



Institutional audit

University of Plymouth

DECEMBER 2009



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ISBN 978 1 84979 102 1

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

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) 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 Plymouth (the University) from 7 to 11 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 a sample of its collaborative partners 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. As part of the hybrid audit process, the University's collaborative arrangements fall within the scope of this audit. The team visited two of the University's partner organisations in the UK where it met with staff and students, and conducted meetings with staff and students.

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 Plymouth 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.

In addition to the two judgements above, the audit team also produced commentaries on the University's arrangements for quality enhancement, collaborative provision, postgraduate research students and published information. These can be found in the report.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

While the Teaching and Learning Strategy, the changes to the Strategic Plan and the work of the Quality Network demonstrate systematic enhancement activity, there was no widespread understanding of how enhancement was articulated and developed throughout the University.

Postgraduate research students

Completion rates have declined when compared to national data and while trends for submission by full-time postgraduate research students have stabilised, those from part-time research students have increased above the recommended norm. The arrangements for postgraduate research students largely reflect 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*, although the audit team advised that further work needs to be done.

Published information

The audit team found that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University of Plymouth 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 continuing development of the role of the Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning) has been central to the dissemination of good practice and the development of a coherent approach to the quality of the provision and of the security of academic standards
- the way in which the work of the Higher Education Learning Partnership (HELP) CETL had contributed to and enhanced the functions of University of Plymouth Colleges.

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- ensure that the University's processes for the oversight and management of collaborative arrangements are consistently applied
- develop an institutional response to postgraduate research student progression and completion rates and feedback, and strengthen the relationship of the Graduate School with the faculties and the Quality Support Unit to facilitate institutional oversight of the postgraduate research student experience.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- give consideration to the greater involvement of student representation in the University's formal quality assurance processes.

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 while the University of Plymouth 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, further work will be required regarding the *Code of practice*.

Report

1 An Institutional audit of the University of Plymouth (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 07 December 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 Emeritus Professor Andy Cobb, Professor Alan Jago, Mrs Sandra Middleton, Dr Ann Read and Dr Jon Scott, auditors, and Ms Jenny Lyon, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mr Derek Greenaway, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The University of Plymouth (the University), which was awarded University title in 1992, developed through the merger of geographically dispersed institutions: it has recently completed a programme of relocating its provision to the main campus in Plymouth.

4 At the time of the audit, the University had 28,261 undergraduate students, 4,026 taught postgraduate students and 528 postgraduate research students.

5 The academic structure of the University was reorganised in August 2009 into six discipline-based faculties: Arts, Education, Health, Plymouth Business School, Science and Technology, and the College of Medicine and Dentistry. In addition, institutional collaborative partnerships with regional educational providers are organised as a faculty, University of Plymouth Colleges (UPC).

6 The University's vision articulated in its Strategic Plan is 'To be *the* enterprise University'. The University expresses its mission as: 'Our enterprising approach will further develop our reputation as a world-leading University and our enterprise culture will deliver sustained innovation and international impact. We will use the knowledge we create to transform lives. We will achieve this through world-class research, excellence in teaching and learning, and through our partnerships and collaborations. We will maintain our commitment to driving social inclusion, economic prosperity, and environmental quality in our local community and beyond'.

7 The University's collaborative arrangements fall within the scope of this audit. While the large majority of its collaborations are within the region, the University is committed to finding ways to increase the number of international collaborations.

8 The University was subject to an Institutional audit, a collaborative audit and an overseas audit in the period 2005 to 2009, in all cases the teams found that broad confidence could be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards, and where appropriate, with an appropriate regard for the precepts of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA. In all audits the teams found examples of good practice as well some recommendations for action.

9 The recommendations arising from the audits have resulted in a number of developments to address the issues identified. From the evidence presented, the current audit team was able to confirm that the University had addressed all of the recommendations in an appropriate manner.

10 The University carried out a major strategic review in 2008. The resulting academic structure, outlined in paragraph 5 above, was instituted in August 2009 with faculty deans assuming corporate responsibilities as well as being accountable for leading and managing their faculty, with heads of school assuming the role of associate deans with cross-faculty responsibilities.

11 Other significant developments include: the adoption of its enterprise vision in spring 2008 and the development of a new Strategic Plan launched in autumn 2009. Concurrently, the

Teaching and Learning Strategy was also reviewed, and underpinning strategies such as those for internationalisation, research and innovation and human resources were developed or updated.

12 Since 2005 the University has been the location for four Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and contributes to a further such Centre in partnership. In 2007 the University received funding for a Centre of Excellence in Teacher Training. In addition, the University now hosts three national centres in specific subject areas: the National Subject Centre for Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, the National Centre for Innovation in Mathematics Teaching and The Royal Statistical Society Centre for Statistical Education.

13 The Vice-Chancellor and the senior management team have managerial and leadership responsibility for the meeting of academic and other objectives within the University. Ultimate responsibility for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities resides with the Vice-Chancellor, with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor overseeing arrangements for the quality assurance processes and procedures as they relate to the student experience.

14 Academic Board is responsible for academic planning, and the alignment of academic aspirations with the corporate resource. Its remit also includes the development, implementation and monitoring of the systems which assure the quality of teaching, learning and research, the maintenance of academic standards and the enhancement of the student experience. To fulfil these obligations, it is supported by six subcommittees, which include Teaching and Learning, and Academic Development.

