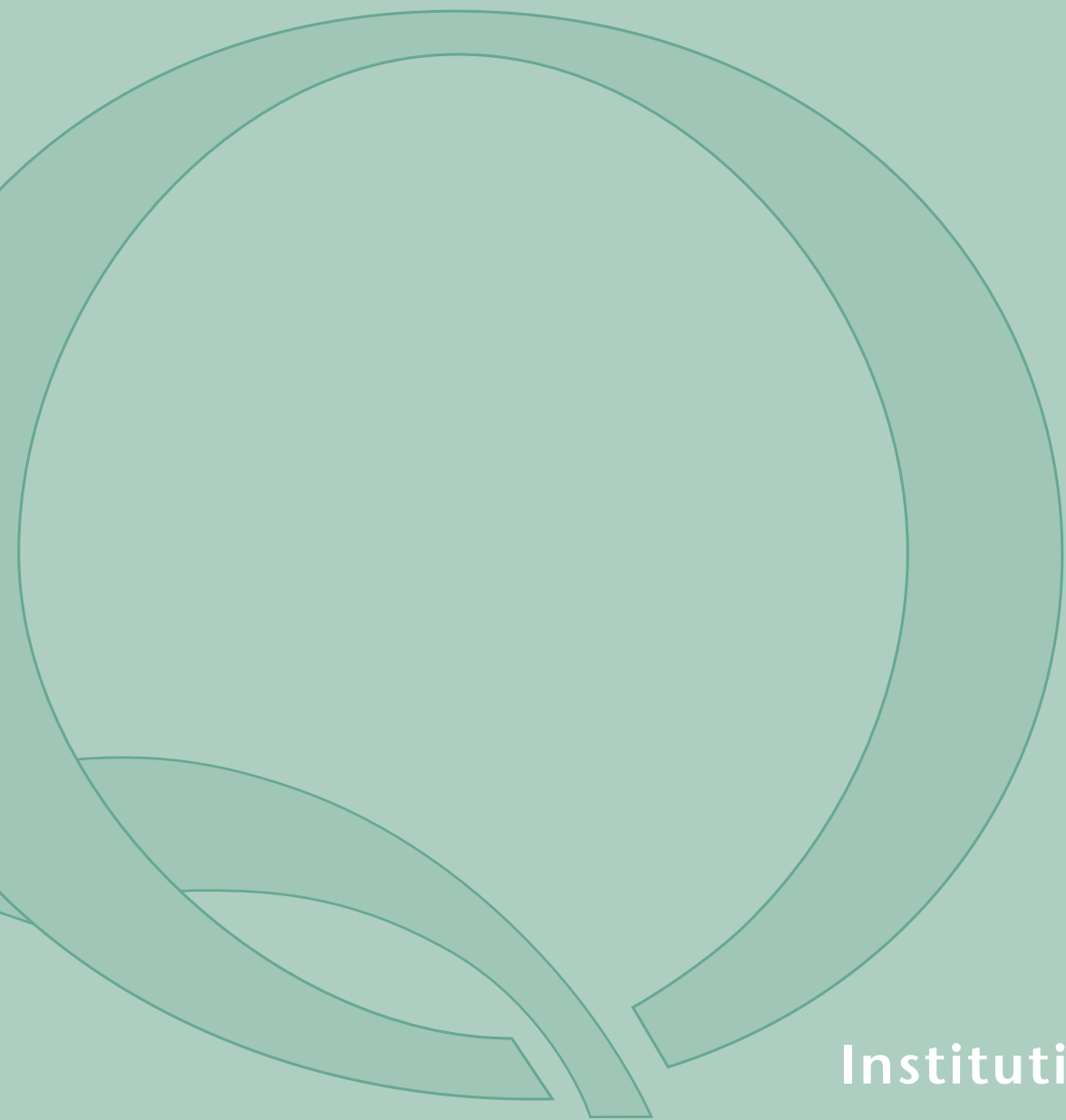




**QAA**



# Institutional audit

**University of Hertfordshire**

MARCH 2009

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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 Innovation, Universities and Skills (now the Department for Business, Innovation 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, 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 Hertfordshire, (the University), from 16 March to 20 March 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

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 University of Hertfordshire is that:

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

### Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit found that the University has a range of activities in place and under development, which constitutes an effective institutional approach to quality enhancement.

### Postgraduate research students

The audit found the University's arrangements for postgraduate research students met the precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, and are effective in securing academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities.

### Published information

The audit found that 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 being good practice:

- the Student Performance Monitoring Group, which analyses the information provided to better inform the processes for monitoring retention and achievement
- the comprehensive support for international students prior to joining, during induction and while on their programmes

- the engagement of the Graduate Futures office, both inside the University and with external stakeholders, to further the University's business-facing mission
- the support for research students, including the generic training programme and the comprehensive information available via StudyNet.

