



University of Lincoln

Institutional Review
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

November 2012

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About this review

This is a report of an Institutional Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the University of Lincoln. The review took place on 19-22 November 2012 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Mark Atlay
- Professor Jeremy Bradshaw
- Professor Debbie Lockton
- Miss Sarah Crook (student reviewer)
- Ms Louisa Green (review secretary).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the University of Lincoln and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. In this report the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
 - threshold academic standards¹
 - the quality of learning opportunities
 - the information provided about learning opportunities
 - the enhancement of learning opportunities
- provides commentaries on the theme topic
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the institution is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the [key findings](#) can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

In reviewing the University of Lincoln the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The [themes](#) for the academic year 2012-13 are the First Year Student Experience and Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement, and the institution is required to elect, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.² Background information about the University of Lincoln is given at the end of this report. A dedicated page of the QAA website explains the method for [Institutional Review](#) of higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland³ and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

¹ For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

² www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx

³ www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/ireni/pages/default.aspx

Key findings

QAA's judgements about the University of Lincoln

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at the University of Lincoln (the University).

- Academic standards at the University **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at the University **meets UK expectations**.
- Information about learning opportunities produced by the University **meets UK expectations**.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University **is commended**.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at the University of Lincoln.

- The systematic engagement of students at all levels across a wide range of quality assurance and enhancement processes (paragraph 2.8).
- The 'Getting Started' information pack and associated processes for new students (paragraph 2.12).
- The use of the 'Lincoln Award' in recognising a range of extra-curricular activities undertaken by a significant and increasing number of students (paragraph 2.15).
- The impact of the 'Student as Producer' initiative on the enhancement of student engagement at all levels and on learning and teaching practice across the University (paragraph 4.1).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following recommendations to the University of Lincoln, that by the beginning of the academic year 2013-14 the University should:

- put in place plans for the accelerated roll-out of a system to address academic integrity issues in relation to student work and ensure appropriate institutional oversight of assessment offences (paragraph 1.8)
- ensure that appropriate training and support is provided and promoted to all postgraduate research students/graduate teaching assistants who teach and/or assess (paragraph 2.3)
- revise its processes for the consideration at institutional level of management information about the performance and attainment of students (paragraph 2.10)
- make the regulations for the interruption of postgraduate research study more explicit and ensure that the specific regulations regarding the maximum period of registration are consistently applied (paragraph 2.11)
- make information on the appeals procedures more readily accessible to students both on campus and studying through partner organisations (paragraph 2.13)
- revise its course approval, validation and review processes to ensure that there is always demonstrable consideration of inclusivity issues for all student groups (paragraph 2.18)

- make more explicit the requirement that chairs of centre approval panels are fully independent of the subject areas to be associated with delivery (paragraph 2.28)
- reconsider the use of the term 'associate college' in order to remove any potential for confusion about the nature of the status of partner organisations (paragraph 2.29).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms the following action** that the University of Lincoln is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students:

- the University's progress towards the full implementation of a comprehensive system for the collection and analysis of programme management information (paragraph 2.10).

Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The University of Lincoln systematically engages students at all levels across a wide range of quality assurance and enhancement processes.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the operational description and handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining [Institutional Review for England and Northern Ireland](#).⁴

About the University of Lincoln

The University of Lincoln gained degree-awarding powers in 1992 as the University of Humberside, which was based in Hull. It became the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside in 1996. In 2001, it was established as the University of Lincoln and a year later moved its headquarters from Hull to a new purpose-built campus at Brayford Pool in Lincoln city centre. There are two further campuses at Riseholme Park and at Holbeach.

The University's objective is to concentrate all its activities, other than those at Holbeach, on the Brayford Pool Campus by January 2014. The University describes itself as a medium-sized institution. It employs 1,331 members of staff and has 10,367 undergraduate and 1,355 postgraduate students. Its mission is to be:

a university looking to the future where we serve and develop our local, national and international communities by creating purposeful knowledge and research, confident and creative graduates and a dynamic and engaged workforce.