15 The University's framework for the delivery of its educational provision is articulated in the Teaching and Learning Strategy, with institutional oversight of strategy residing with the Directorate of Teaching and Learning. The Directorate of Teaching and Learning provides a framework within which Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning) share experiences and further develop the student experience. They work closely with Quality Support and play a key role in developing consistent good practice across the faculties and in the deliberative structures of the University through their memberships of institutional and faculty committees. Following discussions with staff and the review of a range of relevant documentation, the audit team formed the view that the continuing development of the role of the Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning) has been central to the dissemination of good practice and the development of a coherent approach to the management of the quality of the provision and of the security of academic standards, and is a feature of good practice.

16 The deans of faculty are responsible for ensuring that there are adequate resources available to meet the needs of the Teaching and Learning provision. They provide leadership in academic quality and standards and, through their oversight of the faculty, compliance with the implementation of quality assurance arrangements.

17 The Faculty Business Manager has overarching responsibility for all professional services delivered within the faculty. The Faculty Quality Unit reports directly to the Faculty Registrar, who in turn reports directly to the Faculty Business Manager. There is further delegation to Heads of School in relation to teaching and learning, approval and review, external accreditation, QAA audit and approving research degree programmes.

18 The Graduate School is responsible for the quality assurance of research degree provision and the development of associated policies and procedures. The quality assurance of research degree proposals and the associated monitoring of progress is the responsibility of the Faculty Boards, supported by the Graduate School. The University Graduate Committee, in conjunction with faculty research committees, oversees the quality of the research degree process from proposal, research training and registration to completion. It also monitors the quality of supervision and examination arrangements.

19 The audit team concluded that the University's deliberative and executive structure provides an effective and suitable framework for the institutional management of academic

standards and the quality of the learning opportunities. Most roles are clearly articulated and understood by the holders and there are appropriately detailed terms of reference and reporting lines for committees at both institutional and faculty level.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

20 Academic Development Committee is responsible to Academic Board for initial evaluation of new programme proposals regarding their alignment with faculty and institutional priorities, market demand and resource issues. Subsequent review of the full proposal is by a panel of the Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee, including external peers, and is normally chaired by an Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) outside the faculty. The programme approval documentation includes the programme specification and the team was able to confirm these are referenced against subject benchmarks and *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), published by QAA.

21 Any conditions to be met before final approval, and longer term recommendations, are set out in the approval report. Satisfactory resolution of the conditions is normally signed off by the chair of the Approval Meeting and reported to the Faculty Board and Teaching and Learning Committee, though the team learnt that the subject specific conditions/recommendations is sometimes signed off by the Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) of the proposing faculty.

22 The University of Plymouth Colleges (UPC) Faculty has established two additional structures concerned with managing the quality of the student experience and academic standards in its collaborative arrangements: Joint Boards of Studies and subject fora. The approval process for programmes within University of Plymouth Colleges is initiated with the initial proposal being considered by the Joint Boards of Studies. The proposals are then referred to the Academic Development Committee to consider resource and strategic implications, as for all other programmes of study leading to a University of Plymouth award. A two-stage panel approval process is then undertaken, which includes external input and a recommendation defining the collaboration in accordance with the University's typology of the collaboration, which is then entered in the University's Register of Collaborative Provision.

23 Faculties are authorised to approve all changes to programmes except those involving exceptions to regulations, changes to award title and changes affecting students' programmes in the current academic year or progression routes from Foundation Degrees. Faculty approval requires consideration by the Programme Committees of the revised programme documentation and the rationale for the changes and external scrutiny, normally by an external examiner. The Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) is charged with determining whether the new programme is sufficiently close to its predecessor to be approved at faculty level or if a full programme approval is required.

24 Programme Monitoring is undertaken annually and underpinned by a more comprehensive review every three years. Annual Programme Monitoring involves review of core data, including student progression and completion statistics, external examiners' reports and responses, student feedback and a progress report on the previous year's action plan. The Annual Programme Monitoring data are considered by the Programme Committee, which is attended by student representatives, and the minutes include an action plan along with any aspects of good practice. The Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) prepares an overview report of the Annual Programme Monitoring for Faculty Board, which considers any recommendations for action at faculty level and collates examples of good practice for consideration at Teaching and Learning Committee. The team considers that these reports are comprehensive and provide effective, evaluative overviews of the monitoring reports.

25 All programmes are subject to a five-yearly review to consider the coherence and relevance of the programme portfolio, the academic standards and student achievement, the quality of the student learning experience and opportunities for enhancement. The review

panel is chaired by a representative from outside the faculty and includes at least one external adviser. The panels do not include student representation but current students and alumni are interviewed, as are academic and professional services staff and employers. In response to the panel's report, the programme teams are required to produce an action plan that is approved by the Dean. Monitoring of implementation subsequently forms part of the Annual Programme Monitoring to ensure that Teaching and Learning Committee is fully informed.

26 Operational changes are being piloted for 2009-10, and the audit team was informed that these will include allocation of specific schedules of meetings to enable more consideration of strategic issues such as enhancement.

27 The audit team was able to conclude that the institution's processes for programme approval, annual monitoring and review contribute effectively to the assurance of academic standards and are carried out in accordance with the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review*.

28 The University identifies a central role for external examiners in assuring standards and ensuring that student achievement is assessed against the intended learning outcomes and in line with the Assessment Policy. External examiners are appointed for all programmes leading to an award of the University, including those delivered by partner institutions, and take oversight of all assessments contributing to students' final awards.

29 The University has published guidelines for the appointment of external examiners, including specific exclusion criteria. In the case of UPC Faculty, external examiners for cognate Foundation Degrees may be appointed across partner colleges to contribute to assuring consistency. Nominations of new external examiners are considered by the faculty boards with final approval by the External Examiners' Sub-Committee and report to the Academic Board.