### **Recommendations for action**

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

The team advises the University to:

- revise the process by which short courses that contribute to University awards are developed and approved, to include input external to the University, in order to ensure the appropriateness of level, content, learning outcomes and assessment
- revise the generic grading criteria so that the grades align with those in the University's Grading and Marking Scale, to further develop these grading criteria to differentiate between all levels and to ensure their consistent use and communication to students
- develop further, implement and publish protocols for ensuring that the academic standards of programmes delivered and assessed in languages other than English are equivalent to those delivered and assessed in English; in particular, and in the light of its risk-based approach to the oversight of modules delivered by partner institutions, to introduce and publish protocols for the moderation by University staff of modules judged to be of medium or high risk.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- revise its plans for making awards based on credit-bearing short courses and/or accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) so that appropriate attention is paid to external reference points, including subject benchmark statements, in determining the name of such awards, and, in doing so, to review APEL protocols in support of the process.

### **Reference points**

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

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

The audit found that the University took due account of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

## Report

1 An Institutional audit of University of Hertfordshire (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 16 March 2009. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers on behalf of University of Hertfordshire and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team was Professor Sonia Blandford, Professor James More, Professor Trevor Nicholls, Dr. Keith Sharp, auditors, and Mrs Sue Gregory, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Professor Chris Clare, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

### Section 1: Introduction and background

3 Originally established in 1952 as a technical college, the institution was identified as one of 25 Colleges of Technology in 1959. Further growth, accompanied by the development of strong links with industry and commerce in the county and region, were recognised in 1969 when the College was designated one of the first three polytechnics in the country. The reputation of The Hatfield Polytechnic increased during the following two decades, and in 1989, following the passage of the *Education Reform Act*, it ceased to be maintained by the Hertfordshire County Council and became an independent higher education corporation. In 1992, the University of Hertfordshire was established.

4 The University now has over 3,000 staff and is one of the largest employers in the area. It has a financial budget of over £200 million per annum, with a significant part of its income being earned through research, consultancy and business services activities. The number of students registered with the University has increased substantially, rising from approximately 5,000 in 1987 to over 22,000 in 2007-08. This growth reflects not only the diversification of activities within the University itself but also the increasing participation rate in higher education, both by school leavers and mature entrants.

5 Over 18,500 of the University's students are based at the University's home campuses in Hatfield (College Lane and De Havilland campuses) and St Albans, along with almost 1,500 students studying at four Hertfordshire further education colleges, (Hertford Regional College, North Hertfordshire College, Oaklands College and West Herts College), along with the University, (collectively termed the Hertfordshire Higher Education Consortium, or HHEC), and almost 2,500 students studying at collaborative partner colleges abroad. Around 84 per cent of students are following undergraduate programmes, 14 per cent taught postgraduate programmes and 2 per cent postgraduate research programmes.

6 The University's vision for 2012 is 'to be recognised as a new model of a University through far-reaching engagement with business, community and international partners, shaping the future success of its graduates by operating in the global environment and advancing the prosperity of its region', and its mission statement encapsulates a business-facing approach to the education of students from a wide range of backgrounds.

7 The University's vision and mission are an integral part of the 2007 to 2012 Strategic Plan, which was approved by the Board of Governors in December 2006. The strategy builds on the vision set out in the 2004 to 2007 Plan: widespread engagement with businesses and employers, excellence in learning, teaching and research and accelerating the widening participation agenda. Engaging with business and the professions is the foundation for many of the institution's activities and the Strategic Plan 2007 to 2012 takes account of the changing external environment, especially government policy in relation to the skills agenda and widening participation. The University is currently embarking on a review of its strategy, with the development of a 2009 to 2014 strategic plan, and a 2020 visioning exercise to inform the strategic review.

8 Since the last audit, the University has undergone changes to its management and committee structures. A new Deputy Vice-Chancellor has been appointed and two new senior management groups have been established. The University has introduced three new academic schools (School of Film, Music and Media, School of Pharmacy and the Postgraduate Medical School with Bedfordshire and Cranfield); identified the Academic Quality Enhancement Committee as having responsibility for all staff development arrangements for teaching, learning and academic quality; established a student performance monitoring group, to consider student entry and performance data; and the Student Feedback Working Group has been reconstituted into the Working Group on Student Voice.

9 Significant developments have taken place in estates. A new building for Digital Arts and New Media was opened in 2006; the Health Research Building was also opened in 2006 to house the postgraduate Medical School; almost all teaching rooms have been refurbished between 2006 and 2008; and currently the south end of the campus is being developed to create a new student forum as a centre for all student activity outside of studies.

10 The University has in general addressed the recommendations of the last audit, however, the audit team identified that further developments are required for those recommendations relating to assessment (see paragraph 27).

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

11 The University has in place clear and robust procedures for the development and approval of new programmes. Before new programmes can be developed, initial approval is required at faculty and university levels. This initial approval process ensures that appropriate resources are available to support the development, that there exists an appropriate market rationale and that the development is aligned with the strategic direction of the faculty and University. A similar process is followed, whether the programme is for delivery within the University or through a partner institution.

12 Once initial approval for a programme development is given, a clearly defined planning process is followed, which ensures that the views of various stakeholders, including students and, where appropriate, employers are taken into account. Teams are encouraged to make use of the expertise of external consultants during the development phase.

13 All programmes are approved through a formal approval event. Approval panels are chaired by senior academics not associated with the faculty, and are required to have suitably qualified and experienced external members. The University provides training for panel members and administrators who support the process, and comprehensive documentation is available to support the process and ensure consistency across the institution.

