

**University of Leeds**

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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 (UK) 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 Leeds from 10 to 14 March 2008 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards of the University.

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. 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 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 team found that the University takes deliberate actions at institutional level to improve the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. The team formed the view that the development, consistent use and presentation of the Strategy Map as a tool for enhancement were features of good practice. The team also identified the desirability of the University considering improving its ability to use key themes extracted from reviews and reports and use them to enhance practice across the institution.

### Postgraduate research students

Research degree programmes, and the students registered on them, play a major part in the new vision and strategy for the University to secure a place in the top 50 universities worldwide. The audit team concluded that the University's procedures for the support, assessment and supervision of research degrees align with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA.

### Published information

The audit team established that the University provides an extensive and accessible range of published information for prospective and current students, both electronically and in hard copy. The team concluded that reliance can reasonably be placed in the integrity and reliability of the information that the University publishes about its educational provision.

### Features of good practice

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

- the development, consistent use and presentation of the Strategy Map as a tool for enhancement

- the development of mechanisms across the University for the consideration and publicising of responses to National Student Survey results
- the varied mechanisms for making research-led teaching increasingly a distinctive feature of the University
- the importance given to teaching as well as to research in the University's appointment and support of academic staff.

### **Recommendations for action**

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

The team advises the University to:

- ensure that learning outcomes contained in programme specifications are, as the University expects, specific to each programme
- check codes in order to ensure compliance with its expectations, where, through School codes of practice and in order to reflect disciplinary differences, it permits variation in practice in assessment.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- improve its ability to use key themes extracted from reports and reviews, and use them in order to enhance practice across the institution
- consider its methods for ensuring that it has a clear, comprehensive overview of the current status of practice with regard to changes in the Academic Infrastructure
- where, to reflect disciplinary differences, it permits variation in practice in personal supervision, check that variation in order to ensure that it is still within the University's expectations, and in order to facilitate the spread of good practice
- enhance, through greater provision of study space and facilitation of shared training across faculties, opportunities for research students to meet other postgraduate research students in their own and other disciplines.

### **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, generally, 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. However, the audit team also made recommendations to the University concerning the expression of learning outcomes, and the desirability of using the most recent versions of guidance given in the Academic Infrastructure.

## Report

### Preface

1 An institutional audit of the University of Leeds (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 10 March 2008. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of its awards and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team comprised Ms Susan Blake, Professor Paul Luker, Professor Robert Munn, Dr Paul Ryall, and Ms Alison Blackburn, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mr Alan Bradshaw, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

### Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The University received its Charter as an independent University in 1904, and it is now one of the largest British universities with over 26,000 full-time and 4,100 part-time students studying on 550 undergraduate and 320 postgraduate award-bearing programmes in the academic year 2007-08. The University is a major research institution with over 1,800 postgraduate research students.

4 The University has renewed its strategic direction with a Strategic Plan and a 'Strategy Map' that underpin decision-making. A key objective is that by 2015 the University will use its distinctive ability to integrate world-class research, scholarship and education in order to secure a place among the top 50 universities in the world.

5 A key aim in the strategy is that learning and teaching should take place in a research intensive environment in which programmes are constantly refreshed by new research findings and students learn about the research process. The University also seeks to provide excellent and inspirational learning and teaching, and an exceptional student experience.

6 The University has a long history of regional collaborative arrangements with a small number of higher and further education colleges, and engages in a few collaborations to enhance its portfolio of provision in disciplines that complement existing programmes. The University has reviewed its strategy for collaboration in the light of its Strategic Plan. By agreement with collaborating institutions, it is withdrawing from its validation arrangements as key partners gain their own degree awarding powers, and it is now focusing on faculty-based collaborations that make use of, or complement, existing expertise. The University will also seek more international collaborations.

7 The information available to the audit team included the following QAA documents:

- Institutional audit report, published March 2004
- Collaborative audit report, published March 2006
- Review of postgraduate research degree programmes, published July 2006
- Overseas Quality Audit Report on higher education provision in Oman, published 2005
- Foundation Degree review of York and St John College, published 2005.

8 The University provided the audit team with documents and information including a helpful and informative Briefing Paper with hyperlinks to supporting material, and intranet access to a wide range of internal and published documents.

9 The audit team was grateful to representatives of the Leeds University Students' Union who produced a student written submission that included detailed analysis of data on student opinions.

10 Since the last institutional audit in 2004, the University has taken action on the recommendations made. It has revised its consultation and periodic review processes, and these are functioning effectively. Information for students has been facilitated through the Student Portal, and the University continues to work with Leeds University Students' Union in developing this. The University has restructured support for learning and teaching, and believes that further development would be beneficial here and with regard to variations in practice.

