



Institutional audit

University of Surrey

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Preface

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

In England and Northern Ireland, QAA conducts Institutional audits on behalf of the higher education sector, to provide public information about the maintenance of academic standards and assurance of the quality of learning opportunities provided for students. It also operates under contract to the Higher Education Funding Council in England and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland to provide evidence to meet their statutory obligations to assure the quality and standards of academic programmes for which they disburse public funding. The audit method was developed in partnership with the funding councils and the higher education representative bodies and agreed following consultation with higher education institutions and other interested organisations. The method was endorsed by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (now the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills). It was revised in 2006 following recommendations from the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group, a representative group established to review the structures and processes of quality assurance in England and Northern Ireland, and evaluate the work of QAA.

Institutional audit is an evidence based process carried out through peer review. It forms part of the Quality Assurance Framework established in 2002 following revisions to the United Kingdom's approach to external quality assurance. At the centre of the process is an emphasis on students and their learning.

The aim of the revised Institutional audit process is to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges of higher education in England and Northern Ireland have effective means of:

- ensuring that the awards and qualifications in higher education are of an academic standard at least consistent with those referred to in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree awarding bodies in a proper manner
- providing learning opportunities of a quality that enables students, whether on taught or research programmes, to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications
- enhancing the quality of their educational provision, particularly by building on information gained through monitoring, internal and external reviews, and feedback from stakeholders.

Institutional audit results in judgements about the institutions being reviewed. Judgements are made about:

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes
- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research

- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

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

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

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

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

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary and the report, without the annex, are published in hard copy. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website. The institution will receive the summary, report and annex in hard copy (*Handbook for institutional audit: England and Northern Ireland 2006 - Annexes B and C* refer).

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Surrey (the University) from 2 to 6 March 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

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

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

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the University is that:

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers
- 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 University has achieved much in taking forward its quality enhancement agenda; not least the significant cultural change towards an increased focus on the quality of student-centred learning which was seen as a feature of good practice. Nonetheless, the slow progress within some faculties led the audit team to recommend as desirable that the University expedites its intentions regarding the role of faculties in quality enhancement.

Postgraduate research students

The University's arrangements for its postgraduate research students meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, for the assurance of academic quality and standards higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA, and are operating as intended. The audit team considered the effectiveness of the quality procedures and strength of support for postgraduate research students to be a feature of good practice.

Published information

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 features of good practice:

- the University's commitment to, and excellence in, professional training
- identifying the need and initiating an institutional drive for cultural change towards an increased focus on the quality of student-centred learning and teaching

- the integrated approach to the resource planning and management of library resources in meeting student needs
- the comprehensive nature of student induction, including the Big Guide and Project Welcome
- the effectiveness of quality procedures and strength of support for postgraduate research students.

Recommendations for action

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- encourage further consideration of how the University defines academic standards for its own awards, in order to engage the whole institution in articulating and applying clearly and consistently expectations of student achievement
- articulate more clearly the role of faculties in the management of quality and standards
- expedite the University's intentions regarding the role of faculties in quality enhancement
- amend the annual programme monitoring template to elicit evaluation about delivery in non-associated partner institutions.
- give further consideration to its approach to the monitoring and review of collaborative provision, particularly with respect to partnership-level quality assurance mechanisms, to enhance effective University oversight

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 the 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 Surrey (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 2 March 2009. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team was Dr S Hardy, Dr S Hargreaves, Dr K King, Mrs K Powell-Williams, auditors, and Dr M Gilmore, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Mrs E Harries Jenkins, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The University can trace its origins back to the Battersea Polytechnic Institute, founded in 1891. A Royal Charter was granted in 1966 which enabled the institution to award its own degrees and it became the University of Surrey, moving from London to become fully established by 1970 at its present location in Guildford.

4 At 1 December 2008, 13,479 students were registered directly with the University, of whom undergraduates comprised 8,192 full-time and 498 part-time students, and postgraduates comprised 2,316 full-time and 2,473 part-time students; 15 per cent of undergraduates and 45 per cent of postgraduates were from outside the United Kingdom (UK). In addition, there were 380 students taking modules as part of the Open Studies programme; 582 students taking post-registration Health and Social Care modules; and 3,093 students registered for University awards at the Associated Institutions, that is, institutions offering higher education and/or training with which the University, have a relationship based upon external programme validation, or accreditation. At 1 August 2008, the University was employing 2,289 staff.