14 The University has recently approved a procedure for the rapid development and approval of credit-bearing short courses. The University regulations also permit the unlimited use of such credit in the formulation of an award (see paragraph 24). While this process broadly aligns with the University's existing frameworks, it differs from the existing approval process in that no external input is required either at the development or approval stage. Approval for these courses is given by the relevant Head of School and Associate Dean (Academic Quality), with little input or oversight external to the faculty, and none external to the University. The audit team considered that this process was insufficient to ensure appropriateness of level, content, and assessment and hence has the potential to place standards at risk. The team therefore recommends it advisable for the University to revise the process by which short courses that contribute to University awards are developed and approved, to include input external to the University, in order to ensure the appropriateness of level, content, learning outcomes and assessment.



15 The University has in place a clear and effective system for the annual monitoring of academic standards. An annual monitoring and evaluation report is produced for each programme according to a standard template, and this is considered in detail at faculty level, together with any comments from the external examiner. The use of standard templates ensures that key issues relating to academic standards are considered consistently across the University's provision. The reports also consider key statistical information on student performance. Summary reports are sent by faculties to the University's Academic Quality and Enhancement Committee, where any issues for the attention of the University, or examples of good practice, are identified. A further report, summarising this process, is sent to the Vice-Chancellor's Group, which uses this information to inform future strategic planning. The University has recently approved similar annual monitoring arrangements that will apply to its credit-bearing short courses.

16 Following approval, all courses are subject to periodic review, normally every six years. The periodic review process is based on the initial validation process, but also includes reflection on, and evaluation of, the performance of the programme over the previous six years. As with the initial validation process, the periodic review process is thorough, considers the views and experiences of a range of stakeholders, including students and employers, and has appropriate external input.

17 External examiners are fundamental to the University's approach to the maintenance of academic standards and quality. Ultimate responsibility for the appointment of external examiners lies with Academic Board, and appointments are made on the basis of well-publicised criteria, designed to ensure the appropriate levels of expertise and independence. The University provides mandatory training for new external examiners.

18 External examiners complete their annual reports according to standard templates, which are designed to ensure that common themes relating to standards and quality are addressed across the institution. Initially, reports are received centrally, by the Academic Quality Office, and are read by one of three senior staff with a University-wide remit for standards and quality. This process ensures that any major issues, or issues of urgent University-wide significance, can be identified and addressed at the earliest opportunity. Reports are then considered in detail at programme level, and programme committees are required to respond to the reports. The annual monitoring process ensures that issues identified by external examiners are addressed through the annual cycle.

19 Student representatives engage with the external examiners' reports when they are appended to the appropriate programme annual monitoring and evaluation reports. They are given full and detailed consideration by the Programme Committee, whose reactions to the external examiner's comments and appropriate actions are documented within the annual monitoring and evaluation report prior to them being passed on to the Faculty Academic Quality Enhancement Committee.

20 The University's recently developed processes for managing credit-bearing short courses also includes a requirement for external examiners, appointed according to the same processes and criteria as for any other course. External examiners for short courses maintain oversight of the standards of each short course, and are represented at the appropriate module boards, where grades are confirmed.

21 The audit team found that the University has sound processes governing the appointment and role of external examiners, which are effective in securing academic standards.

22 The University is compliant with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and has in place arrangements to ensure that the development of its policies and procedures take account of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)* (see paragraph 33) and other elements of the Academic Infrastructure. The guidance given to staff

in relation to programme development, approval, monitoring and review clearly references the Academic Infrastructure.

23 The University also has involvement with many professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. Its engagement ensures that professional programmes are relevant and up to date, and that examples of good practice from specific professional areas can be disseminated more widely.

24 The development and review of taught programmes takes account of subject benchmark statements. The University has recently developed, through its Flexible Credit Framework, the possibility that 'Open Studies' awards may be made entirely on the basis of credits gained through credit-bearing short courses, the accreditation of prior experiential learning, or a combination of both (see paragraph 52). This can lead to a student achieving an award that requires no further study within the University. Therefore it is possible that a student can gain sufficient credit solely from this accreditation process and/or short-course credit for the award of a degree at undergraduate (unclassified) level or postgraduate level.

25 Should such an award map directly onto a taught award of the University, that award could be made. Where, however, the credits awarded do not map directly onto an existing named award, but there is coherence within the credits offered, the framework allows for the award of a named degree not identical to those validated as taught awards. The audit team was concerned that this possibility could allow named awards to be made without appropriate reference to subject benchmarks, and without appropriate external scrutiny of their alignment with the subject benchmarks. Consequently, the team recommends it desirable for the University to revise its plans for making awards based on credit-bearing short courses and/or accreditation of prior experiential learning so that appropriate attention is paid to external reference points, including subject benchmark statements, in determining the name of such awards and, in doing so, to review these accreditation protocols in support of the process.

26 The University publishes comprehensive documentation that details its assessment policies and regulations. Detailed guidance is given to staff on good practice in relation to assessment, together with practical guidance on how to implement the University's learning, teaching and assessment strategy. The audit team found clear evidence that assessment policies and regulations are generally adhered to, and that appropriate mechanisms are in place for monitoring their effectiveness.

