



Institutional audit

University of Newcastle upon Tyne

DECEMBER 2009



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Preface

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

In England and Northern Ireland QAA conducts Institutional audits on behalf of the higher education sector to provide public information about the maintenance of academic standards and the 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 then Department for Education 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 to 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's) approach to external quality assurance. At the centre of the process is an emphasis on students and their learning.

The aim of the 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* (FHEQ) 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 on 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 the quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes
- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research
- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

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

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

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

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

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website.

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Newcastle upon Tyne (the University) from 30 November to 4 December 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

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

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

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne 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 strong evidence of deliberate steps taken by the University to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. The University's commitment to parity of esteem for research and learning and teaching, and its central support and funding provide a context which encourages innovation and enhancement from both professional and academic staff.

Postgraduate research students

The audit team found that the University has a sound infrastructure in place to ensure satisfactory arrangements for postgraduate research students. Action has been taken or is in hand following the Review of research degree programmes in 2006 by QAA. The University's arrangements meet the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

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

- the steps the University has taken, as a research-intensive institution, to recognise the value of teaching through its rewards and incentives for staff, and to enhance the quality of teaching by encouraging the inclusion of research in the curriculum
- the range of ways in which the University is developing the employability of all of its students.

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- review the effectiveness of Internal Subject Review as a means of reporting on the consistency of local implementation of University policies
- give high priority to the development and implementation of a revised system for personal tutoring
- strengthen its oversight of collaborative provision.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- extend, as widely as possible, opportunities for students to benefit from the University's investment in learning technology
- strengthen arrangements for sharing and embedding practice that the University has identified as exemplary.

Reference points

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

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

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

Report

1 An Institutional audit of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 30 November 2009. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team comprised Professor D Bonner, Ms J Clarke, Dr J Hostler and Dr A Mackenzie, auditors, and Mr D Coombe, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mr M Cott, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The University is located in the city centre and was established with full degree awarding powers by *Act of Parliament* in 1963, although its origins can be traced back to the School of Medicine founded in 1834. The University's vision is to be a civic university with a global reputation for academic excellence.

4 The University is organised into three faculties, comprising a total of 23 academic units. In 2008-09 the University had 18,878 students, of whom 14,155 were undergraduates and 4,723 postgraduates (3,025 taught postgraduates and 1,698 research postgraduates). Overall, 50 per cent of the University's students were female and 20 per cent were non-UK (14 per cent from outside the European Union). Around 600 students were studying through collaborative programmes.

5 A number of changes have been made at senior management level since the last audit. A new Vice-Chancellor was appointed in August 2007 and the roles and responsibilities of the senior management team were redefined in 2007-08. There are now seven pro vice-chancellors, each responsible for a core function (Research and Innovation, Teaching and Learning, Engagement, Planning and Resources) or one of the three faculties.

6 Changes have also been introduced in the areas of teaching and learning, particularly to support the University's aim of promoting parity of esteem between teaching and research. At the time of the audit, the Learning and Teaching Strategy was in the process of being refreshed and integrated into a 'Learning, Teaching and Wider Student Experience Strategy'.

7 The audit team found the University's committee structure and framework for managing academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities clearly specified and effective. Nevertheless, a few changes to the committee structure were being introduced in 2009-10. Policies, procedures and guidance relating to quality management are clear and comprehensive and are drawn together in the Quality and Standards Handbook, which complements the University Regulations.

8 The University has a committee that undertakes independent audits of all the University's activities, and its remit includes the consistency of implementation of quality management policies and processes. The audit team noted that the committee had produced a number of reports on a range of issues, most of which had been acted upon rapidly.

9 The audit team found that the University had responded appropriately to the last audit, although in respect of one recommendation (consistency and implementation of University policies and practices at the local level), it concluded that further action was advisable (see paragraph 22). The team also found that the University had responded appropriately to the findings of the 2006 Review of research degree provision.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

10 The University has well developed and clearly documented procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review which make an important and effective contribution to the management of academic standards.