30 New examiners are provided with an induction pack and access to an external examiners' website with online documentation: examiners have commented positively on this provision. In addition, UPC Faculty operates a mentor system for inexperienced examiners and holds an annual conference providing an opportunity for generic briefings and also subject-based discussions. In response to the positive feedback, the University plans to hold an annual conference for newly appointed external examiners.

31 The external examiners' reports are considered by the Programme Committees through the Annual Programme Monitoring process. Action plans are drawn up in response, along with updates on the implementation of the previous year's plan. Quality Support prepares an overview report for the Academic Regulations Sub-Committee with recommendations being forwarded to Teaching and Learning Committee. In University of Plymouth Colleges Faculty the Assessment Manager produces a summary report in relation to UPC Faculty issues. The Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning) are charged with monitoring the responses from their respective faculties and the audit team noted that recent reports included positive comments regarding receipt of responses to previous reports and also regarding the overview report.

32 Teaching and Learning Committee agreed that the external examiners' reports should be shared with the student representatives and the audit team was able to confirm that this normally occurs as part of the Annual Programme Monitoring reviews.

33 The audit team was able to conclude that the University operates a robust system for collecting and responding to external examiners' reports in line with the guidelines of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*.

34 The University considers external reference points to be an important aspect of its framework for quality assurance. This includes the use of external examiners, external expert opinion in programme design and review, close working relationships with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, and clear and relevant use of the Academic Infrastructure published by

QAA. The University has made sure that the requirements of the FHEQ and the Code of practice are incorporated into the relevant parts of its quality assurance framework. It is also clear that the University has put in place mechanisms which permit it to keep up to date and respond appropriately to any changes to the Academic Infrastructure. It has also put in place methods for dealing with other external reference points.

35 The audit team concluded that the University was making careful and consistent use of those elements of the Academic Infrastructure relevant to its stewardship of academic standards and the management of the quality of learning opportunities.

36 In 2007, the University revised its Assessment Policy, taking account of the 2005 QAA Institutional audit and the 2006 revision of the *Code of practice, Section 6: Assessment of students*. This Assessment Policy sets out nine principles of assessment, including validity, reliability and equity as well as the provision of formative and summative elements. The Policy is underpinned by a code of practice on marking that sets out procedures for ensuring the reliability of assessment evaluation. The audit team noted that the quality assurance procedures, such as programme approval, are referenced against the assessment policies and external examiners confirm the implementation of the Assessment Policy.

37 The University's Corporate Information System is linked into the student administration system and provides online access to summary data at programme, school and institutional levels regarding, inter alia, admissions, retention, progression and graduate destinations. The Corporate Information System provides the information underpinning the quality assurance processes, such as the Annual Programme Monitoring and periodic reviews. The audit team noted some concerns, expressed in the Annual Programme Monitoring reviews, regarding the reliability of the Corporate Information System data compared with locally-held records and learnt that the University has agreed the appointment of a systems analyst to ensure the reliability of the data provided centrally. The team considered that the University makes effective use of the core management information data but that there is capacity for more critical evaluation and analysis of the information at faculty level (see paragraph 72).

38 The audit team was informed that the University is developing its current key performance indicators over the next three years, with a wide-ranging focus derived from the 2009 Strategic Plan, including employability, social enterprise, value-added and civic engagement.

39 The audit team concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

40 The audit team found clear evidence of widespread engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and other relevant external reference points which inform the University's management of the quality of learning opportunities. The University's approval and review processes have the Academic Infrastructure as a key reference point. It was also apparent to the team that the *Code of practice* and any changes made to it are informing discussion and policy within the institution at all levels.

41 The University engages with a wide range of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies which provide important external benchmarks for a number of discipline areas. This engagement is effective in ensuring that relevant professional standards, curricula and requirements inform programmes of study.

42 The audit team concluded that the University was making careful and consistent use of those elements of the Academic Infrastructure and external reference points relevant to ensuring the maintenance and enhancement of the quality of the students' learning opportunities.