27 Following the 2004 Institutional audit, the University introduced a generic grading and marking scale. The audit team found, however, that the generic criteria published by the University concerning the award of grades does not align wholly with the generic grading and marking scale and, furthermore, that these do not differentiate between undergraduate levels. It was further noted that not all course handbooks contain this information and that some contextualisation is permitted at Faculty level, which leads to some variation. The team therefore recommends it advisable for the University to revise the generic grading criteria so that the grades align with those in the University's grading and marking scale, to further develop these grading criteria, to differentiate between all levels and to ensure their consistent use and communication to students.

28 In relation to modules delivered in partner institutions, the University has adopted a risk-based approach to the management of standards and this is promulgated through the Collaborative Working Practices Handbook. Modules deemed to be low-risk may be moderated within the partner institution, with oversight of the process maintained by University staff. Modules deemed to be medium or high-risk, by contrast, must be moderated by a member of University staff. While the audit team found this variable scrutiny approach to be suitable for modules delivered in English, it is not fully compatible with the fact that the University permits, and practises, the delivery of modules in languages other than English. The University does have measures in place for assessment of the one programme that is currently partly delivered and assessed in a language other than English. However, this programme does not fall into the

high-risk category and, in any case, such measures as are in place would not satisfy the University's requirements for moderation of high-risk provision, which requires staff within the University to moderate that provision.

29 An advisable recommendation of the 2006 audit of Collaborative provision was that the University should 'continue to implement the policy of phasing out, in international partnerships, the use of...assessment in languages other than English'. The University has chosen not to do this and, furthermore, has now introduced a policy that sets out the conditions under which partner institutions are permitted to deliver and assess material in languages other than English at levels 0, 1 and 2. In addition, it specifies further conditions that would allow extension of this practice to level 3 and M. Although the University has yet to apply this extension, the revised policy permits, in principle, and under certain circumstances, an entire programme at either undergraduate or master's level to be delivered and assessed in languages other than English (see paragraph 69). At the time of the audit, the articulation of this revised policy had yet to appear in the Academic Regulations for Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes, which are published annually and delivered to all staff. In the light of this, and the risk-based approach to the management of standards (paragraph 28), the audit team makes the following recommendation. It is advisable for the University to develop further, implement and publish protocols for ensuring that the academic standards of programmes delivered and assessed in languages other than English are equivalent to those delivered and assessed in English; in particular, and in the light of its risk-based approach to the oversight of modules delivered by partner institutions, to introduce and publish protocols for the moderation by University staff of modules judged to be of medium or high-risk.

30 The University makes comprehensive use of statistical management information in its oversight of academic standards. All statistical data used in the annual monitoring process is provided centrally from the University's information system. This ensures consistency in the data that is used throughout the institution. The audit team found evidence of critical reflection on statistical management information during the annual reporting process, and evidence that this reflection contributes to the maintenance of standards.

31 The University has a student performance monitoring group which, proactively monitors student entry and performance data across the University. This group reports on trends to faculties and other committees and the audit team found evidence that this contributes to the supervision of academic standards. The team considered this to be a feature of good practice.

32 The overall conclusion reached by the audit team is that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of its academic standards.

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

33 The audit team found evidence that effective use is made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure in its management of learning opportunities. Formally, it is the responsibility of the Academic Quality Enhancement Committee to consider revisions to the *Code of practice* and how they impact upon the University, and it discharges this responsibility through its subcommittee, the Academic Quality Audit Committee.

34 Engagement with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies is another way in which the University makes use of external reference points in its management of learning opportunities. Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies frequently specify competencies or standards, and these will inform the way in which the University approaches the management of learning opportunities for those programmes.

35 The University's requirements for the approval of programmes is set out in its 'Programme Developer's and Reviewer's Handbook.' This is a comprehensive document, which sets out the rationale underlying the University's approach to programme development and which gives thorough guidance on process for all those involved in the development and review of academic programmes.

36 Both programme development and review require input from appropriate experts external to the University. The requirements for this are reported above (paragraph 13). The audit team saw evidence that external experts add value to the programme development and review process. External experts comment on all aspects of programme structure, design, delivery and assessment, and as such are well placed to comment on key aspects of the quality of learning opportunities on programmes.

37 The University is a large organisation and clearly makes good use of the range of human resources at its disposal in the approval and review of its programmes. Validation events, although organised in the main at faculty level, are chaired by a senior academic external to the faculty in question. This, together with the input of external experts, ensures that decisions concerning approval and review are made independently of the interests of the faculty or school in which provision is housed.

38 The annual monitoring and periodic review processes employed by the University are discussed above in relation to academic standards (paragraphs 15, 16). Just as the systems described provide a robust framework through which academic standards are assured on an annual and periodic basis, so the same systems function to ensure that the quality of the student learning opportunities provided are monitored both annually and at longer intervals. Through the sequence of reporting, from programme, to school, faculty and University academic quality enhancement committees, the University is able to ensure that central oversight is maintained over the quality of the student learning experience.

39 The University has in place appropriate systems and processes for assuring the quality of the student learning experience once a decision has been made to suspend or discontinue a course. Oversight of these processes resides with the Academic Development Committee and, ultimately, with Academic Board.

40 Comprehensive arrangements exist for monitoring the quality of the learning experience for students engaged in modes of study other than traditional full-time. The annual reporting system receives and reviews feedback from students studying in partner institutions, including those overseas. Similarly, the learning experience of those students of the University engaged in distance learning is monitored systematically through both the annual monitoring and evaluation report and periodic review processes. Overall, the audit team found that the review and monitoring processes in place were effective in ensuring a high quality student learning experience.