11 In its Briefing Document, the University drew attention to several other recent developments. It views the new Strategic Plan and supporting Strategy Map as particularly important developments that underpin key decision-making and provide a tool for enhancement. The Learning and Teaching Strategy has been revised in the light of the Strategy Map, and a Learning and Teaching Partnership Agreement has been drawn up, setting out agreed mutual responsibilities of the central university administration, the schools of study, and the students. At institutional level, a new strategic initiative, 'Leeds for Life', is being developed to increase student awareness of skills, and to develop support for their studies. A new building, due to open in 2008, will bring together student administration and support facilities in a purpose-built centre. The audit team formed the view that the development, consistent use and presentation of the Strategy Map as a tool for enhancement were examples of good practice.

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

12 The University manages the standards of its academic provision through policies and procedures typically defined at university level, while responsibility for applying them is devolved to school, or sometimes, faculty level. Local interpretation and adaptation by schools is allowed, provided that overall University policy is not contravened.

13 The standards of the University's taught awards are set at approval and are primarily monitored through annual health checks, programme reviews and periodic reviews known as Student Academic Experience Reviews.

14 With respect to the management of academic standards, the University's collaborative provision is subject to the same procedures and processes as those described here for the home campus.

15 All aspects of the University's management of research degree programmes are covered in Section 6 of this report.

16 The University regards external examiners as an essential part of its quality assurance mechanisms. At least one external examiner is appointed to each of the University's undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes. External examiners are responsible to Senate through the Learning and Teaching Board and the corresponding faculty committee. The University's external examiners are usually senior academics from other institutions, some of them from overseas, but for good reason may occasionally be less senior academics or suitably qualified individuals in professional practice. Where a nominated external examiner has no previous experience of external examining, the University appoints a serving external examiner as a mentor to the new examiner on appointment.

17 The audit team found that the University makes the role of external examiners, and those with whom they interact, very clear through its publications. The procedures for the external examination of taught programmes are compatible with the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*. The procedures for external examiners of taught programmes are easily accessible to staff, and they are sent annually to external examiners. A dedicated website is also provided for external examiners. External examiners are encouraged to write their reports on a standard form available on the website. Completed forms are sent to the Academic Quality and Standards Team which maintains oversight of external examining of all taught programmes.



18 External examiners' reports are sent to the school or department for consideration, and for a response to be made to the external examiner. The annual health check for each school considers all external examiners' reports and the responses made to them. The appropriate faculty's Learning and Teaching Committee, which has two student representatives, monitors that issues raised by external examiners have been dealt with.

19 Summary reports of issues for the faculty are prepared by the Pro-Dean and the Academic Quality and Standards Team for consideration by the faculty's Learning and Teaching Committee. The Academic Quality and Standards Team produces an annual overview of undergraduate external examiners' reports which is presented to the University's Learning and Teaching Board.

20 The external examiners' reports seen by the audit team were overwhelmingly positive. Issues raised by external examiners were adopted as items for action by schools. Written responses to external examiners engaged with all aspects of their reports, whether positive or negative.

21 While there is clear evidence that faculty learning and teaching committees have oversight of responses to external examiners' reports, and receive the summary reports noted above, minutes of meetings evince no discussion of any common themes arising from the reports. Similarly, the minutes of the Learning and Teaching Board that relate to a discussion of the overview report mentioned above, do not record the identification of specific good practice to disseminate.

22 The audit team concluded that the University's approach to external examining was making a significant contribution to the security of the academic standards of its awards. However, the team also concluded that it would be desirable for the University to improve its ability to use key themes extracted from reports and reviews in order to enhance practice across the institution.

23 The University publishes a composite listing of learning outcomes and level descriptors for taught programmes. These descriptors are based upon *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*. The audit team found that subject benchmark statements are used effectively in programme design, approval and periodic review.

24 Professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements are taken into account during programme design and review. The audit found that the University engages effectively with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies in meeting their requirements. External examiners are asked to comment on the appropriateness of provision in the light of professional and disciplinary requirements.

25 Forms are used for the proposal of new taught programmes. Each form embodies the University's level descriptors. The approval process culminates in the production of a signed copy of the programme specification.

26 The audit team found that many undergraduate and postgraduate programme specifications have generic learning outcomes which have not been tailored to be subject-specific as the University requires. Consequently, quite dissimilar programmes have, according to their programme specifications, identical learning outcomes. Where this is the case for learning outcomes in the programme specification, it also tends to apply to assessment, such that it is frequently not possible to determine from the programme specification any subject-specific assessment strategy. Online module specifications are specific with respect to subject matter and assessment plans. The University was one of the first in the UK to issue a European diploma supplement and transcript for all its graduates.

27 Overall, the audit found that the University makes effective use of external reference points in its management of standards. However, the audit team advises the University to ensure that learning outcomes contained in programme specifications are, as the University expects, specific to each programme.

28 The University regards assessment as an integrated and beneficial part of student learning, and requires that assessment methods and processes be valid, transparent, and have integrity. The University publishes a Learning and Teaching Partnership Agreement with its taught programme students. Appended to this agreement is a Code of Practice, which states that schools must have their own Code of Practice on assessment, and provides clear information for students and staff on all school assessment policies and practices. The University also publishes a minimum requirement template for Codes of Practice on assessment.