5 The University has a significant range of collaborative arrangements which is changing and developing (see paragraph 47). The University is also building overseas alliances of varying kinds, ranging from a partnership with a Chinese university to provide dual degree programmes through a joint entity, to partnerships with more limited scope that assist the delivery of remote learning.

6 The University's strategic vision is set out in the Strategy 2007-17. This 10-year Strategy aims for the University 'to work in partnership with industry, commerce, the professions and other institutions for the benefit of our world' through six themes: quality; international impact; distinctiveness; collegiality; professionalism; and sustainability. The Strategy also lists eight challenges, among which are improving the student experience; increasing the attractiveness of the teaching programmes; growing the University's activity overseas; and developing the distinctiveness that the many and various links with the workplace provide. The University Strategy is supported by a number of specific strategies including ones for the student experience, internationalisation, and learning and teaching.

7 The report of the QAA's previous audit of the University in 2004 included an overall judgement of broad confidence in the institution's management of the quality of its academic programmes and the security of its awards, and the report recognised three features of good practice. The outcome was qualified by seven recommendations, three of which were considered to be 'advisable', the other four being 'desirable'. The University submitted action plans in response to these recommendations and continues to develop themes raised in the audit report. The present audit team found that the University had generally taken effective action in response to the recommendations made in the previous audit report, although it considered that further consideration should be given to how the University uses its programme specifications (see paragraphs 13, 14).

8 The period since 2004 has featured major changes in structure and senior management. In 2006-07, the University reorganised its academic activities into four faculties replacing the school structure that had been in place since 1997. The four new faculties were the Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences, the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences, the Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, and the Faculty of Management and Law. More recently the University has moved away from having part-time pro-vice-chancellors to full-time deputy vice-chancellors. In this period the University has also introduced a new corporate student record system.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

9 Senate, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor is the University's highest academic authority with quality assurance functions and is supported strategically and operationally by a system of University and faculty committees, key academic personnel, and specialist academic and administrative support units. It devolves considerable responsibility to standing committees, while maintaining an overview of their activities through the receipt of reports submitted at least on an annual basis.

10 The University identifies six key committees in relation to the management of quality and academic standards: the Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee; University Learning and Teaching Committee; Validation Board; Student Progress and Assessment Boards; Senate Progress and Assessment Committee; and the Professional Training and Careers Committee.

11 The University's framework for managing academic standards is supported by regulation and guidance described in the Academic Standards Guidelines which includes procedures for approval, revision, monitoring and review of programmes; appointment of external examiners, conduct of examinations and other forms of assessment for taught programmes; and the Policy Statement on Quality and Academic Standards which provides the guiding principles for the procedures and practices for awards made in the University's name.

12 The audit team, through examination of committee minutes and papers, was able to verify that the programme approval, monitoring and review processes followed the University guidelines, were robust and critically evaluative procedures, and made an effective contribution to the University's management of its academic standards. In approval there was a staged process of 'outline' and 'full approval', with consideration of proposals at faculty and institutional-level committees including Senate. Validation panels were configured properly and have appropriate externality. Faculties generally responded effectively and within the specified timescales to any conditions and recommendations set by the validation panel. Periodic review is similar to that for validation with a focus on self-critical reflection and evaluation, with reference to annual programme review, external examiner reports and, as appropriate, reports of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. Annual Programme Review (APR) uses a standard template and takes suitable account of action points from previous APR reports; student data; external examiner reports and subsequent actions taken. It was noted that from 2008-09, APR reports will also support quality enhancement, through identifying good practice in learning and teaching for dissemination within the faculty and across the institution.