- 43 The initial consideration by Academic Development Committee of new programme proposals involves evaluation of market demand both from student and employer perspectives and of the resource needs of the new programme, such as library and information and communication technology (ICT) needs. The main approval event further reflects on the curriculum design and resourcing needs of the programme. The Annual Programme Monitoring process affords an opportunity for identifying the development of learning opportunities, including feedback from students and from programme teams, and areas of good practice which, through the summary reports from the Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning), are collectively considered at faculty level and contribute to the action plans. Institutional-level issues are taken forward to Teaching and Learning Committee. Periodic review is a further process that enables reflection on learning opportunities and their management at programme, faculty and institutional levels. This is effected through consideration, inter alia, of the self-evaluation document drafted by the programme team. These documents, prepared by the programme teams, form the basis of the periodic review process.
- 44 The audit team was able to confirm that the University makes effective use of the processes of programme approval, monitoring and review to assure the provision of learning opportunities in existing and proposed programmes.
- 45 The University acquires feedback from students at all levels through module reviews, the Student Perception Questionnaire and the National Student Survey. The Student Perception Questionnaire has been revised to align it with the National Student Survey and is provided online in a global format as well as sub-divided by faculty programme and stage. It additionally provides valuable data across University of Plymouth Colleges in enabling direct comparison of student perceptions of comparable provision delivered in different partner colleges, with consideration and specific actions being agreed at the Joint Board of Studies.
- 46 The statistical data produced by Corporate Information Systems, the Student Perception Questionnaire and National Student Survey are evaluated against university-wide benchmarks and these are reported through the quality procedures such as the Annual Programme Monitoring, along with the consolidated faculty summary reports and periodic reviews. The audit team noted that evaluations of this data are used effectively to inform the action plans regarding learning opportunities at programme and faculty levels. At institutional level, Quality Support prepares over-arching reports for Teaching and Learning Committee that include trend overviews and updates on implementation of the previous years' action plans and which result in further specific actions to enhance the learning opportunities. Feedback information regarding employability is analysed from the Higher Education Statistics Agency's (HESA) Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education data at school and institutional level and is linked into the University's employability theme. Information and Learning Services also monitor and respond to the statistical data from student feedback, including local feedback in relation to IT and library provision.
- 47 Student representatives are members of the committees that review programmes annually, but they do not participate as panel members in other quality processes such as programme approval or periodic review panels. At the University level, Students' Union officers sit on all the major academic committees, have access to the Vice-Chancellor, and have regular meetings with the Dean of Students who acts as a student advocate within the senior management team. In their briefing document the University identified a number of developments prompted by student feedback mechanisms, but the students were less clear about the impact of their feedback.
- 48 Student engagement mechanisms vary considerably between courses and partners. The recruitment of sufficient student representatives on programme committees and faculty boards is an issue, leaving some areas under represented and students unsure who is representing them.
- 49 While students were positive about their relationship with the University there was variability in terms of student engagement with the various quality processes and the students expressed concern about their effectiveness in the committee structure. The audit team concluded that there is the potential to improve the quality of learning opportunities by greater and more

consistent involvement of students in the University's quality processes and decision making. Therefore, the team recommends that it is desirable that the University give consideration to the greater involvement of student representation in the University's formal quality assurance processes.

50 The University is committed to a mutually beneficial link between teaching and research, citing it as one of the core values defining the culture of the University; it is identified as a key theme in the Teaching and Learning Strategy. The University sees research-informed teaching as being influenced by discipline and pedagogic research/professional practice along with the opportunity for students to learn about, acquire and practice research skills. As part of the Learning and Teaching in Higher Education programme for new academic staff, the University also offers an advanced practitioner module which examines the links between research and teaching. The University has a strong track record in attracting funding for teaching and learning (four Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, 12 National Teaching Fellows, one Higher Education Academy subject centre and two national centres) and used its Teaching Quality Enhancement Funding to sponsor projects designed to make more use of research in the curriculum. Students confirmed that their programmes were informed by the latest research and the curriculum helped them develop research skills.

51 The audit team agreed that the University's approach to linking research and scholarly activities with learning opportunities makes an effective contribution to its management of the quality of the students' learning opportunities.

52 The University has a successful track record of delivering programmes using a wide range of pedagogical approaches to a diverse range of students. Approximately 36 per cent of the University's students are part-time and over 12,000 students annually engage in some form of work-based or placement learning. Consequently, the University has invested heavily in its student portal as a means of communication and providing services to its students, including technology enhanced learning opportunities.

53 The University has also been one of the pathfinder pilot institutions for two-year degree programmes. Students take established modules from three year programmes in the autumn and spring terms but utilise part of the four-month summer break for intensive short courses and project work. The University has developed a separate regulatory framework for two-year degrees utilising the same quality processes and assessment regulations as the three-year variants. A number of issues have been identified and the University has been proactive in developing comprehensive action plans to address these.

54 Considerable investment has been made in the development and refurbishment of the estate, including closing several campuses and moving academic schools to Plymouth. While not without problems, most issues with the moves have now been resolved and students report being satisfied with access to specialist equipment and facilities.

55 Substantial investment has also been made in ICT and specialist staff to harness and exploit new technologies to enhance the teaching and learning experience. The information technology strategy paints a very clear picture of a technology enhanced learning environment for campus and non-campus based students including all services, information and teaching materials being available remotely, greater use of collaborative working tools (including video conferencing), and the increased use of mobile devices. With the support of the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and funding from the Joint Information Systems Committee the University has been piloting these technologies.

56 Students who met the audit team expressed satisfaction with the quality and accessibility of resources. Library and information technology facilities were rated as good, with dedicated information technology support available if needed. The study skills materials and the student portal were seen as very useful.

57 On the basis of the information provided and talking with staff and students, the audit team found that the University's arrangements for the provision, allocation and management of learning resources were making an effective contribution to maintaining the quality of the student learning opportunities.

58 The University's admissions policy is aligned with the *Code of practice* and is clear and comprehensive. The University accepts all relevant qualifications, has committed to taking the 16 to 19 diploma, and has a strong track record in recruiting and supporting students with disabilities. Students seen by the audit team were satisfied with the admissions process.

59 The University is committed to sustaining a diverse and multi-cultural student body and offers a comprehensive service for overseas students through its International Student Advisory Service, including an orientation programme, hall accommodation and free pre-session and in-session language courses.

60 To maintain and develop widening participation is a key theme in the Teaching and Learning strategy and the University targets its bursaries at low income families and closely monitors its widening participation Key Performance Indicators. The University undertakes a number of activities to actively encourage participation from under-represented groups in the region.