29 The audit team saw an example Code of Practice from one school in each of the nine faculties. While some of these documents were similarly structured and followed the template closely, others were less obviously aligned. Mandatory areas were largely, but not always, covered in varying degrees of detail. The team found little explicit evidence to confirm that Codes of Practice are formally revised and checked as required against the University's template.

30 Assessment policy and practice is most accessible to students through their handbooks. Although the format of these handbooks varies considerably, examples seen by the audit team covered assessment policy and practice well. Students met during the course of the audit confirmed that, when assignments were set, they knew what was expected of them through their course handbooks, and through explanations from their tutors. The conduct of assessment is covered well in handbooks.

31 The partnership agreement states that schools will provide systematic and timely feedback on students' work. Codes of Practice and handbooks refer to specific practice at the discipline level. The University has focused on improving feedback given to students as part of its response to the results of the National Student Survey. Students on taught programmes confirmed to the team that they were largely satisfied with the quality and timeliness of feedback.

32 The University defines the terms of reference and responsibilities for school boards of examiners. The minutes of all examination boards are sent to the Academic Quality and Standards Team, and are provided for scrutiny in programme review and also form part of the evidence for periodic review. The Student Performance Analysis Reporting and Classification System is able to highlight anomalies to boards and faculties. The profile of awards across all undergraduate programmes is considered annually by the Learning and Teaching Board.

33 The audit team found that the University's assessment policies and regulations make an effective contribution to its management of standards, and that they are consistent with the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining; Section 5: Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters; and Section 6: Assessment of students*. However, the team advises the University to check its Codes in order to ensure a match with its expectations, where, through School Codes of Practice and in order to reflect disciplinary differences, the University permits variation in practice in assessment.

34 Student statistics are used in a variety of ways and at various levels. Summaries of such measures as student numbers, student achievement, student progression and retention are routinely prepared at levels appropriate to school, faculty and university-level committees. Each of the University's review processes uses supporting data on student progression and achievement. In April 2007, the University instigated a project designed to improve the retention of undergraduate students. The project is informed by a breakdown of retention by school, together with a comparison with competitor norms. It was clear to the audit team that the University makes effective use of management information in its management of the academic standards of its awards.

35 The audit found that the University's systems for the management of academic standards were robust, and operating as intended. In particular, there is strong and scrupulous use of external examiners in summative assessment of provision and those examiners are well supported. The University makes effective use of external input in approval and review processes in the establishment and maintenance of the academic standards of awards. Management information is used routinely in the management of standards. All of these features support a

judgement of confidence in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

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

36 University policies and procedures evolve in response to perceived needs, and take account of external reference points, leaving schools to concentrate on meeting disciplinary requirements. The audit team established that revisions to sections of the *Code of practice* had led to modified policies and procedures. However, there have been some recent delays in consideration of revised sections of the *Code*. The University's current guidance on e-learning has not been updated in the light of the revised *Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*. The University's Undergraduate Admissions Policy makes no reference to the revised *Section 10: Admissions to higher education*. Information on the *Code of practice* on the University intranet refers only to the original sections, except for the revised *Section 4: External examining*. This entails the risk that staff may rely on outdated documents as authoritative.

37 The audit team also found no explicit reference to the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* in the University's procedures, and staff seemed unaware of it, even though the University does offer Foundation Degrees.

38 The audit team considers it desirable that the University should develop methods to ensure that it has a clear and comprehensive overview of its current practice with regard to each aspect of the changing Academic Infrastructure.

39 Detailed procedures for programme and module approval, revision and review are clearly documented. The Learning and Teaching Board approves the teaching portfolio, with Graduate Board responsible for research degree programmes. External review forms an integral part of consideration for the approval of new programmes. The University handles the withdrawal of programmes carefully, giving proper regard to the interests of enrolled students.

40 The overall profile of awards is considered annually by the University, and individual programmes are subject to an annual health check. Programmes must be reviewed more extensively at least once every two years. External examiners are asked to comment on the provision in their disciplines. The University thereby ensures that the curriculum and learning opportunities continue to be suitable. The periodic Student Academic Experience Review combines reviews of learning and teaching and of research degree support and supervision. It reconsiders formally all existing programmes, with advice from an external member. The Learning and Teaching Support Unit monitors the University's processes and their implementation. The reviews also monitor local practices within the University's framework. The University does not claim to have the right balance between flexibility and central oversight in all cases.

41 Reports of the various review processes pass up through the committee system, although the University does not always obtain maximum benefit from the review reports. Overall, the University has a comprehensive set of policies and procedures for programme and module approval, revision and review that operate effectively. They serve to ensure the continuing provision of programmes of study that help students to achieve the intended learning outcomes of their programmes and attain their awards.