13 The University has responded to the previous Institutional audit regarding construction of learning outcomes by including training for academic staff through the compulsory Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice; and through the Guide to Good Practice in Learning and Teaching produced by the Centre for Learning Development. Despite this, the University noted that presentation of learning outcomes remains an issue and continues to feature in the conditions and recommendations in validation and periodic review reports. The audit team concurred with this view, although it saw examples of excellent programme specifications, such as the Master's in Teaching. The team also saw little evidence of mapping of programme aims to programme learning outcomes (and hence to module learning outcomes), assignment learning outcomes or assessment criteria. As learning outcomes describe the knowledge and competencies that students are expected achieved, and thus put the student at the centre of the learning process, the team would encourage the University in its progress in moving to a more

student-centred expression of learning on programmes of study, to engage the whole institution in articulating and applying clearly and consistently expectations of student achievement.

14 The audit team were advised by some staff that programme specifications were unsuitable for students and that the information was already available in programme handbooks. On examination of a selection of such handbooks, the team did not agree with this as the handbooks did not include details of what the students would achieve on completing the programme, or an informative overview of the course in terms of learning, or a mapping of course aims to course learning outcomes and assessments. The team encourages the University to make programme specifications available to staff and students.

15 The audit team were able to identify a clear route for consideration of monitoring and review reports at institutional level, including overview reports prepared by the Quality Support Section for the Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee. However, the team was less clear about where Annual Programme Reviews, in particular, were discussed more widely at faculty level, other than at boards of studies; and the role of key faculty personnel such as the dean of faculty and associate dean (learning and teaching) in these processes. While accepting that faculties are still being fully established, the team recommends as desirable that the University articulate more clearly the role of faculties in the Annual Programme Review process and hence the management of quality and standards.

16 Annual and periodic review are supplemented by periodic visits to faculties, conducted by members of the Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee, to review quality management and enhancement processes at faculty level and to explore specific themes. All faculties were visited during 2008, with summary reports considered by the Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee and senior University managers. Specifically, these visits were to consider the effectiveness and alignment of the committee structures and quality assurance procedures in the new faculty structure, and to monitor the implementation of faculty learning and teaching strategies and associated quality enhancement activities. The audit team concluded that the visits provided a comprehensive review of procedures and provide a helpful overview of quality assurance and enhancement activity at faculty level. The team noted, however, that the visits, which previously considered schools and departments, continued to sample these subdivisions rather than the faculty as a single entity. This suggests that there has been limited progress towards embedding structures and procedures within faculties for managing academic standards, quality assurance and enhancement. The team recommends as desirable that the University articulate more clearly the role of faculties in the management of quality and standards, and expedite its intentions regarding the role of faculties in quality enhancement.

17 The University arrangements for external examining are documented in its General Regulations, the 'Guidelines for the Conduct of Examinations and other forms of Assessment for Taught Programmes', and 'Notes of Guidance for External Examiners' and these arrangements align fully with the intentions of the relevant section of the *Code of practice*. The audit team concurred that the Regulations and Academic Standards Guidelines were clear; however, it identified instances of inconsistency with other documents and practice.

18 External examiners are appropriately nominated, approved and inducted, and their reports are submitted to the Quality Support Section and forwarded to the dean of faculty along with a letter from the Assistant Registrar indicating any concerns. Reports are considered by the director of studies and the board of studies who agree an action plan. The audit team noted a number of recommendations from the Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee visits relating to student access to external examiner reports, although this is not a stated requirement within the Academic Standards Guidelines. The team encourages the University to ensure that in a changing environment, the Academic Standards Guidelines clearly reflect practice required by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) with regard to access to external examiners' reports, and that all guidance for examiners is implemented consistently across the institution.

19 The audit team saw evidence of detailed consideration of external examiner reports at boards of studies and in annual and periodic review processes. The team also noted the changes in the report form from 2008-09 to strengthen the link between quality assurance and enhancement, and to identify areas of good practice in learning and teaching that are worthy of dissemination across the University.

20 A summary of external examiners reports for both on-campus and collaborative programmes within the Associated Institutions is prepared by the Quality Support Section and presented to the Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee, annually identifying recurrent themes and highlighting any issues requiring consideration. The audit team concluded that the reports could be more effectively used to contribute to quality enhancement by indicating the detail for individual subject issues, including good practice.

21 Overall, the audit team formed the view that the role of external examiners in securing the standards of University awards was effective; however, the University needs to ensure consistency between the Academic Standards Guidelines and expectations of implementation, to ensure consistency between the Academic Standards Guidelines and the requirements of HEFCE's publication 06/45, *Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: Phase two outcomes*, regarding access to external examiners' report by students.

