue with the programme development team, culminating in a clarification meeting. The panel's recommendations are reported to the Committee. The external adviser's role thus switches between adviser and scrutineer and the audit team's view is that there is potential for the impartiality of the external adviser to be challenged in the approval process. The team therefore considers it advisable that the University reviews the role of the external adviser in the programme approval process, to ensure that there is appropriate impartial and critical scrutiny.

13   Between periodic reviews, there is provision for programmes to undergo minor change so long as it does not involve changes to the learning outcomes. The University defines the maximum permitted change in any one year as 25 per cent of programme content. Although the ultimate arbiter of what might constitute 25 per cent of programme content is the chair of the Academic Standards Committee, the auditors heard conflicting views from University staff as to what was meant by 25 per cent of programme content. The audit team was satisfied that the minor change process was useful. However, the team encourages the University to strengthen the definition of the scope of minor change in any review of its procedures.

14   The procedure for annual monitoring of programmes involves the appointment of an annual monitoring panel. The panel considers programme-related documents including a summary report on student evaluations. The panel produces action points in the form of a report to the School Management Team which, in turn, proposes an action plan that is agreed by the relevant School quality committee or collaborative provision quality committee and reported to the Academic Standards Committee. Completion of the annual monitoring cycle by all programmes is reported by the Academic Standards Committee to the Academic Board. The audit team was able to confirm that there was adequate oversight of the annual monitoring process. The team concluded that the annual monitoring procedures are robust and consistently applied across the University.

15   Periodic review of programmes is scheduled to occur every five years. Programme teams produce a self-evaluation document that is considered by a panel including at least one external adviser. The panel meets or otherwise engages with students, discusses the programme with the programme team and produces a report to the Academic Board. The audit team found that a small number of programme teams had not responded to the request to prepare for periodic review and their period of validation had been extended for one year. Given that there was no formal check on the continuing suitability of those programmes in that particular year, the team recommends that it would be advisable for the University to ensure that periodic review takes place every five years in line with the University's own requirements.

16   The University's approach to joint honours is that the two subjects constituting the joint programme are studied separately. Minor subjects contribute 25 per cent to the course content and grades for the total degree, while joint subjects contribute 50 per cent. The University does not produce programme specifications for joint honours programmes, nor does it define separate learning outcomes for these or the majority of major/minor awards. The audit team heard that joint honours students achieve the learning outcomes of both single honours programmes that contribute to their programme of study. The team considered that the current arrangements do not provide a focus for students' study and concluded that it would be advisable for the University to review the definition and coherence of joint and combined honours programmes.

17   Regulations and procedures relating to external examining are clearly specified by the University. External examiners are appointed by the Academic Board, with nominations coming through the relevant School quality committee or collaborative provision quality committee. The Briefing Paper described this multi-layer approval process as ensuring that nominations undergo thorough discussion at School level, a process that the audit team was able to confirm. In its annual report, the Academic Standards Committee provides the Academic Board with information on the quality of external examiners' reports and on their findings, along with a summary of the institutions from which external examiners are drawn. The team was able to confirm the University's view that this enabled its standards to be benchmarked across the sector. The team found that the reports of the external examiners are distributed appropriately through the institution, including to students. The team considered that the use made by the University of the external examiner system in securing the standards of its awards was a feature of good practice.

18   The audit team saw many examples of where the University had taken into account the Academic Infrastructure in the development of its awards and in the maintenance of standards. The University takes appropriate steps in response to changes and proposed changes to the Academic Infrastructure, and is aware of its requirements under the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. The team was satisfied that the arrangements for externality in programme design, review and assessment were consistent across the University. A small proportion of programmes are accredited by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and the University has an appropriate process for dealing with such bodies. The team considered that the University takes due regard of external reference points and in particular that the Academic Infrastructure is embedded within the University's quality processes. The team concluded that the University's full engagement with the Academic Infrastructure was a feature of good practice.