42 Feedback from students is an element in the University's Strategy Map. Students confirmed that consultation and student representation are taken seriously by the University. The University also pays good attention to the student views as expressed through the National Student Survey. Procedures exist to discuss with students the issues raised by the results. The University requires schools to develop and publish an annual action plan in response to the National Student Survey results and other feedback. The University obtains feedback from research students through questionnaires and focus groups.

43 There is widespread systematic collection and discussion of feedback, particularly through a dedicated website where schools report on their responses. Students appreciate the website as a sign that their concerns are taken seriously, and staff appreciate it as a source of ideas for enhancement. The audit team considered that the development of mechanisms across the University for considering and publicising responses to National Student Survey results is a feature of good practice.

44 Students are represented on all learning and teaching committees that decide policy and procedures. Schools are required to have a student-staff consultative body. Leeds University Union sabbatical officers attend learning and teaching committees at university level, and other students act as representatives at programme level. In each faculty, three elected Students' Union Academic Representatives attend relevant committees. Leeds University Union provides training for student representatives and individuals, supported by a joint Union and University handbook.

45 Students understand and are generally content with student participation. The audit team concluded that the University's mechanisms for engaging students in quality assurance make a significant contribution to the quality of the learning opportunities provided.

46 The University regards as an essential strategic aim the effective integration of learning and teaching with research of international quality. The University expects learning and teaching to involve teaching staff who are engaged in world-class research and innovative professional practice, curricula that reflect recent developments, and a culture of enquiry and challenge that encourages research skills. Major developments in faculties have resulted from this expectation, all serving to enhance students' learning opportunities.

47 A concern to integrate research and teaching pervades the University, and the enthusiasm of individual staff and students was evident to the audit team. This integration, a key feature of the Strategy Map, is implemented effectively through means that include financial incentives and programme approval and review. The team concluded that the varied mechanisms for making research-led teaching increasingly a distinctive feature of the University are a feature of good practice.

48 Few students are engaged formally in distance learning or study away from the University campus. Most of these are taught off-campus by University staff. The University has few programmes provided purely by e-learning.

49 For all the student body, however, the use of technology to enhance teaching and learning is a priority in the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy. The University has invested in a new virtual learning environment to support students through blended learning.

50 The Lifelong Learning Centre provides tailored support for the University's few part-time undergraduate students. Students spoke appreciatively of the support that they receive. The University is aware that the needs of full-time mature undergraduates and part-time postgraduates are not fully recognised, and continues to keep them under review.

51 The University's international exchange programme involves 12 per cent of students at some time during their degree programme. They are supported by the Study Abroad Office. The audit team heard evidence that the University responds quickly and energetically to problems experienced by students abroad.

52 The University offers doctoral programmes in which students based at overseas universities spend periods of time in Leeds. One such student spoke positively about the experience, except for difficulties in finding suitable short-term accommodation in Leeds, a problem that the University is addressing.

53 The University has a wide range of arrangements and support tailored for specific groups of students in addition to those for 'standard' full-time home students on-campus in Leeds. The

audit team concluded that these arrangements work well, to the overall benefit of learning opportunities.

54 Overall responsibility for ensuring that learning resources meet the needs of students lies with the Learning and Teaching Board, and faculty learning and teaching committees working with the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group and the Faculty Management Group. Planning integration is assisted by staff responsible for resources sitting on, or attending, key committees. Resources are also considered as part of periodic review.

55 Student views on resources for learning are provided through student experience and programme experience surveys which provide feedback on resources and services. Feedback from the National Student Survey is also used to inform planning for resources. The provision of resources is a specific point in the Partnership Agreement. Students who met the audit team were appreciative of the resources available to them.

56 The library provides a range of services, and the students who met the audit team considered these resources and the service provided by the library to be very good.

57 Information Systems Services is the central information technology (IT) and information services provider for the University, on and off-campus. Students expressed satisfaction with the information technology facilities available. A new virtual learning environment has been purchased by the University, to be used across the full range of programmes, with blended learning as standard by 2012. This is part of a range of technologies being used by staff to support learning.

58 In its briefing document, the University stated that it operates a programme of teaching space refurbishment, with computer clusters and teaching rooms being fitted with the latest teaching tools. Students expressed to the audit team satisfaction with the space available to them, save that some postgraduate research students felt that providing desks and some common areas for them would better foster the feeling of being part of an academic community.

59 The audit team was told that students in collaborative provision arrangements had the same access to the library and to IT facilities as students on campus. The University requires that learning resources are reviewed as part of the approval of a collaborative arrangement, and the team was told that they were reviewed as part of the five-year review programme, although any significant problem should be identified earlier by an annual health check.

60 Overall, the audit team found that the institution's arrangements for the provision, allocation and management of learning resources were effective in maintaining the quality of the student learning opportunities.

61 The University has a central Admissions Policy for undergraduate students. A University Admissions Committee reporting to the Learning and Teaching Board considers policy and maintains oversight. Statistics on admissions are monitored by the Faculty Management Group. Faculties and schools take local responsibility for admissions, and a central Student Recruitment Team provides support, including training for admissions tutors. Applications for research degrees are monitored by the Research Degrees and Scholarships Office. Clear information on admission requirements for each programme is available to students on the website.