22 The University has engaged fully with the Academic Infrastructure and ensures appropriate and regular review in the light of revisions from QAA. Consideration of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, the *Code of practice* and subject benchmark statements are embedded in approval, monitoring and review processes. External examiners comment specifically on alignment with external reference points.

23 The audit team saw evidence of the Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee maintaining institutional oversight of professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) activity, including the consideration of PSRB reports and discussion of a request from a PSRB for changes to assessment regulations.

24 In response to the previous audit, the University instigated a range of regulatory and process developments in relation to assessment which have been implemented fully. Assessment is governed by the University's General Degree Regulations; the audit team noted the complexity of these regulations and the considerable flexibility in application at programme level, but acknowledged the University's continued commitment to reduce variability as evidenced by changes already made in number of areas. The Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee has agreed to further review existing regulations in order to ensure better equity of treatment of students across the University from 2010. The team heard that these developments were seen as essential to support cultural change, and the team support the University in these developments and encourage them to give these issues greater priority to ensure equity of treatment of students across degree programmes.

25 A major driver for change in assessment practice has been the Academic Reform Programme and changes have included a policy on returning assessed work; the provision of formative feedback; guidelines on good practice in determining and using assessment criteria and providing formative feedback; and common module sizes. The audit team confirmed these changes have been implemented, although the students the team met indicated variability in adoption by staff across the University.

26 The audit team determined that the University requires that students receive information on 'generic marking criteria for particular standards of performance' within their programme handbooks. In meetings with staff it was confirmed that the University does not have generic assessment criteria for application across programmes, and the team was unable to elicit a clear definition of academic standards from the staff it met. The team encourages the University to consider further how it defines academic standards for its own awards, in order to engage the

whole institution in articulating and applying clearly and consistently expectations of student achievement.

27 The audit team supports the developments on assessment within the University and encourages it to actively continue these in order to engage the whole University in articulating and applying clearly and consistently expectations of student achievement.

28 The University uses student statistical data effectively at institutional and programme level in approval, monitoring and review processes, and envisages that this will become more sophisticated as the new corporate student record system is implemented fully. The audit team saw no evidence of data from collaborative, remote or distance-learning programmes, except for Associated Institutions, being considered within the University.

29 Overall, the audit team concluded that confidence can be placed in the soundness of the institution's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

30 The University emphasises the role of the Learning and Teaching Strategy in taking forward the management of learning opportunities under the auspices of the University Learning and Teaching Committee, the Learning and Teaching Strategy Group and the associate deans (learning and teaching). The University requires that learning resources be considered in all programme approval, monitoring and review procedures. This is done with due cognisance of all aspects of learning opportunities and appropriate consideration of the Academic Infrastructure, other external references, and student feedback. The University considers the National Student Survey to be key performance indicator which has initiated developments such as the Academic Reform Programme (see paragraph 42).

31 The University is committed to collecting and using student feedback, although the audit team noted student views about variability in these processes and supports the University in the development of a module evaluation template with common elements to enable effective comparison of student views on the quality of their programmes across faculties. Students are represented on institutional level committees by officers of the Students' Union and on boards of studies or student-staff liaison committees. The Students' Union is responsible for training student representatives and is currently redesigning their training programme, with input from the University, to promote the role and establish better links with faculties. The students who met the audit team confirmed that they were listened to by the University and were able to provide examples of action taken in response to their feedback, although the student written submission was less positive about the degree to which students were heard at faculty level.

32 The University describes itself as being a research-led institution, but through the programme of cultural change, the University now places greater emphasis on the relationship between teaching and research and is raising the profile of teaching through a number of significant initiatives.

33 Since the 2004 Institutional audit, the University has embedded more explicit consideration of programmes delivered wholly or partly through distributed means at programme validation and periodic review. However, the audit team could find no requirement for the annual monitoring of programmes to include explicit identification of flexible, distributed or distance-learning programmes, and the template for annual programme review did not have any reference to these form of study or the particular needs that such delivery might evince for the quality of learning opportunities in non-associated institutions. The team recommends as desirable that the University amend the annual programme monitoring templates to elicit evaluation about delivery in non-associated institutions.