19   The awards of the University are made under the provisions of the Academic Regulations (July 2007). The arrangements for assessment are both clear and detailed. Academic Regulations are reviewed each year by the Academic Board, informed by a report from the Academic Standards Committee. This report largely considers the reports of external examiners and the audit team considered this as an opportunity for the University to reflect further on other sources of information on assessment, and thus develop the assessment process.

20   In its Commitment Charter, the University informs its students that they can expect to have all items of assessment returned to them with feedback on performance 'as soon as possible' and 'normally within three weeks'. However, both the staff and students that the audit team met were unsure of the University's expectation in relation to timely return of student work, and students indicated considerable variability in both the quality and timeliness of feedback on assessed work and in the application of assessment criteria.

21   The Management Information section of the Planning Department supplies data to inform the University's quality processes. The data include a range of statistics on applicants and entrants, progression and completion information on current students and their performance at module level. The audit team came to the view that the data supplied were used appropriately at annual monitoring and in periodic review, but noted the absence of a supply and discussion of first-destination data in these processes, even though the University holds such data.

22   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

23   The University regards provision of appropriate learning resources as a key factor in ensuring delivery of the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The resource planning process determines the adequacy of learning resources based on a sound analysis of financial viability of a programme given its resourcing needs. Under the procedure for programme approval, the external subject specialist adviser, appointed to work with the programme development team, is not required to attend the clarification meeting at which the programme is scrutinised, and consequently does not have access to the resources statement. The adviser, therefore, is not in a position to comment on the adequacy of the learning resources from the subject perspective. The audit team considered that this did not reflect the expectations of the *Code of practice* and the team considers it advisable that the University reviews the role of the external adviser in the programme approval process, to ensure that there is appropriate impartial and critical scrutiny, including with respect to resources for learning.

24   In terms of student evaluation, there are University guidelines on module evaluation. Programme coordinators can supplement these module evaluations with cohort evaluations. Students are represented on the University's quality management committees and on many of the other committees of the University. Student representatives are included on programme boards, which operate for every programme. In meetings with the audit team, students were supportive of these forms of representation and viewed them as effective. Students felt that the University was receptive to their views and acted on issues wherever practicable. The team concluded that the University was making effective use of student representation and feedback mechanisms to take account of students in its management of learning opportunities.

25   In the case of joint programmes, students reported that they could not always obtain advice on the whole of their programme, or that where more than one adviser was appointed, there was confusion as to their respective advisory roles. The audit team identified further issues relating to joint and combined programmes, where the treatment of joint or combined fields is not consistent. In some cases, students are required to use two separate programme handbooks and there can also be difficulties on occasions with respect to timetabling, where students were prevented from attending some modules on their joint programmes. As a result, the team

recommends that it would be advisable for the University to review the definition and coherence of its joint programmes.

26   The University regards e-learning as a valuable adjunct to more conventional means of teaching and learning. This focus is made clear in the e-learning strategy, which emphasises the use of e-learning technology as complementing existing teaching and learning methods. The strategy is implemented at School level through School-based e-learning projects. Additionally, all subjects and programmes are required to demonstrate how they have used information technology to enhance the student learning experience. During approval and review of programmes that offer significant e-learning or distance learning, arrangements for supporting students are examined. However, the audit team noted that there are no additional expectations with respect to the e-learning expertise of the panel, nor were samples of programme e-learning materials made available at the event. The team therefore recommends that it would be advisable for the University to review the approval and periodic review processes for programmes that involve significant amounts of flexible and/or distributed learning to ensure appropriate specialist scrutiny.

27   Student feedback is the principal means through which learning resource issues are identified as part of the annual monitoring process. The audit team judged that a programme should not depend solely upon student views to gauge the continuing adequacy of resources at programme level and the team considers it desirable that the University ensures that annual monitoring includes specific consideration of learning resources.

28   The University has an admissions policy within the context of which programme admission requirements are established. In straightforward admission cases, applicants are made offers by the central Admissions Office. More complex cases are referred to School-based admissions tutors for a decision. The University accepts students with advanced standing, and has a set of accreditation procedures that requires applicants to make clear the prior learning achieved, and to support any claims with appropriate evidence. Claims are assessed by assessment tutors, and all applications are reviewed by the Pro Vice-Chancellor. In the view of the team, the arrangements for admission of students are appropriate.