62 It is part of the University's strategy to widen participation, encouraging applications from under-represented groups. A Standing Group on Widening Participation reports directly to the Learning and Teaching Board. In 2005, the University established its Lifelong Learning Centre, which works with the Access and Community Engagement Team, to offer outreach activities in the community. The University has schemes to encourage applications from international students, including articulation arrangements with foreign universities, and an International Foundation Year. International students are supported by pre-sessional and in-session language courses.

63 The student written submission and students who met the audit team were generally happy with admission information and procedures. The team formed the view that the University has a clear admissions policy that is effectively and consistently implemented, and that it has a vigorous commitment to widening participation.

64 The University believes that its students should have easy access to high quality support, and it has policies for academic guidance, for example in personal tuition and on the use of personal development plans. General oversight is the responsibility of the Learning and Teaching Board, but implementation is generally carried out in faculties and schools. The audit team was told that oversight of local implementation normally occurs through periodic review. However, examples of review seen by the team tended to address any difficulties that had arisen rather than review practice more widely.

65 Some schools have their own student support offices, but all are part of the Student Support Network that includes academic and administrative staff responsible for supporting students. The University Learning and Teaching Support Network provides a forum to share good practice. A new building to bring together most student services will open in 2008.

66 Provision of personal tutoring is part of the Partnership Agreement. Policy is outlined in a Code of Practice on Personal Tutoring, but responsibility lies with schools. Examples of local policies seen by the audit team complied with University policy, and included examples of good practice, but there were many variations in the information given, often without any clear justification. The student written submission and students who met the team raised some concerns about variations in practice in personal tutoring. Overall, the team formed the view that while personal tutoring was generally adequate and, in some cases good, the current degree of variation was confusing to students, was not always clearly justifiable, and failed to identify and spread good practice as effectively as it might. The Leeds for Life project is considering the possibilities for greater consistency in personal tutoring, and a common timetable. The team concluded that it is desirable where, to reflect discipline differences, the University permits variation in practice in personal tutoring, it should check the variation in order to ensure that it is still within the University's expectations, and in order to facilitate the spread of good practice.

67 A central policy on the use of personal development plans is implemented locally, and the use of the plans is incorporated into the Partnership Agreement. The audit team was told that the use of personal development plans is considered as part of periodic review. The team saw a variety of approaches in personal development plans, from integration into modules to simply making them available. Some students who met the team had used personal development plans, but others had not. The use of the plans is being reviewed as part of the Leeds for Life project.

68 There is no detailed University policy on feedback to students about assessed work, although the provision of systematic and timely feedback is a general requirement of the Partnership Agreement, and the Staff and Departmental Development Unit provides examples of good practice. Students who met the audit team generally appreciated the support they received from staff, but were also aware of significant variations in the amount of feedback given. Some students reported that it was not always clear how to earn a good mark, or how to make work better, and that much depended on the individual tutor. Postgraduate research students generally commended the support and supervision received, but also commented on differences in the availability of training. They said that they would welcome more opportunities to forge interdisciplinary links. Staff told the team of plans to develop interdisciplinary 'master classes'. The team concluded that it was desirable that the University enhance the opportunities for research students to meet other postgraduate research students in their own and other disciplines through the provision of more space, such as more research student desk areas, and by facilitating more shared postgraduate training across faculties.

69 The Careers Centre offers many services to all students and schools of the university, including general and bespoke career modules, workshops, and individual advice. Professional careers consultants are linked to each faculty, and provide activities at faculty, school and

programme level. The Centre provides the focus for institutional employer engagement, and provides support for work placements.

70 The University offers many options for students to work or study abroad in connection with their programmes of study; these are overseen by the Standing Group on Study Abroad which reports directly to the Learning and Teaching Board. The Study Abroad Office manages undergraduate student exchanges and provides support for students. Students studying abroad have a personal tutor or study abroad tutor, and a local contact, with phone or email support as required. The audit team was given examples of how the University had acted quickly and effectively to address problems in study abroad. Students reported to the team satisfaction with their experience on study abroad and felt that help was available as required.

71 The University provides many joint honours programmes. Students on an interdisciplinary programme are based in the parent teaching school which takes overall responsibility for the programme. Students on cross-disciplinary programmes where no single school takes responsibility for the programme receive support from the Centre for Joint Honours. The audit team was told that the Centre works closely with the schools concerned to ensure the best experience for the students. Some students commented to the team that they were glad to have been able to take a joint honours degree. However, other students and some staff reported difficulties with support for cross-disciplinary programmes; students sometimes considered that they received less coherent support than on single honours programmes.

72 Support for part-time undergraduate students and mature students is offered by the Centre for Lifelong Learning, which provides programmes and services from pre-entry through to graduation. Each student is allocated a personal adviser to supplement faculty-based arrangements. The audit team heard from part-time and mature students who were appreciative of the services offered by the Centre.