Since the previous QAA Institutional Audit in 2008, several changes have been made to the University's management arrangements and committee structures. A new Vice-Chancellor was appointed in 2009, the senior management structure was reviewed in 2010, and a three-college structure was introduced in September 2011. A review of the terms of reference and membership of the Academic Board in 2010 resulted in a streamlined committee structure. Other significant changes include the adoption of 'Student as Producer' as the central organising principle for the delivery of teaching and learning in the University; the establishment in 2010 of a new School of Engineering in collaboration with Siemens; and the closure of the University's remaining campus in Hull in 2011.

⁴ www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/ireni/pages/default.aspx

The University continues to validate awards at Lincoln, North Lindsey and Hull Colleges, although the arrangement with Hull College is being brought to an end by mutual agreement. In July 2010, the University entered into a contract with Study Group to establish the University of Lincoln International Study Centre (ULISC).

The University considers that the challenges it faces are similar to those facing other publicly funded higher education institutions. These include: uncertainties in the funding environment, the complexities of student number control, increased competition for students, heightened expectations of key stakeholders, and the challenge of increasing the numbers of postgraduate and international students.

Explanation of the findings about the University of Lincoln

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.⁵

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a [brief glossary](#) at the end of this report. A fuller [glossary of terms](#)⁶ is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the [review method](#), also on the QAA website.⁷

1 Academic standards

Outcome

The academic standards at the University of Lincoln **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards. The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1 The University's qualifications are mapped to the appropriate level of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The review team found a comprehensive schedule of awards with a clear exposition of academic standards and quality set out in the Quality Assurance Manual. Programme approval reports contained clear evidence that programme teams are required to undertake curriculum mapping and that programmes are discussed in relation to the FHEQ. On occasion, programme teams are asked to rewrite learning outcomes to ensure they reflect the appropriate level. Teams are also required to provide an indication of contact hours per module to ensure there is sufficient volume of study to enable students to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes. External examiners' reports confirm that academic standards are aligned with the FHEQ.

Use of external examiners

1.2 Scrupulous use is made of external examiners. The University has produced a full definition of the role of external examiners and operates robust processes with clear criteria for their nomination, appointment and induction. Annual review processes ensure that there is proper consideration of issues raised by external examiners at programme, faculty and university level. The reports seen by the review team are comprehensive. They are shared at subject committee meetings with student representatives, who are then responsible for disseminating them. External examiners receive thorough responses to their reports, though occasionally some time elapses before responses are delivered. The review team noted that the University had responded swiftly and decisively to work in partnership to resolve problems which had arisen in respect of the appointment of an external examiner at a local partner. The team therefore concluded that this incident did not undermine the University's approach to make scrupulous use of external examiners appointed to its awards..

⁵ The full body of evidence used to compile the report is not published. However, it is available on request for inspection. Please contact QAA Reviews Group.

⁶ www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx

⁷ See note 4.

Assessment and standards

1.3 The University's assessment strategies are effective in ensuring that students have the opportunity to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes of their awards. The assessment framework sits within the University Assessment Regulations and provides definitive information on a range of assessment matters, such as pass requirements and opportunities for resitting assessments.

1.4 Assessment strategies, including professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements, are scrutinised during programme approval and review processes. Programme teams are required to produce an assessment map indicating the range of assessments and how they are distributed throughout the academic year. Programme approval reports seen by the review team recorded detailed discussion on the mapping exercise, though the thoroughness with which programme teams had undertaken the exercise varied.

1.5 Staff make effective use of the University's guidelines on marking and grading work and students told the review team that they understand what they have to do to achieve a particular mark or grade. Clear grade descriptors are available to staff and students through Blackboard, the University's virtual learning environment, and in some programme handbooks. The review team formed the view that the University generally fulfils its commitment to provide feedback to students on work submitted for assessment within three weeks, although the student written submission and some students met by the team reported that this is not always the case.

1.6 The terms of reference provided for boards of examiners are unambiguous. A University Extenuating Circumstances Panel, chaired by the Director of Student Affairs, meets monthly to consider claims for extenuating circumstances in respect of both coursework and examinations on behalf of all boards of examiners. The review team was informed that the panel only makes a decision as to whether the student has provided sufficient evidence to substantiate a claim of extenuating circumstances, leaving the final decision about what action to take in the hands of individual boards of examiners. The review team considered that this practice could lead to inconsistent outcomes for students across the institution.