29   Subject to meeting threshold requirements, programmes are free to develop their own approach to student support. In practice, almost all programmes opt to appoint an academic adviser. The University also provides a comprehensive range of centrally-provided services. International students receive additional centrally-provided academic and welfare support and follow a special induction programme.

30   During approval and review, arrangements for student support, as laid out in the student handbook, are reviewed. Services obtain feedback from students and each area reports annually to the Student Support Services Committee, which in turn reports to the Academic Board. Additionally, services benchmark themselves against external standards. A new procedure for review of support services has been introduced, involving a biennial review, with results notified to the Academic Board. Students have reported general satisfaction with the student support services. The audit team found the procedures for assessing the quality of student support services to be sound.

31   In the case of collaborative programmes, additional procedures apply. When programmes are initially approved a site visit is undertaken, which reviews all aspects of student support. Student services may provide additional support; where this is the case, this is elaborated in the Memorandum of Agreement and Service Level Agreement. The annual monitoring process for collaborative partners provides further information on the suitability of resources.

32   Staff development requirements are established through the annual appraisal processes, via external examiner reports and the annual monitoring process. The Staff Development Committee, chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor, brings together information from these sources and determines how these needs will be met.

33   The University offers a number of staff development opportunities, with the Centre for Learning and Teaching playing a key role in delivering training and providing support. All staff new to teaching are expected to follow the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching programme (or equivalent). Staff development and support is available to all associate lecturers, relevant collaborative partner staff and research students. In collaborative partnerships, the liaison tutors also play a role in monitoring staff development. The audit team was made aware of a research student with a significant teaching load whose development needs had not been met prior to the student undertaking teaching. The team therefore recommends it is desirable that the University ensures that all postgraduate research students are given appropriate training prior to undertaking a teaching role. Despite this, the team concluded that the University has appropriate processes in place to support staff in assuring the quality of teaching and demonstrated a commitment to development activities in support of the improvement of learning opportunities.

34   The audit found that confidence could reasonably be placed in the University's current and likely future management of the quality of learning opportunities.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

35   The University considers enhancement to be 'the process of taking deliberative steps at institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities'. The promotion of enhancement in learning and teaching was a key consideration in the revision of the University's quality procedures between 2002 and 2004. This approach is articulated in the quality principles that form the quality statement of intent in the University's Quality Handbook. The Briefing Paper stated that its systems-based approach to enhancement is reflected particularly in the revised quality procedures for resource scheduling, programme approval, programme review, annual monitoring and the minor change procedures.

36   The University's commitment to enhancement is also reflected in the delivery plan of the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The Principal Lecturer (Learning and Teaching) position within each School with responsibility for enhancing learning and teaching is a key component of the University's approach. In 2006, the Investors in People report commended the role of the Principal Lecturer (Learning and Teaching) posts in 'linking with the Centre for Learning and Teaching to promote and share good practice'.

37   The audit team heard that other quality mechanisms, such as the processes of responding to external examining, periodic review, and annual monitoring and its associated reporting processes, contributed to the process of enhancement. The team concluded that although there is evidence of the University promoting enhancement activity, the University should consider how all outcomes of such monitoring and reporting are to be systematically reviewed and integrated to ensure a coherent institutional view of enhancement issues. The University should also consider how it might measure the overall effectiveness of the enhancement procedures.

38   The University has established a number of processes for identifying and disseminating good practice. Principal lecturers (learning and teaching) and the Centre for Learning and Teaching also play a key role in disseminating good practice. The audit team saw evidence of the identification and dissemination of good practice through these means; however there was no institutional view taken of the effectiveness of processes in encouraging uptake of good practice.