73 The International Student Office has specialised advice and guidance for international students, including a welcome service, and support for international students' families. Language classes are provided for students needing assistance with English. The audit team met international students who were very happy with their experience at the University, although there could still be problems in adjusting to cultural differences and in finding accommodation.

74 The audit team was told that arrangements for the support of students studying within collaborative provision were essentially the same as those for other students. The team saw documents confirming that support arrangements were considered as part of approving a new collaborative arrangement, and heard that provision was reviewed as part of periodic review.

75 On the basis of the information available to it, and evidence gained from meetings with staff and students, the audit team was satisfied with the overall effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for student support in maintaining the quality of students' learning opportunities.

76 The University recognises the strategic importance of staff support and development in assuring the quality of learning opportunities provided to students. It describes them as among the main enablers identified in the Strategy Map. The audit team established that the University ensures that human resources procedures and the Staff Review and Development Scheme are applicable to all employees regardless of their employment contract. Staff believe that the scheme is effective in supporting them in their roles, and in enhancing academic provision.

77 Information on the University's induction and probation procedures is made available to staff. The University provides an extensive programme of staff development facilitated by the Staff and Departmental Development Unit. Staff can also access continuing professional development opportunities in learning and teaching, and in academic practice, which are credit bearing and can lead to master's level qualifications. The University of Leeds Teaching Award, accredited by the Higher Education Academy, is compulsory for staff deemed new to teaching, and requirements for attendance on the course are agreed during appointment interviews.

78 The audit team established that the University provides a wide range of opportunities to support staff in the development of learning and teaching, and in the supervision of postgraduate research students. The team concluded that the University's approach to staff support and development is effectively delivered, and contributes to the management of the quality of learning opportunities for students.

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

79 The audit team found ample evidence of deliberate actions taken at the institutional level to improve the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. Two examples of these are the purchase and the planned implementation of the new virtual learning environment and the creation of the Learning and Teaching Support Unit to provide central support services for learning and teaching. The University provided other examples in its Briefing Paper.

80 The initial enhancement priorities that the University identified in its Learning and Teaching Strategy were integrating research with learning and teaching; refining assessment practice and improving academic feedback; and use of technology to enhance learning and teaching.

81 The audit team noted the development and consistent use made by the University of its Strategy Map in the management of change. In several meetings with staff, the key position of the Strategy Map in enhancement was emphasised to the team. The team formed the view that the development, consistent use and presentation of the Strategy Map as a tool for enhancement were a feature of good practice.

82 The Learning and Teaching Support Unit has the remit to coordinate all central learning and teaching support including quality assurance and enhancement; staff and student development for learning and teaching; and e-learning and online resource support and development. It consists of four teams: Academic Quality and Standards Team; Learning and Teaching Support Office; Staff and Departmental Development Unit Learning and Teaching Team; and the Library Academic Skills Group.

83 The audit team noted the roles that the Learning and Teaching Support Office plays in the identification of good and weak practices from the review processes of the University, and in the subsequent facilitation of staff development and enhancement. The team identified the desirability that the University consider improving its systematic ability to use key themes extracted from review reports and to spread them to enhance practice across the institution.

84 The University affirmed that students play a key role in assisting in the identification of areas for development as well as the identification of good practice. This is achieved by student representation on the University's committees at all levels, providing feedback and involvement in the monitoring activities of the quality assurance framework. Student representation was confirmed by the audit team in meetings with students who were appreciative of the University's efforts in addressing their feedback in the school action plans.

85 The University differentiates between the deliberate, systematic enhancement actions that it takes and mechanisms for dissemination of good practice. The audit team found numerous examples of the latter which confirmed the assertions in the University's Briefing Paper.

86 Good practice is shared through the committee structure and other means such as the Annual Learning and Teaching Conference, informal networks, topical events, newsletters and Higher Education Academy Subject Centres and Higher Education Funding Council for England Centres for Excellence in Learning and Teaching. In discussions with staff it became apparent to the audit team that informal networks are important for dissemination of good practice, involving National Teaching Fellows, Pro-Deans and other staff.

87 The University is developing new promotion procedures that will recognise excellence in teaching and learning, and in scholarship. The proposed procedures illustrate the different



combinations of activities required for promotion, and the audit team saw evidence that teaching-related criteria were as prominent as research-related criteria for academic roles.

88 The Vice-Chancellor, senior staff and student representatives told the audit team that the University held teaching and research in comparable esteem. The team observed that this parity of esteem is evident in the importance attached to teaching, as well as to research in the University's appointment, promotion and support of academic staff, and concluded that it was a feature of good practice.

89 The audit team found evidence of institutional consideration of, and decision-making on, enhancement. The Strategy Map provides evidence of consideration by the most senior management who define enhancement themes for the University and review them periodically. The team found evidence of the University taking deliberate steps to improve the quality of learning opportunities. The team found, however, that enhancement received less support because of the tendency for only relatively short consideration of review outcomes identified by the Academic Quality and Standards Team. It is desirable that the University improves its ability to use key themes extracted from reports and reviews, and use them in order to enhance practice across the institution.