34 The University has a range of alternative modes of study including distance and blended learning using paper-based and electronic delivery systems such as its virtual learning environment, ULEARN, and student exchange. The University has appropriate safeguards in relation to assessment, and suitable support mechanisms for these different modes of study.

35 The University considers the Professional Training Year, where undergraduate students undertake a year-long placement as part of an academic programme, as a key element of its distinctiveness. Students see it as one of the most positive aspects of the University's provision. There is a comprehensive set of regulations and support for the Professional Training Year, including a tripartite professional training agreement specifying the responsibilities of the employer, the University and the student. The University has seen a decrease in student uptake of the Professional Training Year and measures to improve the level of participation were being considered by the Professional Training and Careers Committee. The audit team considered the Professional Training Year to provide a valuable contribution to the student experience, where undertaken, and commends the University's commitment to, and excellence in, this area as a feature of good practice.

36 The University provides extensive and effective academic and pastoral support for students; underpinned by the Student Experience Strategy (2007) and aided by the close integration of central service departments into the management framework of the University at both institutional and faculty level. In particular, the audit team found that the University's integrated approach to resource planning and management of library resources in meeting student needs was a feature of good practice. Students noted some concern regarding the availability of space in certain services and some teaching accommodation, and the University is taking steps to address these matters. The team concluded that the University's Student Experience Strategy and its implementation exemplified the institutional drive for cultural change towards an increased focus on the quality of student-centred learning and teaching. The team considered this to be a feature of good practice.

37 The University's admissions procedures are fair, clear and implemented consistently. Once admitted, undergraduate students go through a comprehensive induction programme assisted by Project Welcome, an initiative instituted in 2008 to provide an improved welcome and induction to the University from the student's perspective. Appropriate induction arrangements are also available for postgraduate taught and research students.

38 The University also provides a detailed handbook to students called 'The Big Guide'. This comprehensive document contains information on everything that new students are likely to need. The audit team considered the comprehensive nature of student induction, including the Big Guide and Project Welcome, to be a feature of good practice.

39 Support for staff is underpinned by the Staff Strategy which has four core strategic objectives: (i) recruitment; (ii) reward, recognition and retention; (iii) training and development; and (iv) equality of opportunity. These are being introduced through a series of initiatives such as the a leadership and management programme for senior staff; the Postgraduate Certificate of Academic Practice for all new academic staff; events and seminars hosted by Centre for Learning Development; and the new academic promotion procedures which take account of both teaching and research. These measures have proactively supported the drive for cultural change and have significantly strengthened and directed staff support, and rewarded excellence in teaching to enhance this aspect of the management of learning opportunities.

40 From the evidence available to it, the audit team concluded 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

41 The University's strategic framework for quality enhancement underpins its drive for cultural change from an institution that has always valued research highly to one which places greater focus on the quality of student-centred learning. The framework evolved through the development and renewal of its Learning and Teaching Strategy, together with the creation of two complementary and interlinking strategies, the Quality Enhancement Strategy and the overarching Student Experience Strategy. The Quality Enhancement Strategy describes the University's view of quality enhancement in learning and teaching as a deliberate and systematic process of professional reflective practice operating strategically to improve student learning.

42 The 2006 Quality Enhancement Strategy aims to link with the Academic Reform Programme to significantly enhance the quality of student learning. A number of elements of the Academic Reform Programme have been implemented, although some areas have yet to be addressed fully by some faculties. Similarly, not all faculties have taken forward the outcomes from the Appreciative Enquiry, through which staff and student experiences of good learning and teaching were gathered, aspirational institutional challenges set, and common culture of what constitutes good teaching established.

43 Another area in which parts of the University has been slow to implement change has been the development of faculty learning and teaching strategies, a recommendation from the 2004 Institutional audit. This was due, in part, to a delay in appointing some of the faculty associate deans (learning and teaching), which has now been resolved.