39   The audit team concluded that the University is committed to enhancing the quality of learning opportunities and has taken steps to promote this approach through its quality procedures. However, the systems for providing an institutional overview of the enhancement activity were less developed. The team considered it desirable that the University reviews the institutional processes for the oversight of quality enhancement and the dissemination of good practice.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

40   The University has a small amount of collaborative provision with six partnerships delivering eight programmes. One of these collaborations is with the University of Brighton, which is the awarding body, and delivers a Certificate in Policing in the Communities with 101 students based at the Bognor Regis Campus. There are currently 42 full-time and 90 part time students registered for University of Chichester awards.

41   The University has two programmes jointly delivered overseas. These are a Diploma in Practical English Teaching (DipPET) and an MA in TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) with relatively small numbers of students. Both these courses are delivered in Tokyo in partnership with the International Diploma Council to Teachers of English. They are part-time programmes taught by University staff employed in Japan and by full-time University staff from Chichester.

42   The University does not envisage a large-scale expansion of collaborative provision, but where future expansion is desirable it will be undertaken only in subject areas of proven success and with trusted partners.

43   In its previous institutional audit in 2003 the University received limited confidence for its collaborative provision and the report made a number of recommendations that the University should take action on without delay.

44   The audit team noted that immediate action had been taken in relation to the partnership with the Isle of Wight College which included enabling existing students on programmes that were subsequently closed to complete their programmes. The University had appointed an external adviser in September 2004 to support the development of a clear and rigorous framework for the management of collaborative provision, a role that is still in existence. The team considered the role of the external adviser to the Collaborative Programmes Committee in supporting the development of collaborative provision as a feature of good practice.

45   The University has introduced a range of new procedures to ensure effective operational management of collaborative provision. This is embodied in the Academic Framework for Collaborative Programmes Handbook, much of which now appears in the Quality Handbook. Other external review reports confirmed that the actions taken to address the issues raised in 2003 have succeeded in establishing an effective framework through which to deliver collaborative provision.

46   The Centre for Collaborative Programmes has been established to take responsibility for the University's Academic Framework for Collaborative Provision and it supports the schools in the operational management and quality assurance of their collaborative programmes. It also acts as a central coordinating body and focal point for collaborative activity. The audit team, however, found an example of ongoing difficulties with core administrative systems relating to the enrolment and registration of collaborative students. This was leading to students having problems activating their intranet accounts and gaining access to other services. Consequently, the team considered it advisable that the University reviews its procedures for the registration of students on collaborative programmes, in order to ensure that they have timely access to all learning resources.

47   The establishment of a liaison tutor role acting as a link between the University and its partners has proved a positive development. Although some efforts have been made to enable liaison tutors to meet together and share practice, there is currently variation in the ways in which they carry out their roles and responsibilities. The University is encouraged to continue its efforts at securing greater consistency.

48   The Collaborative Programmes Quality Committee was also established in 2004 as a subcommittee of the Academic Standards Committee and is charged with the maintenance of

quality and standards in collaborative provision. Its responsibilities include annual monitoring and review of collaborative programmes. Powers for the nomination of external examiners, minor change to programmes and new awards lie with the School quality committees. The reason for this division of responsibility was unclear to the audit team, therefore it is suggested that the University reviews the interrelationship of the two committees as part of its review of the quality assurance processes.

49   The audit team considered that the University's standard quality assurance procedures are used effectively for the management of its collaborative provision, and that there are also a number of additional processes in place for the effective management of learning resources.

50   The responsibility for issuing award certificates and transcripts remains with the University. However, neither the award certificate nor the transcript provided to the audit team in relation to its collaborative provision contained reference to the name and location of the partner organisation engaged in the delivery of the programme of study. The team considers it advisable to ensure that the University's transcripts or award certificates indicate the location of study in respect of collaborative partners.

51   The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for the management of the quality and standards of collaborative provision are on the whole effective and reflect the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, published by QAA.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

52   The University operates under an accreditation agreement with the University of Southampton, and is subject to their Regulation and Code of Practice for Research Degrees. Under this arrangement the responsibility for the standard and quality of research degrees is shared between the Universities.