## **Section 5: Collaborative arrangements**

90 The University stated that it has detailed and well-understood arrangements for the consideration and management of all collaborative arrangements, and is confident that these provide assurance for the security of the University's awards and the appropriateness of the learning opportunities of students. In response to recommendations from the QAA Collaborative provision audit in March 2006, procedures for collaborative activity were revised, with clearer definition of roles and improvement of oversight. The Standing Group on Collaborative Provision, which reports to the Learning and Teaching Board, is responsible for oversight of the University's arrangements. Having reviewed strategy in this area, the University is now focusing on faculty collaborations.

91 The University has clear procedures for approval of programmes to be offered in collaboration; these involve site visits, due diligence surveys, investigations of prospective partners and detailed consideration of the curricula. The audit team saw examples of the procedures in operation. The team formed the view that the procedures were effective.

92 The University also has clear procedures for managing the end of collaborative partnerships. Following a review of the accreditation agreements with York St John University, and Leeds Trinity and All Saints College during 2007, the University is implementing agreed exit strategies. The audit team saw documents on these procedures, and concluded that they have been managed well.

93 Day-to-day management of collaborative activity is usually undertaken by a programme team comprising representation from both the University and the collaborative partner. The audit team met academic link managers who were clear about, and committed to, their function.

94 Annual consideration of collaborations at the institutional oversight level varies depending upon the nature of the collaboration: affiliated institutions have an annual health check meeting on the same model as those for University schools. Accredited colleges have an annual review meeting chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Learning and Teaching. Faculty-based collaborations, often small scale, are reviewed in accordance with the school's normal review procedures. There is a specific item on the agenda of each school's annual health check to discuss issues relating to its collaborative provision arrangements. Collaborative arrangements are then also considered as part of school periodic review processes, as well as each collaborative arrangement being reviewed independently periodically by the Standing Group on Collaborative Provision.

95 The University approves the appointment of external examiners for collaborative arrangements, and receives all external examiner reports. The audit team was told that, where appropriate, the same external examiner and final assessment board are used as for internal students. The team was also told that resources and support for students in collaborative provision were essentially identical to those for internal students, and that staff teaching on collaborative courses have access to the University's staff training. The team was told of examples of good practice being shared with collaborative partners, and that partners should have a similar approach as the University to research-informed teaching. The team met some students on collaborative provision programmes, and they expressed themselves happy with their experience.

## **Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students**

96 Research degree programmes and students play a major part in the new vision and strategy for the University to secure a place in the top 50 universities of the world.

97 The key features of the University's arrangements for the support and supervision of research students are detailed within regulatory documents. All faculties within the University have graduate schools and faculty graduate school committees, which discuss postgraduate matters and consider quality issues. Each faculty or school has at least one postgraduate research tutor appointed by the Faculty Graduate School Committee on the recommendation of the Head of the School. From discussions with students, the audit team established that the Postgraduate Research Tutor Scheme was working well, and that students were well aware of the role of tutors and their availability.

98 The University online application system, which allows central monitoring of applications prior to faculty consideration, was introduced in response to one of the recommendations of the Review of postgraduate research degree programmes, 2006. Each application is normally considered by the Postgraduate Tutor and the potential supervisor, and always by at least two members of staff.

99 The audit team found induction arrangements to be satisfactory. The responsibilities of both students and supervisors are well documented, and students confirmed that they were satisfied with the regularity of supervisory meetings, although these varied slightly between discipline groups.

100 The University requires consistent processes for individual progress monitoring and review in all schools and faculties, and that all students must be informed of any problems in their progress expeditiously.

101 The University commissioned a review of postgraduate research student training and development in 2006-07. The review led to initiatives for 2007-08, including the enhancement of communications with research students and staff through a new website, and the creation of a new Guide to Training and Development Opportunities for Research Students. The audit team established that the University provides an extensive range of training opportunities to postgraduate research students in accordance with the relevant ordinances and regulations.

102 The audit team established that the assessment of postgraduate research students is assured by rigorous external examiner procedures and that the Examination Group of the Graduate Board monitors the reports of examiners. The team found the assessment arrangements to be sound and well-understood by students.

103 The audit team saw evidence of regular review of University and faculty codes of practice including reference to sections of the *Code of practice*. The team concluded that the University's procedures for the support, assessment and supervision of research degrees align with the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

104 The student written submission describes how the University's Research Student Surveys show general satisfaction with most aspects of the postgraduate research student experience. Inadequate postgraduate research student work space, and a lack of a sense of discipline community were identified in student surveys and by students who met the audit team. Students also believed that more opportunities to interact with students from other disciplines would be beneficial. Students informed the audit team that they were often unaware of interesting training opportunities in other faculties. In the light of the contents of the student written submission and discussions with postgraduate research students, the team felt it would be desirable for the University to consider greater provision of study space and facilitation of shared training across faculties, and the University should enhance opportunities for research students to meet other postgraduate research students in their own and other disciplines.