61 The audit team formed the view that there was fair, effective and consistent implementation of the admissions policy.

62 At school level, support for students is provided through the tutorial system, which has recently been subject to an internal audit. The University is aware of some of the problems with the implementation of the current system and the audit team recognised that the University was committed to strengthening the provision where necessary. Students with whom the team met were very positive about the way they were supported both within the schools and by the institution-wide student services. The University provides a wide range of specialist services. These include the development of student skills through the Skills Plus policy, part of which is the development of employability and career management skills. There is also a policy to develop personal development planning through the use of PebblePad across the whole institution. The University is very aware of its diverse student population and has put in place a number of policies to make sure the level of support given matches their different needs. In particular these include well-developed policies for students with disabilities through the work of Disability ASSIST. As an established assessment centre, the University offers independent needs assessments and advice for students referred under the Disabled Students' Allowances scheme throughout the South West.

63 These policies and developments contributed to the audit team's assessment that the arrangements for student support are both relevant and effective.

64 The University has a comprehensive set of staff development policies, procedures and guidance covering staff appointment, induction, appraisal and promotion. It also offers extensive staff development opportunities designed to meet the needs of different groups of staff at various levels and experience within the organisation.

65 The Higher Education Academy-accredited course, Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, is mandatory for all full-time staff new to teaching, and participants can choose their options, including an option on 'Higher Education in the Further Education Context', which is of particular interest to staff in partner institutions. The University also runs a General Teaching Associates course aimed at part-time lecturers and research students.

66 Generic training, focusing on skills development, management and leadership is available across the University with a particular emphasis on 'enterprise-enabling leadership'. Staff development focused on teaching and learning is also widely available and provided by the Educational Development and Technology-Enhanced Learning teams within the Teaching

and Learning Directorate, supported by faculty-based learning technologists and the associate deans (Teaching and Learning). The Teaching and Learning Directorate provides a wide range of activities and materials including good practice guides, online courses, mentoring, workshops and conferences.

67 The University has a clearly articulated and supported induction and probation policy for all staff. The generic policy for 'peer review of activities that support learning and assessment' determines the threshold requirements for review and leaves the faculties free to develop locally-devised procedures to support their discipline mix. All staff are expected to participate in the annual appraisal scheme which reviews individual performance, identifies personal development needs and sets objectives aligned to the University Strategic Plan. The University has also recently updated its academic promotion criteria to facilitate career progression to professorial level on the basis of 'outstanding achievements in teaching and learning'.

68 Staff are generally very positive about the level of support provided. A review of a sample of University and Faculty committee agendas suggests little formal review or evaluation of the effectiveness of staff support mechanisms occurs, however, and the University might like to consider this matter further.

69 The audit team concluded that confidence can 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

70 The University states that it is focused on the creation of an environment and ethos which will encourage the enhancement of learning and that the review of the Strategic Plan provided the opportunity for the incorporation of enhancement within the institution's mission and key institutional strategies rather than by developing a separate enhancement agenda. The University states that 'it does not have a standard definition of good practice as it considers that good practice depends upon context', thus providing the faculties with the freedom to identify their own interpretation.

71 The University cites the work of the five Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, one of which is shared with other institutions, as contributing to the enhancement agenda by providing a network of enhancement activities, through the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning Steering Group, and representing good practice. Individual examples of projects undertaken to enhance the student experience arising from the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and other University initiatives were presented to the audit team which demonstrated areas of predominantly local enhancement which were innovative and potentially useful to a wider audience. There were individual examples of projects and developments such as Labplus, the Critical Thinking Study Guide, the mobile learning project and the University's own sustainability policy and action plan which clearly demonstrate that there are specific areas where the work has resulted in enhanced practice and the potential for further developments. The team agreed that the way in which the work of the Higher Education Learning Partnership Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning had contributed to and enhanced the functions of the University of Plymouth Colleges is an example of good practice. The team formed the view that this example of good practice could inform the University's efforts to further embed the work of other Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

72 The students' views of their learning experience are considered essential to the enhancement process and the University captures these not only via the Student Perception Questionnaire and the National Student Survey but also through student participation in committees at all levels of the institution. The audit team noted that the engagement of students with these committees varied across the institution, thus reducing the efficacy of student participation and would encourage the University to consider how to improve the student

engagement in committees, an issue of which it is already aware. In addition, there is direct liaison between senior members of the University and the Students' Union. The University's Quality Assurance Handbook sets out the responsibilities of programme teams in terms of the evidence base and the monitoring process, which facilitates the capture of examples of good practice and enhancement at the local level. The evidence base also draws upon retention and student outcomes, external examiners' reports and reflections abstracted from the annual monitoring process. The new system of internal audits, carried out by an external body, also provide evidence dependent upon the audit brief. However, the University does not appear to analyse the data it collects, for example admissions, retention, progression and graduate destinations, through the means mentioned (see also paragraph 37). The University also refers to the 'professional judgement of staff' in evaluating enhancement and also cites peer review to be an integral part of the approach to teaching quality enhancement using faculty or school designed procedures.

73 The University has recently reviewed its promotion criteria for Senior Lecturer, Reader and Professor to facilitate career progression through these levels on the basis of outstanding achievements in teaching and learning.

74 The Quality Network has held a series of programme meetings on quality enhancement with external and internal speakers; the participants were drawn from across the University. The audit team found that the Teaching and Learning Strategy and the changes to the Strategic Plan demonstrate systematic enhancement activity. However, in discussions with staff and students, the team was unable to discern an institution-wide approach as there was no widespread understanding of how enhancement was articulated and developed throughout the University.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

75 The University has a wide ranging set of collaborative arrangements. It sees collaborative provision as an integral part of the University's activities, key to its mission, with important synergies across the institution.

