



Institutional audit

University of Teesside

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Preface

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

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

Institutional audit is an evidence-based process carried out through peer review. It forms part of the Quality Assurance Framework established in 2002 following revisions to the United Kingdom's (UK) 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* 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 Teesside (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 to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the University manages the academic aspects of its provision.

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

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University does not have a separate and specific quality enhancement strategy; rather it has taken a systematic approach to establish a range of means of appraising and improving the quality of student learning opportunities. The proactive approach adopted by the University to quality enhancement has created a sound basis for further development.

Postgraduate research students

The audit found that the arrangements for postgraduate research students, including those for support, supervision and assessment, were effective and met the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

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

- the proactive use of a range of outcomes from external evaluations to enhance student learning opportunities
- the effective partnership between the University and the Students' Union to support student representation processes on taught programmes at all levels of the institution

- the development and implementation of a comprehensive and responsive structure to support e-learning
- the effective alignment of strategic aims and inclusive staff development activities in support of the University's mission
- the systematic programme for admission, induction and support of postgraduate research students at both the institutional and school level.

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- ensure that all postgraduate research students involved in the assessment of students are appropriately trained and prepared for this work.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- monitor the consistency of the use by programmes and schools of its internally generated performance data for taught programmes.

Reference points

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

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

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

Report

1 An Institutional audit of the University of Teesside (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 7 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 the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team comprised Professor D Lockton, Mr C McIntyre, Dr K Sharp, Professor D Wright, auditors, and Mrs K Powell, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Ms M McLaughlin, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The University has its origins in the period after World War I, when Joseph Constantine, a local shipping magnate, made a gift to the town to stimulate the establishment of a technical college. It was formally opened in 1930 supporting Middlesbrough's booming engineering and shipping industries. In 1969 the College became Britain's 13th Polytechnic, with 17 degree courses and 600 undergraduate students. In 1992 the Polytechnic was renamed the University of Teesside. Following a major review of the marketing and student recruitment work of the institution, the trading name of 'Teesside University' was adopted in May 2009.

4 Since the last Institutional audit there has been rapid expansion of student numbers, diversification of academic provision, continuous enhancement of the University's reputation and, over the last 10 years, major campus development, involving over £120m investment. In addition, the University has opened purpose-built University centres at campuses of local further education colleges.

5 The Mission of the University is as follows: 'Providing Opportunity, Promoting Enterprise, and Delivering Excellence. Working in partnership to enable individuals and organisations to achieve their potential through high quality learning, research and knowledge transfer'.

6 The Vice-Chancellor is the senior officer of the institution. There are three Deputy Vice-Chancellors for Learning and Student Experience, Research and Enterprise, and Development, who, with the University Secretary and Registrar and Executive Director (Finance and Planning), form the Vice-Chancellor's Executive. The University Corporate Executive Team comprises the Vice-Chancellor's Executive, the deans of the six University schools and directors/deans of the University's departments, and is the University's Senior Management Team.

7 The Academic Board, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, is responsible for overseeing the management of academic standards and advises the Vice-Chancellor and the Board of Governors, which is responsible for determining the overall strategic direction of the University. Seven subcommittees currently report directly to the Academic Board which include the University Learning and Teaching Committee, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Student Experience), which oversees the student learning experience and enhancement; the University Academic Standards Committee chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Student Experience), which oversees quality assurance; the University Academic Policy Committee, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Development) which approves proposals for new developments. In addition, there is a University Research Degrees Sub-Committee that reports into the University Academic Standards Committee.

8 There are equivalent school committees for learning and teaching, academic standards, policy, and research degrees. These are responsible for the implementation and monitoring of University strategies and processes at school level. The Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement provides central coordination. School academic standards committees, reporting to the Academic Board via the University Academic Standards Committee, oversee the quality assurance of individual degree programmes.

9 A review of the academic committee structure was initiated internally in 2006-07 and was taken forward by an external review in 2008. The outcomes of the review led to proposals for streamlining the structure and clarification of the remit and membership of subcommittees reporting to the Academic Board. At the point of audit, the audit team had sight of the proposed terms of reference and memberships which would be considered and ratified by Academic Board in February 2010. The team felt that the proposals would meet the needs of the review and continue to underpin the deliberative structure of the management of standards and quality across the University.

10 The University's Quality and Standards Framework for taught awards was approved by the Academic Board in December 2007. Processes for establishment, review and regulation of awards and the University's Threshold Quality Standards are described in the Quality Handbook produced by the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement. The University Institutional Audit Committee manages the University's Quality Audit and Review activities and advises Academic Board on the application of academic policies, procedures and standards by the schools.

11 At the time of the audit, the University's academic departments and centres were grouped into six schools: Health and Social Care; Computing; Social Sciences and Law; Teesside University Business School; Science and Engineering; Arts and Media, and a university-wide Graduate Research School. The schools are strategically managed by the dean of school who is supported by a deputy dean and/or assistant deans with specific areas of responsibility. Each school has a nominated deputy/assistant dean who oversees the quality management and enhancement of academic provision within the school.

12 The previous Institutional audit visit to the University took place in 2004 and the report identified a number of features of good practice and recommendations for action. The present audit team confirmed that the University had responded appropriately to the findings of the previous audit and had addressed the recommendations for action. The team also found that the University had responded appropriately to the findings of QAA's 2006 Review of postgraduate research degree provision.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

13 The key processes for the University management of academic standards are detailed in the Quality Handbook which includes the Credit Accumulation and Module Scheme. The Scheme provides a common framework for all University taught awards and standard assessment regulations. The University identifies the key processes it employs to manage academic standards as approval, monitoring and review of programmes; external examiners; the Academic Infrastructure and key external reference points; assessment policies and regulations; management information and quality audit and review.