11 The procedure for approval of new programmes ensures that new programmes are aligned with the University's priorities and expectations, and that due account has been taken of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and subject benchmark statements. The procedure includes scrutiny by external experts and involves the preparation of a detailed programme specification. The audit team found that the approval procedure was followed and that the scrutiny of proposals was detailed and robust, with due consideration given to the assurance of academic standards.

12 The procedure for programme monitoring requires the production of an annual report on each programme, taking into account a range of statistical data, external examiners' reports and student feedback; the report includes an action plan to address any issues that have arisen or areas needing improvement. These reports are considered by faculty teaching and learning committees, which prepare overview reports for the Quality and Standards Sub-Committee. The audit team found the annual monitoring procedure thorough in principle and mostly in practice. At the time of the audit a revised procedure was being introduced, which will give more emphasis to ongoing programme development and enhancement.

13 The procedure for programme review requires all provision to be reviewed in depth every six years. A commentary is produced that reflects on the programme during that period, and this is scrutinised by a panel of senior staff (including an external subject expert), along with extensive supporting documentation. The panel meets with staff and students on the programme and evaluates the provision against 52 criteria; they then submit a report to the faculty teaching and learning committees and the Quality and Standards Sub-Committee. The audit team found that the review process had been carried out thoroughly and comprehensively, with involvement by external experts and students. There had been appropriate use of the Academic Infrastructure and consideration had been given both to academic standards and to the quality of students' learning opportunities. Again, at the time of this audit a new procedure was about to be introduced, which will give more emphasis to enhancement, and review panels will include a student member.

14 The University makes robust and effective use of independent external examiners to help assure the standards of its awards. External examiners are appointed for three years and are briefed by the University. They are required to submit an extensive annual report using a standard proforma, commenting on the standard of the programme and identifying aspects of good practice as well as any matters requiring action.

15 External examiners' reports are shared with student representatives and considered at discipline, faculty and university level; there is a procedure for taking immediate action if an external examiner reports serious issues. At the end of each year an overview of external examiners' reports is considered by the faculty teaching and learning committees and the Quality and Standards Sub-Committee. The audit team found that external examiners' reports were responded to, and followed up, effectively.

16 The University makes effective use of the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points in managing the academic standards of its awards. As noted above, consideration is given to the FHEQ and to subject benchmark statements during the process of programme approval, and these are also addressed in the course of programme review and external examining.

17 A significant number of the University's programmes have a professional focus and there are many interactions with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. These are managed by individual academic units, with support and oversight by faculties and the University. The University seeks, where possible, to align its own review procedures with the requirements of external accreditation. The University's framework of policies and procedures satisfies the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*.

18 The University has detailed, robust and effective policies and regulations that govern assessment. All its programmes are located within its Qualifications and Credit Framework, which aligns its provision with national expectations. Its marking scales define classification ranges across the University and its assessment tariff regulates the volume of assessment across and between programmes. The conduct of boards of examiners and the handling of marks are also subject to regulation, and there is mandatory training for key staff involved in these processes. The audit team identified some areas where students would welcome clearer communication on assessment expectations from the University.

19 The last Institutional audit recommended the University to work towards greater consistency in its use of management information at the cohort level. Since then the University has implemented an improved reporting tool. Via its intranet, staff can now obtain a wide range of statistics on student admissions, progression and attainment, enabling the performance of individual cohorts to be monitored. These reports are considered routinely in the processes of programme monitoring and review, and contribute to the management of academic standards.

20 The audit found that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

21 The University makes effective use of the *Code of practice* in managing students' learning opportunities. Key staff are aware of, and involved in, developments to the *Code*, and when revisions are published these are considered appropriately and reflected in the University's policies and procedures. The University's programme approval, monitoring and review procedures are designed to contribute to the management of students' learning opportunities as well as academic standards. For example, the availability of learning resources is considered during programme approval and review, while annual monitoring includes reflection on student performance and feedback. The inclusion of action planning and formal follow-up as an element in monitoring and review helps to ensure that issues and developments are managed effectively.