41 The University collects a range of feedback from its students, and employs this data to inform its approach to the management of the student learning experience. Results from questionnaires are considered through the annual monitoring and evaluation report at programme level, and through school reports. The Working Group on the Student Voice, (see paragraph 44), considers student feedback at university level, and reports to the Academic Quality and Enhancement Committee and Academic Board on any issues arising.

42 Students complete student feedback questionnaires, which are module feedback questionnaires, and the University of Hertfordshire student feedback questionnaire. These are completed by both undergraduates and taught postgraduates. Summaries of both University of Hertfordshire student feedback questionnaires and student module feedback questionnaires are placed on StudyNet. The content of the questionnaires and their administration are reviewed annually by the Working Group on the Student Voice. Results from the student module feedback questionnaires, in relation to individual modules, feed into the staff appraisal process and inform

the plans drawn up by Heads of School. Students receive feedback on these questionnaires that they complete as part of the annual review process.

43 The University makes extensive use of data derived from the National Student Survey as part of its approach to quality management. Results from the National Student Survey are considered at university level at the Employment Committee of the Board of Governors, the Academic Quality and Enhancement Committee and Academic Board. At school level, action plans in response to National Student Survey results are drawn up and comparisons are made with competitor and national benchmarks. Faculties have oversight of the responses made by schools to National Student Survey results and these are monitored through the annual reporting cycle.

44 The University's mission statement and values places 'students first'. The University has considered the effectiveness of student engagement at all levels through the establishment of the Working Group on Student Voice and a Student Voice strategy. In addition to module and programme feedback questionnaires, other surveys are directed at particular groups of students. Postgraduate research students participate in the National Postgraduate Research Experience Survey.

45 The University's students are represented on all Academic Board committees and the President of the Students' Union is a member of the Board of Governors. Students contribute to validation and periodic review processes through attendance at student meetings, which form part of each panel event. Student programme representatives are involved in the annual monitoring and evaluation report process through membership of programme committees. The Students' Union, with University support, coordinates the programme representative system and provides training for student representatives. Students are also represented on subcommittees, working groups and projects. The University also holds focus meetings with disabled students through the Disability Consultative Group.

46 Scholarly activities and learning opportunities are integrated in practice; the University provides an annual allowance for all academic staff to have self-managed time for scholarly activity. Individual development activities are monitored through the staff appraisal process. The University further supports the relationship between scholarly activity and learning opportunities through the Learning and Teaching Institute. The University also holds an annual learning and teaching conference, in addition to which, faculties organise workshops, seminars and annual learning and teaching conferences.

47 The University has a proactive approach to flexible and distance learning. Work-based learning ranges from two weeks to a full year and the University also incorporates evaluations of part-time employment within a number of programme modules. Distance-learning students are supported by online resources mainly through StudyNet (the University virtual learning environment and information site) and by online registration. The University's flexible and distance learning students are also fully engaged in student feedback and quality assurance mechanisms. The University has established a process whereby distance-learning programmes are subject to the same quality processes as on-campus taught awards.

48 Student satisfaction with the level of resources for learning, including the campus network, StudyNet, computing and library facilities is positive as reported in University surveys and the National Student survey. The StudyNet Development Group has overseen StudyNet enhancements and StudyNet, is available for use by all staff and students (home and overseas). All students are fully inducted into StudyNet with online self-help guides providing further support. The Assistant Disability Officer provides advice and help to students with using assistive technology, working with faculty disabled student co-coordinators to implement study-needs support agreements.

49 The University central services work in partnership with schools ensuring relevant resources, services and support for students and staff and their integration into learning and teaching processes. Named Learning and Information Services consultants work with each Faculty; attend Faculty and School meetings; contribute to programme development,



validations and periodic review; as well as undertaking extensive informal liaison with individual academic staff. Students and staff are consulted on learning resource developments through programme, school and faculty reporting and working groups.

50 In the case of the University's international students, there is a significant induction programme beginning from the point of recruitment. International student activities are monitored through an annual barometer event and Schools also have specific academic support for students. The University also provides specific pastoral support for international students through central services and the tutorial system in Schools. The audit team regarded the comprehensive support for international students prior to joining, during induction and while on their programmes as a feature of good practice.

51 The University's policies and operational data for the admission of students are set out in its University Policies and Regulations. The University uses statistical data to monitor its admissions procedures reported by the Student Programme Monitoring Group (see paragraph 63). Annual surveys of new entrants are conducted to obtain student feedback on the pre-entry service.

52 The University's accreditation of prior certificated learning and accreditation of prior experiential learning regulations are in place for both undergraduate and postgraduate level. The management of this accreditation entitlement is conducted by schools in line with the institutional framework and guidance. The audit team found that these regulations have a significant role (see paragraph 24) and that there is no limit on the amount of this accreditation that can be given. While in line with the University strategic objectives for greater levels of employer engagement, the team concluded that it would be desirable for the consequences of this accreditation process to be subject to further consideration by the University.

53 The University mission, policies and values underpin student support on-campus, at a distance and online for all students including full and part-time, those with a disability and international students. The audit team found that the University provides a range of services that are beyond the academic provision. These are managed through the Office of the Dean of Students. There is a toolkit for placements, which is annually updated by the Dean of Student's Office.