44 At institutional level, the University has established a coherent framework for driving forward cultural change: for example, responsibility for academic development passing to a full-time Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Development); the introduction of faculty associate deans (learning and teaching); and the support for learning and teaching developments provided by central units such as the Centre for Learning Development, Surrey Centre of Excellence in Professional Training and Education, E-Learning Unit and the Surrey Personal Learning and Study Hub. Specific Institutional initiatives have also served to progress the cultural change agenda, through the development of creative and scholarly understanding of student-centred learning, including the Centre for Learning Development Faculty Scholar scheme; the Learning and Teaching Awards scheme for all staff; and the Fund for the Strategic Development of Learning and Teaching.

45 The audit team concurred with the University's view that, although a good deal remained to be accomplished, much had been achieved since the last Institutional audit in 2004 to promote quality enhancement in a more strategic and coherent fashion. The team commends as good practice the University's identification of the need for, and initiation of, an institutional drive for cultural change towards an increased focus on the quality of student-centred learning.

46 In the light of evidence of slow progress within some faculties with respect to enhancement and the cultural change agenda, the audit team considered it desirable for the University to expedite its intentions regarding the role of faculties in quality enhancement.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

47 The University's collaborative links comprise arrangements with Associated Institutions for programme validation or accreditation, a joint venture with a university in China and overseas remote learning agreements for direct delivery by University staff. The University has a very small number of partnerships for joint programme delivery, some articulation links and an agreement with Study Group UK concerning the Surrey International Study Centre.

48 Partnerships may be initiated at faculty or institutional level and must go through institutional and programme approval. Memoranda of Agreement are submitted to the Quality Support Section for approval and signature by the Registrar. The Operations and Planning Committee maintains an overview of all forms of alliance and reports annually to the Executive Board.

Associated Institutions

49 The majority of the University's collaborative provision is delivered at its Associated Institutions, institutions that offer higher education and/or training with which the University has a relationship based upon external programme validation or accreditation, although student numbers have decreased by over half since the 2004 audit. One Associated Institution is an accredited institution with delegated authority from the University to manage programme validation and review, in accordance with University policy and practices. The other Associated Institutions deliver programmes that are validated and reviewed directly by the University. Since 2007, the University has taken a more proactive approach to managing the Associated Institution portfolio and has established a clearer rationale for engaging with Associated Institutions and a better indication of what such relationships should provide. This had led to a reduction in the number of Associated Institutions from 12 to seven, and the University has put appropriate strategies in place to maintain standards and the quality of learning opportunities for the students completing their awards under University regulations.

50 The regulatory frameworks, underlying principles and reporting systems applying to Associated Institutions, are clearly outlined in the Quality Assurance Handbook for the Associated Institutions, are consistent with those for on-campus provision and involve the appropriate level of scrutiny and externality. In addition, the Quality Assurance Handbook for the Associated Institutions provides for the possibility of interim review to be carried out during the period of validation, to assess the strengths and weaknesses of a programme as it unfolds.

51 From documents provided, the audit team concluded that the University's procedures for institutional approval of Associated Institutions were robust; the process for validation of programmes in Associated Institutions fit for purpose; and that interim and periodic review provided valuable mechanisms for monitoring ongoing programme delivery.

52 The processes for annual review of programmes broadly replicate those applying to the University's on-campus provision. The process is internal to the Associated Institution, with reports and action plans being submitted to the board of studies and, where appropriate, to the board of examiners. Moderators undertake ongoing monitoring of the programmes, submitting annual reports to the Quality Assurance Officer for the Associated Institutions. The audit team formed the view that scrutiny at the level of the moderators appeared to be effective. However, while the team was able to establish that moderators' reports were submitted to the Quality Support Section and would be available at periodic review of programmes, there did not appear to be a mechanism to ensure that systematic consideration of moderator feedback formed part of ongoing University oversight of programme delivery at Associated Institutions.

53 Each Associated Institution must submit an Annual Statement to the University, reporting on a range of standards and quality assurance matters as part of the institutional review process. Annual Statements available at the audit visit broadly complied with University requirements as to content, but that, in complying with the guidelines as to length, the Annual Statements were limited in the breadth and depth of information provided and in their evaluative commentary. Further, Annual Statements, written by the Associated Institutions themselves, constituted the only formal mechanism for the monitoring and evaluation of institutional quality processes and procedures at the Associated Institutions, subsequent to initial institutional approval. In view of this; and of the fact that periodic review was concerned with programmes rather than institutional quality matters, the audit team considered that it desirable for the University to give further consideration to its approach to the monitoring and review of its collaborative provision, particularly with respect to partnership-level quality assurance mechanisms, to enhance effective University oversight.