22 Although these procedures make a large contribution to the management of students' learning opportunities, the audit team found that some of the claims for these procedures made by the University in its Briefing Paper were not fully substantiated. In particular, it was asserted that periodic Internal Subject Review enabled the University to monitor the implementation of its policies on student representation, the operation of its assessment procedures and the implementation of performance and development review for its staff. The team found that these matters were not always addressed in the review reports presented to the Quality and Standards Sub-Committee and therefore recommends it is advisable that the University review the effectiveness of Internal Subject Review as a means of reporting on the consistency of local implementation of University policies.

23 The University oversees and makes good use of feedback from students in managing the quality of learning opportunities. Feedback from students is routinely gathered through module evaluation and is considered at staff-student committees and boards of study, where responses are formulated and fed into annual monitoring reports. Student service units also conduct surveys of student opinion. The University pays close attention at all levels to the National Student Survey and formulates appropriate action plans in response. To combat concerns about survey fatigue the University has recently introduced a focus group approach, which will continue as part of a

more strategic approach to gathering student opinion. The University's 'You said, we did' website is a recent development aimed at informing students of the responses to opinion surveys.

24 Students are represented on all the main University committees and on key working groups through Union Society Officers. In addition, the officers meet regularly with the Vice-Chancellor. At the programme level the primary means for student representation is through staff-student committees, which were seen by the audit team to be a generally effective means of engaging students in the operation of their programmes. Students are also represented on boards of study but are less well engaged at this level. In response to concerns that the student representation was not operating well, the University recently established a working group that has developed a new policy on student representation, which includes representation at faculty level and students taking the role of chairing staff-student committees. The new policy was planned to be introduced in 2010-11.

25 Students' learning is strongly influenced by research. The audit team saw many examples of research-informed teaching and of the development of research skills in undergraduate programmes. Students who met the team were complimentary about the experience of studying in a research-intensive environment, and spoke of the motivation they gained from being taught by leading researchers. The University encourages staff to enhance the quality of teaching by including research in the curriculum.

26 The audit team found that the University has suitable policies in place to manage the quality of learning opportunities delivered through flexible or distance-learning study. A variety of technologies is in use and the University has recently established an e-learning steering group to oversee the development of these technologies. However, the team heard that the extent of the use of the virtual learning environment is variable, although, when used, it is highly beneficial to students. The team recommends that it is desirable the University extend, as widely as possible, opportunities for students to benefit from the University's investment in learning technology.

27 Resources to support learning are managed effectively. The University library has been awarded the Charter Mark for customer service on five occasions since 1996. The joint Library and Information Systems and Services Strategy aligns with the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The development of these services is informed by feedback from student surveys and library liaison staff, who sit on school committees. In addition, the library itself conducts periodic surveys of student opinion. Student feedback from the National Student Survey indicates a high level of satisfaction with library and information technology resources, and this was confirmed in the documentation seen by the audit team.

28 The University has effective policies and arrangements in place to oversee and manage the application, selection and admission of students. The University's approach to widening participation is systematic. As well as being the lead higher education institution in the regional Aimhigher programme, the University operates its Partners programme, which is aimed at encouraging applications from local schools located in neighbourhoods where participation in higher education is low.

29 The University provides a wide range of support to students. All students have a personal tutor but the audit team found that the University has been slow to respond to identified concerns about personal tutoring. Although some academic units have made changes to their tutoring arrangements, the team recommends advisable that the University gives high priority to the development and implementation of a revised system for personal tutoring.

30 Services which support students, including the Careers Service and International Office, undergo external accreditation and have been co-located in a new building, close to the students' Union Society. Students who met the audit team spoke highly of the support available from these services. The International Office has responded effectively to recent feedback, which indicated that support for international students could be improved. The Careers Service places a strong emphasis on the employability of students and was instrumental in formulating the

University's Graduate Skills Framework. The Service provides modules to support work placements and develop business skills and is also a partner in the ncl+ scheme, which enables students to gain employability skills through working in one of the University's services or departments.