1.7 The University's regulations contain a definition of an academic offence, although details of the guidelines on the measures to prevent, detect and monitor academic offences are not included in the regulations. The review team found evidence that, while some areas of the University use text-matching software to prevent and detect academic offences, this is not employed universally. Although the review team heard that the University plans to implement the use of such software across the institution by 2016, the team considered this to be a slow response which, coupled with the current variation in the use of the software, could present a risk to academic standards. The review team was also informed that the Academic Offences Committee - chaired by the University Secretary - does not report to a University committee, with the result that there is no formal University oversight of academic offences or consideration of actions that may be required.

1.8 The review team **recommends** that the University put in place plans for the accelerated the roll-out of a system to address academic integrity issues in relation to student work and ensure appropriate institutional oversight of assessment offences by the start of the academic year 2013-14.

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.9 The review team saw convincing evidence that the University has processes for approval, monitoring and review of programmes that allow standards to be set and maintained and allow students to demonstrate that they have achieved the learning outcomes of their awards. An initial planning process determines whether a programme will go forward to approval. Both home campus and collaborative provision are integrated within detailed processes for approval, monitoring and review, and these are clearly articulated in the Quality Assurance Manual and regularly mapped against the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. The review team also saw evidence that the University reviews and amends its processes when it needs to do so. External members who serve on validation, revalidation and periodic review panels are approved centrally by the University.

Subject benchmarks

1.10 The University has effective systems for ensuring that programmes are aligned with subject and qualifications benchmarks. At programme approval, teams are required to map the proposed programme against any relevant subject or qualification benchmark statement or PSRB requirements. The review team heard that the University had taken steps to review and revise its definitions of work-based learning. This was in part due to the findings of its own internal audit, which identified that the work-based learning elements of all relevant programmes could be more clearly identified and that some of the programmes were not fully compliant with University policy.

2 Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

The quality of learning opportunities at the University of Lincoln **meets UK expectations**. The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1 The University is committed to maintaining professional standards for teaching and support of learning, and provides staff development opportunities geared towards fulfilling this commitment. The Centre for Educational Research and Development (CERD) supports the professional development of all staff across the University and its partner colleges. The University's Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning was accredited by the Higher Education Academy in 2009 and aligned with the UK Professional Standards Framework.

2.2 Staff are supported at each stage of their development. Staff new to teaching are required to take a professional qualification during their probationary period. Support is provided via a mentoring system, team teaching and training alongside more experienced staff. Skills are maintained and enhanced through annual appraisal and voluntary participation in a scheme for peer review of practice, and refresher training that is provided every three years. Staff are also encouraged to participate in the University's continuous personal and professional development framework.

2.3 The review team heard that arrangements for supporting postgraduate students who teach varied by faculty. It was noted that the previous Institutional Audit report recommended that the University should consider the formal training required to support postgraduate students who teach, and that the Academic Board had signed off the action plan in 2009 confirming that these areas had been addressed. Despite this, the review team

considered that inconsistencies remain and the University would benefit from an overarching institutional policy setting out teaching responsibilities for postgraduate students, the timing of their training and requirements for additional training if they are required to assess as well as teach. The review team **recommends** that the University ensure that appropriate training and support is provided and promoted to all postgraduate research students/graduate teaching assistants who teach, by the beginning of the academic session 2013-14.

Learning resources

2.4 The University's learning resources are appropriate to allow students to achieve the learning outcomes of their programmes. Students commented positively about library and other learning resources. The Learning Spaces Group oversees the provision of suitable learning environments for the University's programmes. There was evidence in programme approval reports that library and other resource needs are scrutinised as part of the process.

2.5 The personal tutor system is working effectively for most students. Although the student written submission reported that some students were more familiar with their allocated personal tutor than others, the students whom the review team met were all aware of their personal tutors. Frequency of contact between student and personal tutor remained variable, however.