54 Around 200 part-time international students are registered on University postgraduate taught programmes delivered by remote learning in overseas institutions. The suitability of facilities and teaching and learning arrangements are monitored through module tutors' trip reports. However, the audit team was not clear as to how trip reports were considered at institutional level (see also paragraph 33).

Surrey International Institute

55 The University's collaboration with a university in China comprises articulation links and direct delivery of existing University programmes by University staff, partner staff and international academic staff appointed by the University. The programmes are delivered in English through the Surrey International Institute, which is managed by a Joint Management Committee. The Validation Board is responsible to Senate for the coordination and implementation of validation, periodic review, approval of programme regulations and curriculum and assessment changes. The audit team learned that the University had conducted a review of the Surrey International Institute in November 2008, including a review of teaching and learning provision, and recorded a number of recommendations concerning resources and learning and teaching. The team heard that the University had not determined if it would conduct future institutional reviews. In this context, as elsewhere in its collaborative provision, the team considered that it would be desirable for the University to give further consideration to its approach to the monitoring and review of its collaborative provision, particularly with respect to partnership-level quality assurance mechanisms, to enhance effective University oversight.

56 Overall, the audit team found that the University's arrangements for the management of academic standards were effective and fit for purpose, and the quality of academic provision were in alignment with the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, published by QAA.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

57 The University offers a wide range of postgraduate research degree programmes, including practitioner doctorate programmes that combine formal taught modules and supervised research. All research degrees are subject to General Regulations and a comprehensive Code of Practice for Research Degrees is also available. The Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee is responsible to Senate for all elements of postgraduate research programmes including reviewing the operation at faculty level.

58 Appropriate institutional oversight of assessment and progression is provided by the Student Progress and Assessment Board for Research Programmes, reporting to Student Progression and Awards Committee. The Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee visits provide a mechanism for monitoring the effectiveness of the quality processes and adherence to the Code of Practice for Research Degrees and General Regulations at faculty level.

59 Faculty-level oversight is through boards of studies (or similar), associate deans (research), and postgraduate research directors (or similar). Postgraduate research graduate schools have been established in two faculties following the good practice in another faculty, with the intention of bringing together postgraduate research students who might otherwise be working in isolation, to inform research activities and to assist in the dissemination of good research practice across the faculty, via research seminars and other informal arrangements.

60 Students are well supported through the deputy dean of students' role; principal supervisors; the Postgraduate Association; institutional and faculty inductions; and guidance such as faculty handbooks, the Code on Good Research Practice, and sections of the Big Guide; and students have access to extensive library and information technology facilities.

61 The dean of faculty has overall responsibility for the appointment of up to three supervisors per student. Campus-based students are allocated a principal supervisor and they may also have one or more co-supervisors. One of the supervisors must already have successfully supervised a doctoral degree. In addition, students in collaborative provision are assigned one or more collaborative supervisors. Staff supervising postgraduate research students are well supported through the Code of Practice for Research Degrees which clearly outlines responsibilities and the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice.

62 The University has a comprehensive mechanism of monitoring the progress of postgraduate research students through specific meetings between student and principle supervisor; six-monthly review meetings; annual progress reporting; and annual review by boards of studies. These review reports are submitted to Quality Support Section, where an institutional overview report is prepared for the Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee.

63 Details about the assessment of research degrees, the conduct of final examination, and grievance and appeals procedures, are clearly outlined in the General Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degrees. Appropriate mechanisms are in place for the appointment of internal and external examiners, and the chair of the viva voce. Students confirmed that they understood what was required of them in the final assessment and were aware of where to find details of the grievance and appeals procedures.

64 Mandatory skills development for postgraduate research students, including those undertaking teaching duties, is provided through a centrally provided programme, evaluated and monitored through the annual review and appropriate central committees. Other training resources are provided by the library and the Centre for Learning Development. Centralised training complements that provided at faculty level, which is overseen by the boards of studies (or similar). Faculties maintain a record of teaching and associated duties, and a function of the Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee visits is to ensure that faculties are complying with these requirements.