31 Feedback to students on their assessed work is of variable quality, although an internal subject review seen by the audit team identified one discipline's approach to feedback as exemplary. The team considered that the University might wish to promote this practice more widely and noted that plans and initiatives are in place to improve the quality of student feedback. Students appreciate the additional facilities provided by the University to support the development of their academic skills. They can also make use of a personal development planning system, although its use is patchy and so the University intends to extend to undergraduate students the e-portfolio system, currently used by postgraduates.

32 Staff joining the University have an induction and are supported by a mentor. Those new to teaching in higher education must complete a Newcastle Teaching Award and can progress onto the Certificate of Advanced Studies in Academic Practice, both of which are accredited by the Higher Education Academy. Staff who met the audit team felt that the course had been well structured and helpful in developing teaching skills. A number of significant actions have been taken towards achieving the University's aim to achieve parity of esteem between research and teaching, such as the introduction of an academic job description and improvements to workload models. The team heard that there have been several promotions to reader or professor status where excellent teaching practice has been a key component of the candidates' case. The team found the steps the University has taken, as a research-intensive institution, to recognise the value of teaching through its rewards and incentives for staff, and to enhance the quality of teaching by encouraging the inclusion of research in the curriculum, to be a feature of good practice.

33 The Staff Development Unit provides an annual programme of staff development opportunities, including short workshops, individual coaching and tailored development events. There is a well-established process of performance and development review for all staff, although in one area the process had recently not been taking place. A new process for peer observation of teaching has been developed for implementation in 2009-10. At the time of the audit some staff training towards this new process had taken place, and staff spoke of the professional approach being adopted.

34 The audit found that 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.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

35 The University's stated approach to quality enhancement is to embed a culture of quality enhancement through its academic activities, organisational structures and quality management processes.

36 At the time of the audit the University was refreshing its Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Strategy with the aim of embedding innovation and best practice in learning and teaching. Progress against the strategy will be monitored through key performance indicators.

37 The University recognises and rewards excellence in teaching and provides funding to support staff undertaking learning and teaching development projects. The University plays a key role in national projects and initiatives that identify and share good practice and which lead to enhancement. The University leads two regional Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and is a partner in one other. The University also hosts the Higher Education Academy's subject centre for Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine. Four members of the University's staff have been awarded national teaching fellowships since 2005, including one from the Library Service. Celebration of achievements in learning and teaching is relatively limited and there

appeared to be no clear route whereby staff can access information on ongoing or completed learning and teaching funded projects or the work of the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

38 The role professional staff play in quality enhancement is also recognised by the University, as demonstrated by successful bids for innovation funding by professional staff. The Careers Service contributes effectively to the employability of the University's students, in particular by working with academic departments to embed employability skills in the student learning experience. The range of ways in which the University is developing the employability of all its students is identified as a feature of good practice in this audit.

39 In 2006 the University realigned its support for the quality assurance and enhancement of teaching and learning by forming the Quality in Learning and Teaching unit. The audit team found that this unit, working together with the Staff Development Unit, provides a range of opportunities for sharing good practice.

40 The audit team found that the Academic Audit Committee supports enhancement through its rolling programme of audits. The team saw some evidence of the outcomes from routine quality management processes leading to wider sharing of good practice, and this is likely to be improved though plans to shift the balance in these processes from assurance to enhancement. However, the team recommends that it is desirable for the University to strengthen its arrangements for sharing and embedding practice it has identified as exemplary.

41 Overall, the audit team found strong evidence of deliberate steps taken by the University to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. The University's commitment to parity of esteem for research and learning and teaching, and its central support and funding, provide a context which encourages innovation and enhancement from both professional and academic staff.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

42 Since the last audit the University has increased the number of collaborative arrangements. The collaborative provision register reported around 600 students across 11 partnerships, five of which are overseas. A further six new partnerships (including two overseas) were yet to recruit students at the time of the audit.