2.6 Access to certain online resources is not universally available. For example, students and staff at partner colleges do not have automatic access to the University's virtual learning environment, Blackboard, because of the nature of the contractual arrangements with the University. The review team heard, however, that this can be provided to staff on request, although the uptake of this facility was not made explicit. The team formed the view that this does not currently disadvantage students at partner colleges because Blackboard is primarily used by the University for communicating information rather than as a medium for learning and teaching. Should the University decide to start exploiting the full potential of a virtual learning environment, it may be necessary to reconsider the current arrangements. The current uneven access to and use of the University's text-matching software may leave some students better equipped to avoid plagiarism than others (see paragraph 1.7).

Student voice

2.7 An increasingly diverse range of students is making an effective contribution to quality assurance in a variety of contexts, including all the University's major committees, and at all levels. Positive attitudes towards student engagement were evident in both the staff and students whom the review team met. The Students' Union takes a leading role in training student representatives in quality assurance and there is increasing involvement of staff in this process.

2.8 The University is taking a strategic approach to student engagement. A Student Engagement Strategy has been produced and is underpinned by the recently appointed Student Engagement Officer. Student representatives are now serving on periodic review panels and will soon be involved in programme approval. As the commitment involved differs from that required of a traditional student representative, these new roles have been successful in attracting students who have not previously participated in the institution's quality assurance processes in a formal sense. The systematic engagement of students at all levels across a wide range of quality assurance and enhancement processes is a **feature of good practice**.

2.9 Close attention is paid to student feedback at every level of the University. End-of-module questionnaires and end-of-year surveys for years one and two are administered on

the home campuses and at partner colleges, and considered within annual monitoring processes. The results of the National Student Survey (NSS), the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey and the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey are considered by the Academic Board, the Learning and Teaching Committee and the Student Experience Committee, as appropriate. Members of committees are asked to relay to student representatives how they are acting upon the feedback to improve the quality of learning opportunities. Course teams are required to formulate action plans based on close reading of NSS results.

Management information is used to improve quality and standards

2.10 The review team found that the University's use of management information to safeguard quality and standards and to promote enhancement of student learning opportunities is not consistently effective and does not meet this expectation. The team noted several areas of effective practice, such as the way that employability data, available via the recently implemented and continually developing University dashboard, is monitored and reviewed by the Student Experience Committee. The team was also aware that the University's planned new management information system may soon facilitate better the collation and analysis of data more generally across the institution. Nevertheless, the review team found that the University was not systematically monitoring and reviewing data in a number of areas, for example, in relation to the number and nature of academic offences detected across the institution. Furthermore, the team did not see evidence that the academic achievement of disabled students and international students was being collated centrally and compared to the achievement of non-disabled students and home students, respectively. The review team **recommends** that, by the beginning of the academic year 2013-14, the University revise its processes for the consideration of management information about the performance and attainment of students. Furthermore, the team **affirms** the University's progress towards the full implementation of a comprehensive system for the collection and analysis of programme management information.

2.11 There was also no evidence of appropriate institutional oversight to ensure that PhD students completed their studies within the maximum period specified in the University's regulations. The review team **recommends** that, by the beginning of the academic year 2013-14, the University make the regulations for the interruption of postgraduate research study more explicit and ensure that the specific regulations regarding the maximum period of registration are consistently applied.

Admission to the University

2.12 The University has admissions policies and procedures that are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied. The Admissions Policy, which is publicly available through the website, is reviewed annually by the Academic Board. Both undergraduate and postgraduate students whom the review team met understood the policy and processes. Those who had been interviewed prior to admission considered it a beneficial process. The 'Getting Started' information pack and associated processes for new students is a **feature of good practice**. Students praised the pack, saying they had found it very helpful as they went through the admission and induction processes. The pack includes distance learning and applies to undergraduate and postgraduate students, both taught and research.

Complaints and appeals

2.13 The University has effective complaints and appeals procedures, but they may not be sufficiently prominent and communicated effectively to all who need to know about them. The procedures have recently been revised after consultation with students and staff, and

taking account of recent discussions with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. As a result, a student member is now included on the hearing-stage panels of the complaints procedure. Academic Affairs Committee receives annual reports on use of the procedures which indicate that there are relatively few complaints and appeals and they are generally resolved satisfactorily. While postgraduate research students declared themselves comfortable with the procedures, there seemed to be a lack of awareness among undergraduate and postgraduate taught students about formal complaints and appeals channels. The review team **recommends** that the University make information on the appeals procedures more readily accessible to students both on campus and studying through partner organisations, by the beginning of the academic year 2013-14 (see also paragraph 3.4).