76 The majority of its arrangements are managed through University of Plymouth Colleges, a faculty within the University, which was set up six years ago to reinforce the extent to which regional collaboration was central to the University's mission. In addition there is a wide range of other collaborative arrangements managed for academic and strategic reasons in the other faculties.

77 The University's approach to managing the quality of its collaborative provision has been designed to allow sufficient appropriate flexibility for the variety of provision, while ensuring consistency with the external academic framework. The University has produced a detailed typology of partnerships and programmes which clearly outlines the differing roles and responsibilities of faculties and partners in all the quality assurance processes.

78 The Academic Development Committee enables the University to maintain oversight of programme development, programme closure and new partnerships across the whole institution. The audit team was able to confirm that the Committee enabled the University to have an oversight of its collaborative provision although, while the strategic rationale for the University of Plymouth Colleges collaborations was articulated in meetings with the team, the overall strategy for collaboration was less discernible.

79 External reference points are used in the same way for collaborative programmes as for the rest of its provision. Owing to the nature of some of the collaborative programmes particular refinements have been introduced to allow for the type of programme.

80 The University has fully aligned the approval, monitoring and review of quality across all its provision. This means that in all the faculties the collaborative programmes are treated in the same way as all other programmes. The audit team saw ample evidence that this was the case.

However, in both the two non University of Plymouth Colleges collaborations investigated by the team as part of the hybrid audit methodology, some issues were identified in relation to the management of formal legal agreements and the application of policy regarding the assessment of teaching staff training needs following appointment. In one arrangement there were also issues relating to the monitoring of publicity materials. As a consequence, the team formed the view that it is advisable for the University to ensure that its processes for the oversight and management of collaborative arrangements are consistently applied.

81 The audit team agreed that the thoroughness and consistency of the way in which University of Plymouth Colleges Faculty applied the University's policies and processes were sound and that its non University of Plymouth Colleges collaborations could benefit from adopting similar practices.

82 Partners are required to have equivalent forms of student representation as those provided in the University itself. Students that the audit team met, from a representative sample of collaborative provision arrangements including non University of Plymouth Colleges collaborations, confirmed that there were mechanisms in place to ensure their voice was heard and that note was taken of their views and appropriate action was taken whenever possible.

83 The management and organisation of the University of Plymouth Colleges Faculty, and in particular its enhancement functions, are areas of good practice (see paragraph 71). This is demonstrated by the way in which it has incorporated the work of the Higher Education Learning Partnerships Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. This has taken several forms and has strengthened the ways in which higher education is supported in further education colleges.

84 While the staff support within University of Plymouth Colleges Faculty was well developed and systematically applied with access to the staff portal, a system of University registered teachers and an active Continuing Professional Development section, the availability of staff development and its consistent application to other partners in the other faculties was less clearly defined.

85 The University has a very large and diverse set of arrangements for collaborative provision. This provision is a very important part of the University's overall mission and is reflected in the recently approved Teaching and Learning Strategy. In view of its scale and importance, the University has developed strong policies to support collaborative activity. This is seen in particular in the development of University of Plymouth Colleges, which provides clear management of the regional provision in its 18 partners. The audit team came to the view that the management of the University's overall collaborative provision could benefit by adopting the thoroughness and consistency in the way which University of Plymouth Colleges applies the University's policies and processes.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

86 Graduate School was established in 2003, and is responsible for the quality assurance of research degree provision and policy development. This includes a comprehensive Logbook and skills programme for postgraduate research students, and recently updated regulations for all research degrees. The Research Degrees Handbook governs all research degree programmes, in conjunction with University and faculty procedures. The Graduate School has executive responsibility for postgraduate research students and operates through a central office which administers postgraduate research provision for each faculty. Following a recent review, research administration will become more centralised in 2010-11 to reduce duplication and to standardise admissions procedures.

87 The current headcount for postgraduate research students in 2009-10 is 528, distributed in five faculties. There are plans to double the numbers of postgraduate researchers by 2015. The introduction in 2008 of Professional Doctorates (DBA, DPA and EdD) will contribute to this expansion, as will a new Research Masters (Res M) route from 2009-10.

88 Following a positive outcome to the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, quality related research income increased from £2.3 million to £9 million. The University plans to focus quality related funds to 3* and 4* research groups, to allocate some funds for prompting new research initiatives and invest in an additional 40 postgraduate research studentships per year. The University is in the process of establishing key performance indicators for research.

89 As part of the Internationalisation Strategy, an increasing number of postgraduate research students are based at a 'PGR Node'. Currently there are 35 research students at three nodes in Zurich, Milan and Darmstadt. An agreement has been signed with Bordeaux although no students have yet been registered on this node. In each case, the Director of Studies is a member of academic staff employed at the node institution but also holds a contract and honorarium with the University. The Head of the Graduate School visits each node to provide relevant staff development. Other members of the supervisory team are academic staff based at Plymouth. All research students at the node follow the same procedures as all other research students based at Plymouth. There have also been additions to the postgraduate student nodes through the Planetary Collegium and the Network Research Group both regionally at the Schumacher College and in Munich and Rome.

90 All research active staff belong to research groups of cognate disciplines and common research interests. Postgraduate research students are assigned to the research group of their supervisory team. Each research group coordinates regular discussion and seminar sessions.

91 The Research and Innovation Committee has formulated a new Research and Innovation Strategy following the success of the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise and has debated the priority research areas for the investment of quality related funds. Research groups are being clustered to form larger, strategically coherent Research Centres or Institutes.