43 The fit between the University's overall strategy and vision and its set of partnerships was not apparent to the audit team, and the types of arrangement suggested a reactive approach. However, the University's policy and procedures for the quality assurance of collaborative provision are clear and regularly updated and in general appropriately reflect the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

44 In addition to the collaborative provision arrangements noted in the institution's collaborative provision register, there is a joint venture with a private provider known as INTO Newcastle. This arrangement includes undergraduate credit-bearing diploma courses in business and computing, the completion of which guarantees direct second-year entry to relevant University honours degrees. The audit team formed the view that this venture clearly falls within the University's definition of collaborative provision. Elsewhere the team heard some confusion from staff about what was covered by the University's definition of collaborative provision.

45 Partnerships are formalised through a partner approval process, involving scrutiny by the University committee responsible for collaborative provision and a recommendation to the relevant member of the senior management team about whether to proceed with the partnership. Partnership approvals seen by the audit team generally indicated that this process was appropriately managed.

46 Collaborative programmes are approved through the standard approval process, but there is an additional initial approval stage at faculty level. The quality and standards of collaborative programmes are monitored through the standard external examining, annual monitoring and periodic review arrangements as described in Section 2 (see paragraphs 10 to 15). In the case of INTO Newcastle programmes, which fall outside the three faculties, reports from these processes are dealt with by a non-faculty teaching and learning committee. The audit team found in annual monitoring reports some variability in approach, but concluded overall that programme approval, monitoring and review were occurring in an appropriate manner.

47 The audit team found that the University's arrangements for ensuring that collaborative provision students play a role in quality assurance were not clear, nor were responsibilities for checking the accuracy of published information. The team found evidence that, in some cases, information provided to students by partner institutions was at variance with that published by the University.

48 The University intends to develop the number and types of collaborative provision in order to diversify the routes into its programmes for students. The audit team identified some areas of the University's management of collaborative provision that could be improved and therefore recommends advisable that the University strengthens its oversight of collaborative provision.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

49 Postgraduate research programmes are managed within a robust framework and responsibilities for assuring the academic quality and standards of postgraduate research degrees are clear. To facilitate even more detailed consideration of these matters a new subcommittee was recently formed, but it was too early for the audit team to assess the effectiveness of this new arrangement. The University coordinates the overall strategic direction of research and a strong research environment is offered across all three faculties.

50 The processes of selection, admission and induction of students are governed by a policy and guidance on them is given in training for research supervisors as well as in a handbook for research students and supervisors. The audit team found that these processes were generally operating effectively.

51 To ensure that an appropriate level of support is available, research students are allocated to a supervisory team, rather than a single supervisor. The University ensures that supervisors' workloads are manageable and training for the role is provided; initial training is mandatory for staff new to the role, while update training is encouraged but optional for established supervisors. Students are made aware of how to appeal to the University if they are dissatisfied with their supervision.

52 To support students' progress on their programmes the University requires regular structured interaction between research students and their supervisory teams. These meetings are recorded in the student's research training portfolio. Annual progress reports are also compiled for each student, and satisfactory completion of these is monitored at the institutional level. The University has revised its fees for students at the writing-up stage in an effort to improve submission and completion rates.

53 The University has effective arrangements for developing the skills of its postgraduate research students. Training in transferable and specific skills for research students is overseen and coordinated centrally. Students record the development of their skills in their research training portfolio. For research students who teach, training is obligatory and students may also take an accredited teacher training qualification. Postgraduate research students also benefit from high-quality, well-directed careers support.

54 Assessment arrangements for postgraduate research students are described in a University handbook for examiners. The arrangements for the handling of external examiners' reports on research degrees have recently been strengthened. The audit team found the arrangements for the assessment of postgraduate research students to be effective.