54 Personal development planning for students is at programme level. Since 2005-06, the University has provided an online facility known as MAPS, which includes an introduction to personal development planning and incorporates a process for students to audit, action plan and review their own personal development. The audit team found this approach to be effective.

55 The University Graduate Futures office provides students with careers and employment support. It is designed to make it easy for employers to find the right graduates to join their organisations and it gives students and alumni help, not only in finding jobs, but also in developing their careers. Graduate Futures also provides a range of services inside the University to students, alumni and staff and also outside to business. These include: career planning and development; advice on curricula vitae production and interview techniques; working with businesses to advise and promote the employment of graduates in their companies; and additionally reaching out to build partnerships between faculties and appropriate businesses (see also paragraph 60). The audit team agreed that Graduate Futures is an example of good practice.

56 The University's programme of staff development is coordinated by the People Development Unit. The University has a strategic objective for staff development, which is developed in consultation with deans, heads of strategic business units and other senior managers and is noted annually by Academic Board and by the Employment Committee of the Board of Governors. At institutional level, committees of Academic Board regularly review staff development needs.

57 Induction procedures are available online. All teaching staff participate in the peer review of teaching scheme. The Continuing Professional Academic Development Programme in learning and teaching in higher education has been developed and is aligned with the Professional Standards Framework and the University's strategic plan and is accredited by the Higher Education Academy and the Nursing and Midwifery Council. The University appraisals are conducted against the University's Strategic Plan as identified in People Development Unit staff development objectives. All appraisers receive initial training, and are provided with comprehensive guidance.

58 The overall conclusion reached by the audit team is that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

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

59 The University states that it is building on its sound quality procedures to create a forward looking enhancement culture, and the audit team would concur. It has put in place an academic quality assurance and enhancement strategy, where it defines quality enhancement as 'the process of taking continual and systematic steps at all levels, to improve the quality of learning opportunities for students and to respond to the changing needs and interests of stakeholders'.

60 In addition to the Academic Quality Assurance Enhancement Strategy, a range of other initiatives have been put in place to aid enhancement, including a student voice strategy and more recently Graduate Futures. The audit team were particularly impressed with the Graduate Futures initiative, which has been set up to provide bi-directional links between the University and business (see paragraph 55).

61 The University uses information from a number of its quality assurance processes to contribute to enhancement. Recommendations made by the external examiner must be considered by the programme team and feed into the action plan of their annual monitoring and evaluation report. Validation and periodic review of programmes promotes enhancement by requiring teams to critically review performance and effectiveness to date and develop actions planned to improve the quality of learning opportunities, which feeds into the annual monitoring and evaluation report process.

62 The Academic Quality Office provides guidance to schools, faculties and various committees on issues relating to QAA, the Higher Education Academy and the university sector. In reports available at the audit there was evidence of consideration of external reference points.

63 Two working groups of the Academic Quality Assurance Enhancement Committee are the Student Performance Monitoring Group and the Working Group on the Student Voice. Both consider University data, and identify issues that need to be addressed to improve the student learning experience. In particular, the Student Performance Monitoring Group considers student entry and performance data at university, faculty and programme level, including collaborative provision and any trends or areas of concern are reported to University committees or faculties for action. Comparisons are also made to national comparative data, including the Higher Education Statistics Agency and the National Student Survey.

64 Pedagogic research is supported by the Learning and Teaching Institute specifically by the funding of a number of learning and teaching enhancement projects. The outputs from these projects are disseminated at the University's annual learning and teaching conference.

65 The University defines good practice as enhancements that are proven to be effective in one context but which are identified as have transferable potential. The University annual learning and teaching conference is seen as a key tool for the dissemination of good practice as is the annual Blended Learning Unit conference, which has now grown to have an international flavour. The Learning and Teaching Institute takes a lead in the dissemination of good practice

with regard to learning, teaching and assessment. The audit team was able to confirm these as effective mechanisms for the dissemination of good practice.

66 The audit team found that the University has a range of activities in place and under development, which constitutes an effective institutional approach to quality enhancement.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

67 The University's quality assurance procedures for the approval and monitoring of Collaborative Partnerships are contained within the University Policies and Regulations and reflect the FHEQ and the *Code of practice*. Guidance on their implementation is given in the Collaborative Working Practices Handbook. Each partner programme shares the same annual review process within the University as home campus programmes.

68 All collaborative programmes have their own programme specifications and they, together with student handbooks are published on StudyNet, with hard copies distributed on request. The University has made it possible for its collaborating partners to engage with StudyNet and take advantage of its communication, support and information facilities.

69 The general University Policies and Regulations on assessment and award apply to all collaborative partner provision. However, the University allows programmes to be taught in a language other than English and the audit team was concerned to note that where the University's module risk assessment requires the student work in a module to be moderated by University staff, there was insufficient explanation as to how this would be done (see paragraphs 28, 29).

70 All collaborative partner external examiners have experience of teaching in a UK higher education environment. Collaborative partner boards of examiners are constituted in accordance with University Policies and Regulations. After having raised their concerns within their own institutions, students within a collaborating programme have the same rights of appeal to the Vice-Chancellor as University home students.