92 The research environment is supported by investment in infrastructure and a commitment to research-informed teaching. As a result of an increase in the numbers of staff entered into the Research Assessment Exercise, the number of postgraduate research students per full-time equivalent staff has diminished in recent years, although absolute numbers of postgraduate research students continue to grow. Faculties are encouraged to develop a research strategy to specifically target growth in numbers of postgraduate research students.

93 A comprehensive selection, admission and induction process is evident. Key features include standard procedures, regularly reviewed by the Graduate Committee; all candidates are interviewed, either face-to-face or by electronic means; admissions decisions involve at least two trained active researchers; supervisory, resource and budget arrangements are confirmed by the Dean of Faculty.

94 All postgraduate research students are required to attend an induction session, held bi-annually. An induction within the academic discipline takes place in the Faculty and within the research group. Students are encouraged to document their progress in their comprehensive Logbook and are prompted to do so by research administrators at strategic milestones. Postgraduate research students confirmed their satisfaction with these processes based on their personal experiences.

95 All postgraduate research students have at least two members of academic staff in their supervisory teams. The Director of Studies will have previous experience of supervision to completion. A supervisor from industry, a research node or a collaborative institution may also be a member of the team. An annual research plan is discussed and agreed with the Director of Studies as part of the annual monitoring process.

96 The Research Student Logbook codifies the supervisory meeting arrangements at a minimum of four formal meetings each year. The Logbook provides guidance, valuable milestones and prompts for discussion between the postgraduate research students and their supervisory teams. All new or inexperienced supervisors are required to attend the Graduate School's 'Good

Supervisory Practice' sessions. New academic staff commented on the value of the training courses for new supervisors.

97 The progress of each postgraduate research student is monitored against an agreed timetable on both a formal and informal basis. Key aspects of formal monitoring include the confirmation of project title and approach (six months); annual monitoring; confirmation of route including, where appropriate, transfer from MPhil to PhD (15 to 18 months); appointment of examiners; thesis submission and completion.

98 Each postgraduate research student undertakes an annual training needs analysis with their supervisory team and embarks on a programme of skills training. Training in research methodology focused to the specific discipline undertaken at the research group or school level. The Research Skills Development Programme is organised by the Graduate School and addresses the UK Research Councils statement on skills training for postgraduate research students. The 2009-10 programme offered over 120 sessions aiming to broaden generic and personal transferable skills of the individual, including an introduction to PebblePad, an e-portfolio. These sessions also enable postgraduates from different disciplines to network and share research experiences. Engagement by the academic staff, postgraduate research students and contract researchers with the skills programme is high.

99 The postgraduate research students met by the audit team had found the Logbook and skills training very helpful. They had also received appropriate training prior to teaching or demonstrating to undergraduates.

100 Arrangements to obtain and act upon feedback from the postgraduate research students are in place. Key features include direct communication with the supervisory team and faculty administrators; the completion of student satisfaction questionnaires after generic skills programme sessions; individual submissions to the national Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), and through the annual monitoring process. Student feedback at the institutional level is achieved through faculty level representation on Graduate Committee and on Research Degrees Committees.

101 The University has entered into Postgraduate Research Experience Survey each year since 2007. While Postgraduate Research Experience Survey outcomes are fed back to the faculties by the Graduate Committee, the team could find no evidence of any action planning in response to this student feedback, a finding confirmed during a meeting with academic and professional services staff. Academic staff met by the team were unaware of Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and of any faculty response to it. The postgraduate research students, albeit a small number, were also unaware of the process and stated that they had not had the opportunity to submit a return. In contrast to the value placed by the University of National Student Survey data, there was no evidence of the use of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey feedback within the institution.

102 Feedback at the institutional level occurs via faculty representation on Graduate Committee, with each faculty asked to present to the March meeting an overview report on research student progress. Timings have been variable, with one faculty reporting 2008-09 information as late as November 2009. Nonetheless, the audit team noted that 96 per cent of the annual monitoring of the postgraduate research students had met the March 2009 deadline. This forum also provides an opportunity to identify and act upon cross-faculty issues.

103 The award of higher degrees is conferred by the Graduate Committee, a subcommittee of Academic Board.

104 The supervisory team nominates internal and external examiners and curricula vitae are scrutinised at faculty level, following guidance published in the Research Degrees Handbook. Detailed guidelines regarding the examination process and the responsibilities of all taking part are issued by the Graduate School. The Graduate School provides an internal examiners

briefing session, attendance at which is compulsory for inexperienced examiners or those new to the Plymouth process. The University does not appoint an independent chair for viva voce examinations as a matter of course, but considers each case individually. An independent chair is appointed in 10 to 15 per cent of examinations each year.

105 Candidates for research degrees are informed of complaints and appeals procedures in the Research Degrees Handbook and in a briefing session prior to the viva voce examination. Up to 3 per cent of annual examinations have resulted in internal appeals and one case has been considered by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, which upheld the University's position. The outcomes of all appeals are reported to the Graduate Committee.

106 A paper prepared by the Head of the Graduate School was presented to the Graduate Committee in November 2009 describing postgraduate research student progression and completion rates. A variable postgraduate research student performance was evident in the faculties. In recent years, withdrawal rates have been low (3 to 6 per cent) and good rates of transfer from MPhil to PhD were noted (87 to 96 per cent). Completion rates, however, have declined when compared to national data and, while trends for submission by full-time postgraduate research students have stabilised at around 48 months, those from part-time research students have increased above the recommended norm of 72 months. While the Briefing Paper states that 'the University needs to continue to improve completion rates', the audit team could find no evidence of plans, either from the Graduate School or from the faculties, as to how this might be achieved. The team was informed that this issue had been on the agenda of a meeting with the Associate Deans for Research in May 2008, although there are no minutes of this meeting. It was later confirmed to the team that no action plans had been made regarding progression and completion rates.