53   The University has a research and scholarship committee, chaired by the Director of Research, which reports to the Academic Board. A subcommittee, the Research Degree Group, undertakes the oversight of postgraduate research provision. Two members of the Group represent the University on the Southampton External Research Degrees Committee, and there are also mechanisms for reporting back between the Southampton Committee and the University's Research and Scholarship Committee.

54   Each School that takes research students is required to produce a research environment statement approved by the Research Degrees Group and the University of Southampton. These statements report on supervisory resources, learning resources and training programmes available for staff and students.

55   The admissions procedure is covered by the University of Southampton Regulations and Code of Practice. The application and interview processes are monitored by the University of Chichester's Research Degrees Group. There is an induction process for students, which forms part of a comprehensive training programme, organised by the Director of Research, together with School research coordinators. As well as direct entry into MPhil/PhD, the University operates a probationer MPhil scheme where prospective research students are offered tutorials and access to facilities to help them prepare for research. Students were very positive about the scheme and the audit team considered this to be an area of good practice.

56   Research students have at least two supervisors each of whom undergoes formal training programmes managed through Chichester and Southampton universities, and coordinated by the Director of Research. Tutorial support and quality of supervision is monitored through annual progress reports from both supervisors and students. The audit team heard from students that

supervisory arrangements were supportive and effective; however, the team found that there was some variability in the regularity and frequency of the supervisory meetings. The team would encourage the University to ensure that all supervisory staff are aware of the minimum requirements as indicated by the University of Southampton Code of Practice.

57   A training programme for research students is organised every year by the Director of Research together with the School Research Coordinators. Subject-specific training sessions for staff and students are the responsibility of the Schools. Students receive a list of training events at induction and they are expected to record their progress in personal development planning files. Students are encouraged to attend events organised as part of the general staff development programme.

58   Feedback from research students is obtained through their representation on the University's Research and Scholarship Committee and School Research and Scholarship Groups. There is also an annual student survey that feeds into the annual monitoring process, and findings are relayed to students electronically and via notice boards. Complaints and appeals procedures are governed by the University regulations. The audit team was provided with examples where issues had been raised and satisfactorily dealt with, and formed the view that the feedback mechanisms were working well.

59   Postgraduate research provision is evaluated through an annual monitoring process, based on subject area self-assessments and research environment statements. This process includes data on progression and achievement. Research students' individual progress is monitored through annual progress reports completed by both student and supervisor. The results of the annual monitoring process, together with action plans inform both the University annual monitoring report to the Academic Board and the University annual report to the University of Southampton. The audit team considered that the monitoring processes used by the University were comprehensive and rigorous.

60   Research students are offered the opportunity to provide or support teaching or to demonstrate on undergraduate and master's courses. There is an expectation from the University that students would receive formal training in such duties prior to commencement. However, the audit team found that this was not always the case. The team, therefore, considered it desirable for the University to ensure that postgraduate research students are given appropriate training prior to taking up a teaching role.

61   The audit team concluded that the arrangements for postgraduate research students were in alignment with the section of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes* and were operating as intended.

Section 7: Published information

62   The University publishes a range of information on its website and in hard copy for prospective and current students. All students are provided with programme handbooks which contain the programme specification and information on regulatory matters, operational issues, module content, curricula and assessment, and support for students. Reports and minutes of the University's committees are available on the University's intranet. The University is planning to publish summaries of external examiners' reports and outcomes of periodic review on its website from January 2008.

63   The audit team noted that the University ensures the accuracy and completeness of its publications through checks at a number of levels. The team was able to confirm that these arrangements worked appropriately in practice and that the University ensured that its publications were reviewed periodically.

64   The audit team heard from students that information made available both before and during their study was mostly helpful and reasonably accurate. There were, however, particular issues for students on joint and combined programmes who were required to use two separate handbooks containing the full learning outcomes for both single honours programmes.