71 In addition to the observation of teaching carried out by University link tutors, partners are expected to engage in peer review of teaching. University staff provide staff development opportunities for partners.

72 The University expects students to be represented on collaborative programme committees and where this is not possible, alternative arrangements are made to enable students to express their views. Link tutors monitor the student experience through meeting students. Student feedback is routinely considered as part of the annual review process.

73 While partners are responsible for the day-to-day management of student records, Genesis, the University's student record system, holds complete student records for the majority of UK collaborations and comprehensive records for overseas collaborations. All final-award Pass lists and award certificates for all partners are produced at the University and recorded on Genesis. The Student Performance Monitoring Group currently monitors data to identify students who progress from partners operating articulation agreements, as well as students who progress to University programmes from HHEC Foundation Degrees, in order to track their performance.

74 The audit team was concerned to find that, during the audit, the University's Collaborative Provision Register was incomplete. Subsequently, this deficiency was corrected. However, the team would strongly urge the University to make certain that it has robust processes for ensuring the University's Collaborative Provision Register is comprehensive, and that there is current representation of all partnerships established by the University.

75 Overall, the audit team was satisfied that the University had procedures in place for its collaborative provision which would ensure that academic standards were secure and that the quality of the student learning opportunities was maintained.



## Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

76 All postgraduate research students are located in one of three research institutes: the Science and Technology Research Institute, which houses research from the Faculty for Engineering and Information Sciences; the Social Sciences Arts and Humanities Research Institute, which houses research from the Faculties of Business, Creative and Cultural Industries and Humanities, Law and Education; and the Health and Human Sciences Research Institute, which houses research from the Faculty of Health and Human Sciences. In a meeting between the audit team and a sample of research students, it was clear that where the Research Institute was physically located in one place, as is the case of the Science and Technology Research Institute, then the students felt a greater sense of being in a dedicated research environment. However, the Social Sciences Arts and Humanities Research Institute runs a number of initiatives to help integrate students, such as mini-conferences, to share research experience.

77 Research Institute activities are coordinated through a central University research office. The Academic Board delegates overall responsibility for research degree matters to the Research Degrees Board, chaired by the Director of Research Degrees, and each Research Institute has an Institute Research Degrees Board. These collectively deal with the process of registration, progression, annual monitoring, suspension, extension and withdrawal.

78 Information for research students is available from the Research Office page on StudyNet, which the audit team considered to be extremely well laid out, with access to a rich set of information. This includes two Codes of Good Practice, one for Research Students and a Code of Good Practice for the Supervision of Research Students, along with a comprehensive generic training programme (see paragraph 83). All of these facilities were spoken about positively during the team's meetings with research students.

79 QAA's Review of research degree programmes 2005-06 identified three areas for further consideration: using external performance indicators in collecting and considering research degree programme data; whether the institutional arrangements for monitoring and reviewing progress might be enhanced by further developments in record-keeping; the introduction of personal development planning for research students. It was clear to the audit team that all of these areas had been addressed, including the introduction of a clear process of record keeping of student/supervisor formal meetings.

80 The University has a clear and well-documented policy on the admission of research students, the operation of which is reported annually at the Research Degrees Board. All students attend inductions, which are provided both locally and centrally by the Research Office in the form of a generic induction programme. A research degrees handbook is available to both students and supervisors, and the audit team considered this to be clear and comprehensive.

81 Each student is assigned a supervisory team, which is approved by the Research Degrees Board. All inexperienced supervisors must undergo supervisor training, and a series of update workshops are offered through the year for all supervisors. The number of students supervised by individual supervisors is monitored by the Institute Research Degrees Boards and guidance is offered to heads of school on balancing workload and student registrations.

82 The University operates two separate, but connected, review processes: annual monitoring; and progression assessment. All research students are monitored annually and all students are subject to progression assessment at some point, depending upon the schedule of their research degree programme.

83 The Research Office provides a comprehensive generic training programme, which it updates annually and, in addition, offers this as a summer school for part-time students. This programme is clearly and comprehensively detailed on StudyNet, along with the facility for online booking of places on the programme, and some other well-organised supplementary information on training and development. The audit team considered this a feature of good practice.

84 In addition to the Generic Training programme, a mechanism has been introduced for evaluating individual student needs. At the audit team's meeting with research students they spoke positively about this, and how their Research Institute will often run special courses on specific areas of topical interest, such as specialist software.

85 Opportunities exist for research students to get involved in teaching and supporting undergraduates, and research students may also attend the Continuing Professional Academic Development in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education programme.

86 Feedback on academic progress is through a reporting mechanism for formal supervision meetings. Research degree students are included in the university-wide student feedback questionnaire and the Research Degrees Board evaluates the feedback from this process. The Director of Research Degrees has set up a forum for recording meetings with research students since 2005, outcomes from these meetings are fed directly to the Research Degrees Board or University Research Committee. Research students are represented on Academic Board and on the University Research Committee but not the Research Degrees Board. Additionally students may make representation via the research student forum chaired by the Director of Research Degrees.

87 The University has clear criteria for the assessment of each of its research degrees, following a review of its research degree regulations in 2004. Clear guidelines on the assessment procedures are provided in the Research Degrees Handbook, and the Generic Training Programme also includes a session on examination procedures. Research degree examinations are administered by the Research Office, with a designated examinations officer to ensure consistency of process. Examination arrangements are proposed by the relevant Institute Research Degrees Board to the Research Degrees Board.