Career advice and guidance

2.14 The University's approach to careers education, advice and guidance is adequately quality assured through surveys conducted by the Students' Union into the efficacy of the careers service. The results of these surveys are reported back to the Student Experience Committee, which has responsibility for quality assuring this aspect of provision. The careers service is benchmarked against the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services' (AGCAS) standards.

2.15 The Enterprise@Lincoln department has taken the lead on developing and promoting the 'Lincoln Award', a scheme which recognises extra-curricular activity and achievement. The scheme is available across disciplines and at all levels. It is inclusive, has a healthy uptake and completion rate, and has succeeded in engaging employers and other external stakeholders. The use of the 'Lincoln Award' in recognising a range of extra-curricular activities undertaken by a significant and increasing number of students is a **feature of good practice**.

2.16 Employability is embedded at school level, where the organising principle of 'Student as Producer' is geared towards ensuring that employability and skills are central to learning and teaching (see further exploration of this concept in section 4 of this report).

Supporting disabled students

2.17 The University has a relatively large percentage of students with a disability (11 per cent) and overall the quality of learning opportunities is managed to enable the entitlements of disabled students to be met. Specific support for disabled students is managed by the University's Student Services Department and provided by Disability Access Resources and Technology pre and post-enrolment. There is, however, no systematic monitoring at institutional level of the academic progress of these students (see paragraph 2.10) and monitoring at subject level appears to be variable.

2.18 Processes for supporting disabled students have been mapped against the UK Quality Code for Higher Education by the University. This exercise indicated that issues of inclusivity and diversity are dealt with as part of course and module approval, but the review team did not find evidence that this routinely and systematically takes place. As a result, measures are not identified in anticipation of the needs of disabled students. The review team **recommends** that the University revise its course approval, validation and review processes to ensure that there is always demonstrable consideration of inclusivity issues for all student groups.

Supporting international students

2.19 Appropriate learning opportunities are made available by the University to international students. Although numbers of international students are growing, they are still relatively modest. Support provided for international students is sufficient and meets students' needs. They receive a handbook and an orientation programme. Students whom the review team met reported that they felt supported, and confirmed that they were well integrated into wider University support processes.

2.20 English language requirements are sufficiently demanding and the support offered to international students to meet them is appropriate. There is a clear admissions policy in respect of language requirements, which provides alternative routes for those who are less proficient. The academic progress in English language of these students, which varies considerably, is monitored by the University.

2.21 The overall academic performance of international students, in comparison with home students, is not systematically monitored (see paragraph 2.10).

Supporting postgraduate research students

2.22 Appropriate support and guidance is provided to enable postgraduate research students to complete their programmes of study and to enable staff involved in research programmes to fulfil their responsibilities. Numbers of postgraduate research students have expanded since the previous Institutional Audit, giving them a higher profile as a group within the University. They are not, however, evenly spread across the five faculties. While the inclusion of postgraduate research students within representative systems was recognised as an ongoing challenge, the inclusion of students across levels of study as members of complaints panels was viewed by the review team as a positive development (see paragraph 2.8).

2.23 The students whom the review team met confirmed that they were appropriately supported and had been provided with the information they needed. A postgraduate student handbook covers both taught and research postgraduate students and the Student Charter has been revised to include all categories of student. An annual postgraduate student conference provides an opportunity for students to meet other students at the same level.

2.24 In the previous year, some issues had been raised by students about communication and representation in relation to postgraduate research students. Students who met the review team were positive about representative systems, thus confirming that the University is actively extending representative systems to make provision for more systematic representation of postgraduate research students.

2.25 The team noted that there were a number of postgraduate research students who appeared to have exceeded the maximum period of registration permitted by the Academic Regulations. The review team heard that these cases had arisen where applications for interruption of studies had been approved, although the entitlement to and application process for this facility was not explicit and there was potential for confusion or inconsistent application of the regulations in this regard. This issue has given rise to the team's recommendation in paragraph 2.11.