107 The audit team could therefore find no evidence that the process of annual monitoring and review of postgraduate research student progress was being monitored in the faculties, as expected in the Research Degrees Handbook, or reflects the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*. The team noted that while the Quality Support Unit worked closely with the associate deans for Teaching and Learning and with the Director of Teaching and Learning, they had no formal responsibility in relation to research degree students.

108 The audit team concluded that the current level of oversight of progression and completion statistics had the potential to undermine the quality and standards of the postgraduate research student experience. Consequently, the team concluded it advisable that the University develops an institutional response to postgraduate research student progression and completion rates and feedback, and strengthen the relationship of the Graduate School with the faculties and the Quality Support Unit to facilitate institutional oversight of the postgraduate research student experience.

Section 7: Published information

109 The University has a Marketing and Communications Directorate which produces some publicity material. Each discipline-based faculty is responsible for the accuracy of its own course, programme, research and subject area and has its own Marketing and Admissions Manager who formally checks the accuracy of the proofs within the faculty and the relevant information in the index. The printed undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses also include links to appropriate areas of the Extranet for the most up-to-date information.

110 Partner institutions within University of Plymouth Colleges Faculty who submit information on their courses for inclusion in the prospectuses have their submissions checked by the University of Plymouth Colleges Faculty's Marketing and Communications Co-ordinator who makes any amendments and comments before returning the submission to the Marketing and Communications Directorate. The Co-ordinator also monitors the printed and electronic promotional materials produced by partner colleges.

111 All prospective students have access to a range of printed and electronic information including a prospectus, school or faculty specific guides and induction packs, and the University Extranet. On induction, and throughout their programme of studies, the taught course student will receive a Student Programme Handbook, referenced web-based information and, for University of Plymouth Colleges Faculty students, the Partner Student Handbook.

112 Research students, whether studying on the University campus or remotely, receive equivalent information. Once registered, the student receives a copy of the Research Degrees Handbook, Process and Procedures for Research Degrees, a copy of the Research Student Logbook and information relating to the faculty or school which is facilitating their research.

113 The student written submission confirmed the accuracy of information provided to students both in hard copy and in electronic format. Student representatives who met the team praised the information received at all levels from prospectus to course and module handbook for taught awards and the equivalent research information.

114 At the time of the audit, a partner's publicity material was out of date and unclear (see paragraph 80). However, from its examination of a range of published material, for example the published summary outcomes of periodic reviews and the Guide to Information to assist access to the information the University makes available, and from its discussions with students, the audit team was satisfied that reliance can be placed on the accuracy and completeness of information published by the University on the quality of its education provision and the academic standards of its awards as specified in the proposals of HEFCE 06/45.

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

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

- the continuing development of the role of the Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning) has been central to the dissemination of good practice and the development of a coherent approach to the quality of the provision and the management of the security of academic standards (paragraph 15)
- the way in which the work of the Higher Education Learning Partnership Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning had contributed to and enhanced the functions of the University of Plymouth Colleges (paragraph 71).

Recommendations for action

116 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- ensure that the University's processes for the oversight and management of collaborative arrangements are consistently applied (paragraph 80)
- develop an institutional response to postgraduate research student progression and completion rates and feedback, and strengthen the relationship of the Graduate School with the faculties and the Quality Support Unit to facilitate institutional oversight of the postgraduate research student experience (paragraph 108).

117 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- give consideration to the greater involvement of student representation in the University's formal quality assurance processes (paragraph 49).

Appendix

The University of Plymouth's response to the Institutional audit report

The University is pleased with the audit team's expressed judgement of confidence in our management of academic standards and the quality of the learning opportunities available to our students. We note the clear and unqualified statement of confidence in the quality and standards of our provision, both now and into the future and the statement that the University has been responsive to the QAA's Academic Infrastructure.

While the audit team limited its identification of 'features of good practice' to the role of Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning) and the way in which the work of the CETL had enhanced the functions of the University's network of Partner Colleges, the University was delighted to note the very positive statements in relation to a range of other features that characterise the learning and student experience at the University. In particular, that students confirmed that their programmes were informed by the latest research (para 50), evidencing the effectiveness of our research-informed teaching initiatives, and that they felt very well supported (para 62) both within their academic School and by institution-wide student services. A very clear picture of a technology enhanced learning environment was gained during the visit (para 55) and students expressed satisfaction with the quality and accessibility of resources (para 56). Students also praised the information received at all levels from prospectus to course and module materials (para 113).

We were surprised that, given the very clear statements about the ways in which the Teaching and Learning Strategy and the changes to our Strategic Plan serve to demonstrate systematic enhancement activity, the audit team was unable to discern an institution-wide approach to enhancement.

While the University accepts the advisable recommendations, we regret that the organisation of the audit visit did not allow us an opportunity (through the cancelled final meeting) to discuss some of the issues raised. The University has always welcomed the opportunity for reflection provided through engagement with the Quality Assurance Agency, and the incorporation within the report of statements which we did not have the opportunity to debate was therefore particularly disappointing.

Nonetheless, the University recognises the potential to further enhance our processes and procedures to assure the continued quality of all our activities. We also confirm that the recommendation considered to be desirable will be explored as an integral aspect of our commitment to continuous improvement and enhancement.

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RG 583 04/10