88 Research students are explicitly included in the University Complaints Procedure, although students are encouraged to take up an issue initially on an informal basis if appropriate, firstly with their supervisor and then with their Research Institute's Research Tutor. Additionally, the University has a procedure for the review of examinations decisions for research degrees, which clearly outlines the grounds and process by which students may appeal against the decisions made by the Research Degrees Board on the recommendations of the examiners.

89 The audit found the University's arrangements for postgraduate research students met the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, and are effective in securing academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities.

## **Section 7: Published information**

90 The University's Information Management Policy sets out the principles of managing information within the institution. The regulations, roles and responsibilities for information published within the university's intranet and internet systems, are defined within a University Policy and Regulation for Internet/Intranet Systems.

91 The University website provides applicant students with comprehensive current information on fees, bursaries, scholarships, accommodation and joining instructions. StudyNet is the University's electronic managed learning environment and a source of essential information communication and support for staff and students. undergraduate and taught postgraduate prospectuses are available in hard copy on request via the website, or from the Student Centre. Prospectus information is also available on the course pages of the website.

92 StudyNet hosts a great deal of essential and highly valued information for students. The audit team found that StudyNet has now become so important to students that they feel it underpins the culture of their learning experience at the University. While enthusiastic about StudyNet as a resource, students were critical when study information was not appropriately current to their learning requirements.

93 Programme specifications are published on the University website. Definitive module descriptors document module details. Data from the Definitive Module Descriptor is used for class lists, transcripts, examination timetabling, assessment, award classification, Strategic Business Unit resource allocation and statutory returns. These descriptors are available to students on StudyNet.

94 The University requires collaborating partners to have all materials using the institution's name and logo approved by the University prior to use.

95 Statistical information on Unistats derives from the Higher Education Statistics Agency student return and the National Student Survey. Information for the University's subject entry profiles on UCAS is sourced from programme leaders and uploaded by marketing executives or marketing officers.

96 Students' experience of published information is captured wherever possible during discrete audits, surveys and fora. The audit team found that the student experience of the University's published information was one of overall satisfaction.

97 The audit team concluded that 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**

### **Features of good practice**

98 The instances of good practice that the audit team considers to make a contribution to the management of academic standards and/or of the quality of learning opportunities are as follows:

- the Student Performance Monitoring Group, which analyses the information provided to better inform the processes for monitoring retention and achievement (paragraphs 31, 63)
- the comprehensive support for international students prior to joining, during induction and while on their programmes (paragraph 50)
- the engagement of the Graduate Futures office, both inside the University and with external stakeholders, to further the University's business-facing mission (paragraph 55)
- the support for research students, including the generic training programme and the comprehensive information available via StudyNet (paragraphs 78, 83).

### **Recommendations for action**

99 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- to revise the process by which short courses that contribute to University awards are developed and approved to include input external to the University, in order to ensure the appropriateness of level, content, learning outcomes and assessment (paragraph 14)
- To revise the generic grading criteria so that the grades align with those in the University's grading and marking scale, to further develop these grading criteria to differentiate between all levels and to ensure their consistent use and communication to students (paragraph 27)
- to develop further, implement and publish protocols for ensuring that the academic standards of programmes delivered and assessed in languages other than English are equivalent to those delivered and assessed in English; in particular, and in the light of its risk-based approach to the oversight of modules delivered by partner institutions, to introduce and publish protocols for the moderation by University staff of modules judged to be of medium or high-risk (paragraph 29).

100 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- to revise its plans for making awards based on credit-bearing short courses and/or accreditation of prior experiential learning so that appropriate attention is paid to external reference points, including subject benchmark statements, in determining the name of such awards and, in doing so, to review these accreditation protocols in support of the process (paragraphs 25, 52).

## Appendix

### The University of Hertfordshire's response to the Institutional audit report

The University of Hertfordshire welcomes the audit team's judgements of confidence in its management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities available to students. We also take assurance from the finding that reliance may be placed on the accuracy of the information we publish about the quality of our programmes of study and the standards of our academic awards.

The University is pleased to note the many positive features included in the audit report, as well as those specifically identified as features of good practice:

- the recognition of the comprehensive support for international students prior to joining, during induction and whilst on their programmes reflects the University's continued commitment to enhance the support provided to all of its students
- the acknowledgement of the support available to research students, when considered alongside the University's excellent performance in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, confirms that its research is of the highest quality and carried out in a high quality research environment
- the recognition of the Graduate Futures office in furthering the University's business-facing mission reinforces its position as being at the forefront in providing education focused towards the future needs of its graduates
- the identification of the Student Performance Monitoring Group as a feature of good practice confirms the University's commitment to the effective and systematic use of management information in managing both standards and quality.

We will continue to build on these features of good practice.

The University will consider the recommendations made by the audit team and will address them through an overarching action plan, the implementation of which will be monitored by the Academic Quality Enhancement Committee. The University's response to two recommendations that refer to its employer-responsive provision will be considered following the publication of QAA guidance on the quality assurance of this area of activity.

The University wishes to thank the audit team and the Assistant Director for the constructive yet searching manner in which they undertook the audit and for the open manner in which they engaged with the staff and students they met.

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