2.26 Further issues relating to appropriate support for postgraduate students who teach (paragraph 2.3) and the monitoring of completion of PhD studies within the stipulated maximum study period (paragraph 2.11) have been addressed elsewhere in this report.

Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.27 The quality of learning opportunities delivered as part of collaborative arrangements is managed to enable students to achieve their awards. The University has a small portfolio of collaborative provision and has taken a cautious approach towards managing this provision, which is governed by its UK and international partnerships policy. Policies and procedures for centre and programme approval are covered in the Quality Assurance Manual.

2.28 The process for selecting a partner is clear and requires prior executive approval. The review team heard that centre approval panels are normally chaired by an independent head of school, even though the Quality Assurance Manual does not make explicit mention of the independence of the chair. In one example provided to the review team, however, both the chair and a member of the panel could have been seen as having a vested interest in approval being granted to the centre in question. The review team **recommends** that, by the beginning of the academic year 2013-14, the University make more explicit the requirement that chairs of centre approval panels are fully independent of the subject areas to be associated with delivery. Once approved, centres are not required to undergo a formal centre re-approval process, although the relevant programmes are included in the University's periodic review schedule. The University may, however, wish to reflect on the benefits to both partners that might accrue from a periodic review of the relationship and its operation.

2.29 The term 'associate college' is widely used in the sector to indicate an acknowledgement by a higher education provider that a partner has robust academic standards and quality assurance processes in place. The review team noted that one partner described itself as an 'associate college' of the University for historical reasons and heard that no formal designation of 'associate college' now exists. As this could be misleading to prospective students, the review team **recommends** that the University reconsider the use of the term 'associate college' in order to remove any potential for confusion about the nature of the status of partner organisations, by the beginning of the academic year 2013-14.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.30 The University manages the quality of learning opportunities delivered through flexible and distributed arrangements, including e-learning, effectively. Provision is small and the University is cautious about developing it further. The 'Getting Started' information pack (paragraph 2.12) applies to distance learning students, who are also given a handbook containing advice on how to learn and other matters. Staff are provided with an e-tutoring guide.

Work-based and placement learning

2.31 The quality of learning opportunities delivered through work-based and placement learning is managed effectively by the University. Extensive use of work-based and placement learning is limited largely to specialist areas such as Health and the Business School. The University formally revised its definitions of and approach to work-based learning after it came to the University's attention that not all of its Foundation Degrees included work-based learning, which is a specific requirement set out in the qualification benchmark statement (paragraph 1.10). A new Work-based Learning and Placement Policy is now in place and is operating effectively, though the level of detailed guidance at school level varies.

Student charter

2.32 The University has a Student Charter in place. Recently reissued, it is a useful document which is widely available. The review team found evidence that the University is meeting most of the commitments it makes in the Student Charter, but there are some areas where further work may be required, notably the return of assessed work within 15 working days, the need for greater prominence of information regarding the procedures for dealing with plagiarism, and the accessibility of the appeals process - all of which have been identified elsewhere in this report.

3 Information about learning opportunities

Summary

The University of Lincoln **meets UK expectations** that the information it produces for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities offered is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The review team's reasons for this conclusion are given below.

3.1 The University recognises the importance of producing information about itself for the public. It has established systems for assuring its quality and is investing in initiatives to enhance it further. The Academic Affairs Committee approves and holds the definitive record of the University's portfolio, while the Office of Quality, Standards and Partnerships carries responsibility for final sign-off of new or modified programmes and for the subsequent updating of programme information on the website. The review team heard that programme leaders - working alongside marketing officers - check that published information is trustworthy, and saw evidence that robust mechanisms are in place for identifying inconsistencies and taking remedial action.

3.2 Additional measures have been put in place to assure the quality of information about provision offered through collaborative partners. Considerable reliance is placed upon the role of link tutor, who liaises with the partner organisation on whom responsibility for the quality of information rests. Link tutors sample information and report back to programme teams at the University, who are required to note that partners have confirmed that their information meets the University's requirements. Some link tutor reports considered by the review team contained little evidence of engagement with the partner college on this matter, however.