55 The University participates in two external surveys that gather the opinions of postgraduate research students, and results indicate a generally high level of satisfaction among students. Results from the surveys are analysed in detail at faculty and university level and responded to effectively.

56 Students can also provide feedback to the University through their representation on faculty-graduate school committees and staff-student committees, although the audit team heard from students some lack of awareness about the identity of their faculty-level representative, reflecting some similar issues among students on taught programmes. The University was intending to address variation that had been identified in its representation practices as part of forthcoming wider revisions to student representation.

57 The processes for making complaints and appeals are clearly described in a handbook for research students and research supervisors, and the audit team saw evidence of appropriate reporting and management of complaints and appeals.

58 Overall, the audit team found that the University has a sound infrastructure in place to ensure satisfactory arrangements for postgraduate research students. Action has been taken or is in hand following the special review of research degree programmes in 2006. The University's arrangements meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Section 7: Published information

59 An information strategy sets out the University's commitment to ensuring the accuracy and completeness of published information. In turn, responsibilities are clearly located for producing and verifying the accuracy of different types of information, whether published internally or externally, via electronic or hard copy format.

60 The University makes available the information required by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Programme specifications are publicly available from the University's website. A wide range of useful information is provided for prospective and current students. Programme handbooks are clear and comprehensive. A student services portal, launched in 2008, brings together a range of information for students, such as links to timetables and examination schedules.

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

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

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

- the steps the University has taken, as a research-intensive institution, to recognise the value of teaching through its rewards and incentives for staff, and to enhance the quality of teaching by encouraging the inclusion of research in the curriculum (paragraphs 25, 32, 41)
- the range of ways in which the University is developing the employability of all of its students (paragraphs 30, 38, 53).

Recommendations for action

63 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- review the effectiveness of Internal Subject Review as a means of reporting on the consistency of local implementation of University policies (paragraph 22)
- give high priority to the development and implementation of a revised system for personal tutoring (paragraph 29)
- strengthen the oversight of collaborative provision (paragraph 48).

64 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- extend, as widely as possible, opportunities for students to benefit from the University's investment in learning technology (paragraph 26)
- strengthen arrangements for sharing and embedding practice that the University has identified as exemplary (paragraphs 37, 40).

Appendix

The University of Newcastle upon Tyne's response to the Institutional audit report

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

The University welcomes the recognition by the auditors of two features of good practice which are wide-ranging and at the heart of both our Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Strategy, and more broadly, our strategic vision as an institution, namely:

- the range of ways in which the University is developing the employability of all of its students
- the steps the University has taken, as a research-intensive institution, to recognise the value of teaching through its rewards and incentives for staff, and to enhance the quality of teaching by encouraging the inclusion of research in the curriculum.

The University is also encouraged by the audit team's recognition that students are very positive about their learning experience and the opportunities and facilities made available to them, of aspects of staff support and staff development, of the high quality of learning resources, and of the quality of the University's professional services (particularly those providing mechanisms to support students' acquisition of academic skills).

The University will give careful consideration to the audit team's direct recommendations and other suggestions for improvement in order to maintain the highest standards and quality of learning opportunities. Actions that will address the auditors' recommendations to review the effectiveness of Internal Subject Review as a means of reporting on the consistency of local implementation of University policies, and to give a high priority to the development of a revised system for personal tutoring, have already been agreed. An internal review of collaborative provision policy, designed to strengthen institutional oversight of collaborative arrangements, is currently taking place. The two remaining recommendations are in areas that, as part of the University's commitment to continuous improvement, we had already identified for ourselves as requiring action, and are immensely useful to us in pursuing those agenda.

The University welcomes the positive outcome of the audit and its verdict of confidence in our provision. This, taken together with other indicators such as student satisfaction, excellent student employability, high student retention and research postgraduate submission and completion rates, will underpin our continuing approach to supporting a rich student experience and the delivery of high-quality teaching.

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