65   The audit team concluded that the published information is reasonably accurate and complete, although the University may wish to consider how it presents information on the coherence of joint and combined programmes. The team also concluded that the University was able to demonstrate that it has in place appropriate mechanisms for reviewing and updating its current publications on a regular basis.

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

66   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

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

- the use made by the University of the external examiner system in securing the standards of its awards (paragraph 17)

- the full engagement with the Academic Infrastructure (paragraph 18)

- the role of the external adviser to the Collaborative Programmes Quality Committee in supporting the development of collaborative provision (paragraph 44)

- the 'Probationer MPhil' scheme designed to prepare students for a higher degree programme (paragraph 55).

Recommendations for action

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

69   The team advises the University to:

- review the role of the external adviser in the programme approval process to ensure that there is appropriate impartial and critical scrutiny, including with respect to resources for learning (paragraphs 12; 23)

- ensure that periodic review takes place every five years in line with the University's requirements (paragraph 15)

- review the definition and coherence of joint and combined honours programmes (paragraphs 16; 25)

- review the approval and periodic review processes for programmes that involve significant amounts of flexible and/or distributed learning to ensure appropriate specialist scrutiny (paragraph 26)

- review procedures for the registration of students on collaborative programmes in order to ensure that they have timely access to all learning resources (paragraph 46)

- ensure that the University's transcripts or award certificates indicate the location of study in respect of collaborative partners (paragraph 50).

70 It would be desirable for the University to:

- ensure that annual monitoring includes specific consideration of learning resources (paragraph 27)

- ensure that postgraduate research students are given appropriate training prior to undertaking a teaching role (paragraphs 33; 60)

- review the institutional processes for the oversight of quality enhancement and the dissemination of good practice (paragraphs 37 to 39).

Appendix

The University of Chichester's response to the institutional audit report

The University receives the audit team's judgement of 'confidence' as an affirmation of the robustness of its systems for maintaining standards and enhancing quality. In particular, we celebrate the team's view that our new quality assurance procedures, introduced in 2004, are operating effectively. We note with pleasure that our system for external examining and our methods for ensuring that our academic standards and the quality of what we offer students are nationally benchmarked, are both considered to be examples of 'good practice'.

The audit team has judged as successful the steps we have undertaken to ensure that collaborative programmes are now soundly delivered. The University's use of externality in this process is recognised as a further example of good practice. It is also encouraging for an institution which aspires to gain research degree awarding powers that the present audit team has endorsed the view of the 2003 team that our probationary system for postgraduate research students is an example of good practice.

The Academic Standards Committee will develop an action plan for each of the recommendations, to ensure an appropriate response. Our initial thoughts and actions for each of these are detailed below.

Advisable

- the University's innovative approach to programme approval enables externality to be used to support both the design stage of development and the work of the Panel. This element in our procedure was based on best practice elsewhere. The team concedes that no evidence of compromise was found. Our practice falls within the *Code of practice, Section 7*

- Given the concerns of the audit team we will revise the programme approval system to ensure the external adviser's position, exclusively as a member of the Approval Panel during the process of development and approval, is clearly established and will develop mechanisms to ensure impartiality is verifiable

- the Academic Standards Committee will ensure that, in the future, its schedules for periodic review are maintained

- the report's advice on joint awards would be challenging for any institution that offers joint degree programmes within a modular structure and, in our view, does not reflect sector expectations. However, the University will review its joint awards in light of the team's advice, in the belief that the information by which it supports students on joint awards can be improved significantly

- the procedures for the approval and periodic review of programmes will be reviewed to secure appropriate expert scrutiny for flexible and/or distributed learning, where this is appropriate

- the University is currently reviewing its registration procedures to make them more efficient for students taking off-campus programmes

- arrangements have been made to indicate the names of partner organisations on student transcripts and certificates.

Desirable

- the procedure for annual monitoring will be revisited to consider learning resources

- at present postgraduate research students undertake training while they are teaching. We will arrange guidance prior to entry to the classroom

- the processes for the oversight of quality enhancement and dissemination of good practice will be a major focus in the University's review of its quality management procedures in 2008-09.