3.3 The previous Institutional Audit report recommended that the University fulfil its commitment to make programme specifications available to prospective and current students. The review team saw evidence that the University has now done so, with the exception of a small number of specialised, work-based learning courses and a Foundation Degree run by one of its local partners. The review team considered that the information provided by the partner in this instance was sufficient for a prospective student to make an informed decision about whether to apply. Students whom the review team met indicated that in general the information they had received prior to registration proved a fair and accurate representation of the programme.

3.4 Current students are provided with comprehensive information about their learning opportunities (paragraph 2.12), with the exception of fuller information about the appeals process. All students who met with the review team commented that information they had received was both accessible and trustworthy. Comprehensive and accessible online handbooks are available on Blackboard, which was valued as a reliable source of information. Despite this, more detailed information about appeals was not readily available to the same degree on the website or in other formats, apart from a hard-copy leaflet

distributed to students at registration. Some of the students whom the review team met did not know where to find information about how to submit a formal appeal. Furthermore, the review team found it difficult to find the relevant information using the search function on the University's website. Given the tight timescale for submitting an appeal, the review team considered that the University should more proactively draw the attention of students to the information they might require. This was particularly acute for students at partner colleges, who do not have access to the University's student portal where the information currently sits. The review team made a related recommendation regarding the accessibility of information on the appeals procedures to students both on campus and studying through partner organisations in paragraph 2.13.

3.5 The University takes responsibility for the production of certificates and transcripts for all its awards, wherever they are delivered. The review team heard that the system under development for the collection, analysis and consideration of programme management information will assist with the more systematic production of academic transcripts and diploma supplements. The system will also support the requirements of the Key Information Set (KIS) and other public information obligations, and there are plans to extend it further to support future needs, such as the production of Higher Education Achievement Reports for students. Those with responsibility for academic standards and quality are provided with the information they need to discharge those responsibilities effectively. The University's Quality Assurance Manual is a comprehensive and up to date document. An annual exercise is undertaken mapping the different elements of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education on to University policies and procedures.

3.6 At the time of the review, the introduction of the KIS was too recent for the review team to form a view about the University's use of this information to inform decision-making and the enhancement agenda. Senior staff informed the review team that KIS data was generated manually and audited internally prior to submission to the Higher Education Statistics Agency. Responsibility for the accuracy of the KIS data for collaborative provision rests with the partner, with the link tutor checking on behalf of the University. The review team heard that the new Academic Programme Management System, which was due to be introduced in January 2013, will play an important role in generating and verifying the accuracy of the KIS data in a more systematic manner.

3.7 The University's approach to presenting the Wider Information Set (WIS) was not clearly distinguishable on the website. However, the review team was assured that the production and consolidation process is in hand and that the majority of the components of the WIS were already available electronically, although some of these were currently available only through the University's intranet. The review team encourages the University to continue to make more readily accessible the information required as part of the WIS.

3.8 External examiners' reports are made available to students through faculty, subject and programme committees, where full discussion of the reports takes place with student representatives. Reports are also available on request from the University's Secretariat.

4 Enhancement of learning opportunities

Outcome

The enhancement of learning opportunities at the University of Lincoln **is commended**. The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

4.1 Enhancement is embedded within the University's strategic plan and put into operation systematically throughout the University via 'Student as Producer', which is

described as the foundation of the Teaching and Learning Plan (2011-16) and the organising principle for teaching and learning across the University. It aims to ground students' learning in research-engaged teaching and learning where students create and develop new knowledge in collaboration with staff. Although engagement of staff and particularly students is currently patchy, 'Student as Producer' is being rolled out across the University and its partner colleges as new programmes are approved and existing programmes go through annual monitoring and periodic review. The 'Student as Producer' website contains a repository of good practice case studies. The review team considered that this initiative contributes substantially to the creation of an ethos which expects and encourages enhancement of student learning opportunities. The impact of the 'Student as Producer' initiative on the enhancement of student engagement at all levels and on learning and teaching practice across the University is a **feature of good practice**.

4.2 Good practice is identified, supported and disseminated by the University, often using quality assurance procedures to identify opportunities for enhancement. Programmes and faculties identify good practice in the annual monitoring summary reports they submit to the Annual Monitoring Oversight Group. A compilation of good practice is then produced for the Academic Affairs Committee, which informs the Academic Board and disseminates the information back through faculties. The Student Experience Committee also plays an important role in enhancement by monitoring results from internal and external surveys, generating action plans and overseeing their implementation across the University.