## **Section 7: Published information**

105 The audit team examined published information, including University-wide policy and procedural documentation; departmental documentation; course handbooks; regulations; the University's website and intranet; the undergraduate prospectus and committee minutes. The team established that the University provides an extensive and accessible range of published information for prospective and current students and staff, both electronically and in hard copy.

106 The University allocates responsibility for data accuracy to data owners. Information is provided for students on courses, their rights and obligations, academic regulations, facilities and support services. The audit team found the information to be both accessible and comprehensive. Information and guidance on university policies, procedures and academic management, for example, committee minutes, is provided on the University's web pages and in paper documents, for example prospectuses. Programme specifications, including module descriptors, are available on the University's website.

107 Programme specifications are made available electronically to students through the programme catalogue from which dynamic links to the constituent module details are provided. This system ensures that the published specification accurately reflects provision as delivered, rather than as it existed when the programme was last formally approved. The audit team concluded that reliance can reasonably be placed on the integrity and reliability of the information that the University publishes about its educational provision.

108 The student written submission concluded that at undergraduate level there is sometimes inconsistent pre-arrival information, and that pre-arrival information on programme and module content is not sufficient to enable informed decisions by undergraduates. However, students did not raise the issue of difficulties in selecting their electives in discussions with the audit team, and were content with pre-arrival and post-arrival information, and their ability to select their elective modules.

109 Postgraduate research students met by the audit team were satisfied with the information provided by the University, and informed the team that they were aware of their rights and obligations on research degree programmes. This reinforced the findings of the 2004 and 2006 research student surveys, included in the student written submission, which recorded that the majority of respondents felt that they were well-informed about facilities and support from both the University and their school.

## **Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations**

### **Features of good practice**

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

- the development, consistent use and presentation of the Strategy Map as a tool for enhancement (paragraph 11)
- the development of mechanisms across the University for the consideration and publicising of responses to National Student Survey results (paragraph 43)
- the varied mechanisms for making research-led teaching increasingly a distinctive feature of the University (paragraph 47)
- the importance given to teaching as well as to research in the University's appointment and support of academic staff (paragraph 88).

### **Recommendations for action**

111 Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

- ensure that learning outcomes contained in programme specifications are, as the University expects, specific to each programme (paragraph 27)
- check Codes in order to ensure compliance with its expectations, where, through school Codes of Practice and in order to reflect disciplinary differences, it permits variation in practice in assessment (paragraph 33).

112 Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- improve its ability to use key themes extracted from reports and reviews, and use them in order to enhance practice across the institution (paragraphs 22, 83, 89)
- consider its methods for ensuring that it has a clear, comprehensive overview of the current status of practice with regard to changes in the Academic Infrastructure (paragraph 38)
- where, to reflect disciplinary differences, it permits variation in practice in personal supervision, check that variation in order to ensure that it is still within the University's expectations, and in order to facilitate the spread of good practice (paragraph 66)
- enhance, through greater provision of study space and facilitation of shared training across faculties, opportunities for research students to meet other postgraduate research students in their own and other disciplines (paragraph 104).

## Appendix

### The University of Leeds' response to the institutional audit report

The University welcomes the audit team's judgement that confidence can be placed in the soundness of our present and likely future capability to manage the quality of our programmes of study and to secure the academic standards of our awards. It is gratifying that the team recognised that we do take deliberate action to improve the quality of the learning opportunities we offer our students and, in this context, that the consistent use of our Strategy Map as a tool for enhancement is a feature of good practice. The Strategy Map provides us with a succinct statement of our agreed purpose and aims, and includes the values through which we identify ourselves and which define our standards as a university community.

A key objective of our strategy is to translate excellence in research and scholarship into learning opportunities for our students so we are delighted to see the audit team identify two aspects of our approach to teaching as examples of good practice. We are also pleased to observe the team's recognition that we listen closely to what our students tell us through the National Student Survey and other feedback channels, and that we take seriously their concerns and are prepared to make public our plans to respond to them.

The University recognises that improvements are possible, and indeed desirable, in some aspects of our activity and we are thus grateful to the audit team for their diligence in highlighting a number of matters for our attention. Some of these are already being addressed. For example, we have developed a new model for personal tutoring that will make it easier for us to achieve greater consistency and the sharing of good practice between schools. Similarly, we are revising our approach to the checking of Codes of Practice on Assessment to ensure that local variation in practice between subjects does not contravene institutional expectations.

We accept that there are steps we can take to improve our ability to use key themes identified from reports and reviews to enhance practice and we will be producing proposals to address this matter. Likewise, we recognise that we lack an appropriate mechanism to ensure that we have a clear, comprehensive overview of our current status of practice with regard to changes in the Academic Infrastructure, and we will address this as a matter of urgency. We shall be undertaking a comprehensive review of our provision to ensure that learning outcomes contained in programme specifications are specific to each programme.