65 Student feedback is gathered through a number of mechanisms including student representatives on staff-student liaison committees, boards of studies and through less formal arrangements, such as lunchtime meetings.

66 Overall, the audit team formed the view that the arrangements for postgraduate research students were robust and met the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, and were operating as intended. The team considered the comprehensive nature of the training provided centrally and at faculty level for students to be an example of good practice. Furthermore, the team is highly supportive of the University's intention to introduce training placements for postgraduate research students. Research students spoke highly of their experience and the support they received at the University. The team considered the effectiveness of the quality procedures and strength of support for postgraduate research students to be a feature of good practice.

Section 7: Published information

67 The University has suitably robust procedures for assuring the accuracy of all published information, including that produced by collaborative partners. Guidance is provided for the content of student handbooks for programmes delivered on-campus and at Associated Institutions. These requirements are generally met and students reported that their course information was excellent and confirmed that they had been provided with accurate information. They were aware of the complaints and appeals procedures, although none reported having used these.

68 The audit team noted the extensive range of information contained in the Big Guide for new students which was identified by students as a comprehensive and useful document. This is supplemented by a series of Mini Guides covering the range of support services for use by all students. These guides are presented in an attractive and accessible style. The team considered

the Big Guide, along with Project Welcome, to be features that contributed to the comprehensive nature of induction, which it commends as good practice.

69 The audit team was able to verify that the University provides the type of information required for the Unistats website, and that required by Annex F of *HEFCE 06/45*.

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

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

71 As a result of its investigations, the audit team's view of the University is that:

- confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers
- 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.

Features of good practice

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

- the University's commitment to, and excellence in, professional training (paragraph 35)
- identifying the need and initiating an institutional drive for cultural change towards an increased focus on the quality of student-centred learning and teaching (paragraphs 36, 39, 45)
- the integrated approach to the resource planning and management of library resources in meeting student needs (paragraph 36)
- the comprehensive nature of student induction, including the Big Guide and Project Welcome (paragraphs 38, 68)
- the effectiveness of quality procedures and strength of support for postgraduate research students (paragraph 66).

Recommendations for action

73 Recommendations for action that the audit team considers desirable:

- encourage further consideration of how the University defines academic standards for its own awards, in order to engage the whole institution in articulating and applying clearly and consistently expectations of student achievement (paragraphs 13, 24, 27, 28)
- articulate more clearly the role of faculties in the management of quality and standards (paragraphs 15, 16)
- expedite the University's intentions regarding the role of faculties in quality enhancement (paragraphs 16, 46)
- amend the annual programme monitoring template to elicit evaluation about delivery in non-associated partner institutions (paragraph 33)
- give further consideration to the University's approach to the monitoring and review of collaborative provision, particularly with respect to partnership-level quality assurance mechanisms, to enhance effective University oversight (paragraphs 53, 55).

Appendix

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

The University would like to thank the audit team for a constructive engagement with the University and for producing this report. The University welcomes the report of the institutional audit carried out in March 2009 and the audit team's confirmation of confidence in Surrey's management of academic standards and quality assurance. We are also appreciative of the considerable contribution made by Surrey's staff and students to the positive outcome of the audit.

We are pleased to note that the general tone of the report is one of positive appraisal and that it identifies five specific substantial areas of activity as features of good practice, which include our Professional Training Year which provides an invaluable opportunity for our students to engage in a sandwich year placement in which they can apply the knowledge and skills they have learnt within the workplace and further reinforce these with the ongoing support of the University's academic staff. This year contributes both to students' academic performance in their final year and their employability as measured by the University's track record in national statistics on graduate employment. We were pleased also that our processes for postgraduate research management were also recognised as a feature of good practice. We will continue to work towards the further enhancement of all the areas identified.

The University also notes the advice given to it in the 'Recommendations for Action' section of the report. An agenda will be formulated in the new academic year to respond to these recommendations. We welcome the broad thrust of this advice, considering it to be constructive and enabling us to build on developments, which in most cases have already begun. Finally, we appreciate the professional and diligent manner in which the audit team engaged with Surrey's staff and students.

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