5 Thematic element

Each academic year, a specific theme relating to higher education provision in England and Northern Ireland is chosen for especial attention by QAA's Institutional Review teams. In 2012-13 there is a choice of two themes: the First Year Student Experience or Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement. The University, in consultation with its student body, had elected to explore the theme of Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement.

Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The review team explored Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement at the University of Lincoln. This has been an area of significant focus and development for the University. The review team regarded the work that has been done as a considerable strength of the University, particularly the way in which student representation is being extended to encompass a wider range of quality assurance and enhancement activities such as programme approval and review and complaints hearings.

Innovations in student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement

5.1 The 'Student as Producer' initiative, which is predicated on the concept of full student engagement within learning and teaching, is being rolled out across the University and its partners in a systematic and planned way that is designed to draw in all members of the student body. This initiative and its various contributory features led the review team to judge the University's enhancement of learning opportunities as commendable. Student representation on university-level committees has been increased and students now serve as members of periodic academic review panels and revalidation events. Appropriate training and written guidance has been provided by the Students' Union in partnership with the Office of Quality, Standards and Partnerships.

Staff experience of/participation in student involvement in quality

5.2 The University has produced a Student Engagement Policy and has recently appointed a Student Engagement Officer to ensure that it is implemented effectively across the institution. In 2012-13, staff became involved for the first time in the training provided by the Students' Union for student representatives. This demonstrates further the commitment of University staff to the benefits of student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement. The Students' Union has produced a guide for staff about the role of the student representative. There is a strong culture of student engagement in learning, curriculum design and development, and this principle is extended to quality assurance and enhancement processes. This culture is also apparent in discrete projects arising from the 'Student as Producer' initiative, such as the project for promoting student engagement in subject committee meetings.

Acting on student contributions and 'closing the feedback loop'

5.3 The student written submission indicated that the University responds positively to student feedback and this view was shared by the students whom the review team met. The annual monitoring process takes full account of both internal and external student evaluation data and ensures that it influences the University's planning and decision-making processes. Actions are discussed and agreed at both the Annual Monitoring Oversight Group and the Academic Affairs Committee. Students did comment, however, that further improvements could be undertaken to more demonstrably 'close the feedback loop' and communicate the outcomes of feedback to students. This is a matter which the Student Engagement Strategy acknowledges and addresses. The Communications Team is now charged with considering how best to report back to all interested parties on what action has been taken in response to student feedback.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to key terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Most terms also have formal 'operational' definitions. For example, pages 18-19 of the handbook for this review method give formal definitions of threshold academic standards, learning opportunities, enhancement and public information.

The handbook can be found on the QAA website at:

www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/ireni-handbook.aspx.

If you require formal definitions of other terms, please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality:

www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx.

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **glossary** on the QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx.

Academic Infrastructure Guidance developed and agreed by the higher education community and published by QAA, which is used by institutions to ensure that their courses meet national expectations for academic standards and that students have access to a suitable environment for learning (academic quality). It consists of four groups of reference points: the **frameworks for higher education qualifications**, the **subject benchmark statements**, the **programme specifications** and the **Code of practice**. Work is underway (2011-12) to revise the Academic Infrastructure as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

academic standards The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Code of practice *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for higher education institutions.

credit(s) A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as 'numbers of credits' at a specific level.

enhancement Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of **learning opportunities**. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

feature of good practice A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

framework A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

framework for higher education qualifications A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*.

learning opportunities The provision made for students' learning, including planned **programmes of study**, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios) and staff development.

learning outcome What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

operational definition A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in reports.

programme (of study) An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

programme specifications Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of **programmes of study**, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

public information Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Quality Code Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is being developed from 2011 to replace the **Academic Infrastructure** and will incorporate all its key elements, along with additional topics and overarching themes.

subject benchmark statement A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

threshold academic standard The minimum standard that a student should reach in order to gain a particular qualification or award, as set out in the **subject benchmark statements** and national qualifications frameworks. Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that students need to achieve in order to gain any particular class of award, for example a first-class bachelor's degree. See also **academic standard**.

widening participation Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

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