14 The University has separated the business aspects of programme development from the academic quality considerations. There are three major stages of the programme approval process, starting with the review of a three-year development plan which schools and service departments are required to produce in alignment with the overarching Institutional Plan outlining new developments and resources. This Plan includes the business case for new programme developments and is considered by the annual University Planning Conference. The second stage comprises consideration by the University Academic Policy Committee of new programme titles and developments in principle prior to the final stage of the approval process, which involves scrutiny by an approval panel whose membership is approved by the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement. The panel includes members who are external to the institution and employers where appropriate. Panel chairs and members are trained and a list maintained by the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement. Following the 2004 audit, the University revised the process for signing off compliance with conditions and recommendations. The chair of the relevant school academic standards committee confirms to the University Approval Panel that these have been met. Prior to the programme approval process, module

approval panels have delegated authority to approve any new modules and the evidence available to the team demonstrated that this process is rigorous.

15 The procedure for periodic review requires all provision at subject or programme level to be reviewed on a six-yearly cycle and builds upon the annual monitoring process. The process starts when schools produce a programme evaluation document and the panel looks at evidence including student feedback, external examiner reports and reports from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). Panel membership includes external representation including members of any relevant PSRBs. Responsibility for the oversight of the process is delegated to the University Academic Standards Committee. The audit team saw evidence of a number of examples of programme approvals and of the periodic review process from iteration through to final approval. Based upon the evidence available, the team found that the processes for programme approval and review were rigorous and thorough.

16 The University Monitoring Sub-Committee has oversight of the annual monitoring process on behalf of the University Academic Standards Committee. The audit team saw evidence of a number of examples of this process in operation. Module, subject and programme leaders produce an annual report which feeds into the school academic standards committee Quality Monitoring and Enhancement report. These school reports are scrutinised by the University Monitoring Sub-Committee at its annual away day and form the basis of its annual report to both the University Academic Standards Committee and Academic Board. The University also makes use of a quality audit and review process, whereby it audits academic policies or processes selected by Academic Board to ensure they are being effectively discharged. The process is managed by the University Institutional Audit Committee. Once an audit is completed, an action plan is devised which is monitored by the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement with six-monthly updates to Academic Board.

17 External examiners at module and award levels are nominated by the school academic standards committees for consideration by the University Monitoring Sub-Committee, and then endorsed by the chair of academic standards committee before proceeding to Academic Board for approval. The University provides induction and training for external examiners and the University Monitoring subcommittee receives regular reports on tenure. In addition, the University Monitoring subcommittee maintains a reciprocity database. External examiners produce reports on a standard template. Module examiners confirm standards; award examiners verify implementation of the University's regulations and award classification. Reports are discussed at programme boards which include student representatives and school academic standards committees. Responses to reports are approved by school academic standards committees and sent to the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement. Following consideration by the academic standards committee, Academic Board receives an annual report on the effectiveness of the external examining system, and the University Monitoring Sub-Committee considers a summary of issues and good practice arising from the reports which is presented to Academic Board. On the evidence available to it, the audit team formed the view that the consideration of external examiner reports by the University was making an effective contribution to the management of academic standards.

18 The audit team found that University makes effective use of the Academic Infrastructure and other relevant external reference points in its programme approval and review processes. The University has confirmed that its level descriptors remain appropriate within *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, which was revised recently. Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), where appropriate, are involved in approval and review events. PSRB reports are considered by school academic standards committees and received by the University Academic Standards Committee. The team saw extensive evidence of the University's consideration of the sections of the *Code of practice* against institutional policy; of the subject benchmark statements and programme specifications within the programme approval and review processes; and of its discussion around the impact of the European Standards and Guidelines and other external reference points.

19 The University has a Credit Accumulation Modular Scheme (CAMS) which was revised in 2004. Academic Board delegates responsibility for the Scheme to the University Credit Accumulation and Modular Scheme Sub-Committee which advises on its development and enhancement. The University has both modular assessment boards and progression and award boards. The boards have clearly defined responsibilities and are chaired by a dean or nominee. There is initial training and an annual update for chairs to ensure consistency of operation. The Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement undertakes an annual schedule of observation of the operation of assessment boards. An annual report is submitted to Academic Board on the operation of the boards. External examiners also comment on the operation of the boards. The Threshold Quality Standards (TQS) Assessment Practice was reviewed in 2008. The review revealed divergence between schools on the operation of the TQS and, as such, the University is developing an Assessment Policy which will be considered for approval by Academic Board in May 2010. The University has standard assessment regulations but schools can seek permission for variance from the University Variance Sub-Committee. The CAMS prescribes the limit on the number of assessments and module approval panels consider the way in which assessment maps to learning outcomes.

20 Data from the Academic Registry on student progression and performance is made available to module, programme and subject leaders and this is used to complete their respective annual reports. In addition, schools receive a three-year analysis of student progression from the Academic Registry. Issues arising from the data are noted in the University Monitoring Sub-Committee annual monitoring report to the University Academic Standards Committee and Academic Board. From the evidence available to the audit team, it was clear that progression and admission statistics form an important part of the evidence base for periodic review and contribute effectively to the management of academic standards. It was also evident that the depth of discussion of statistics at programme and school level was variable, although more recent reports seen by the team suggest that schools are progressively more engaged in the analysis of statistics. The team recommended, however, that it is desirable for the University to monitor the consistency of the use of its internally generated performance data for taught programmes.

21 The audit team found that confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

22 The University makes effective use of the *Code of practice* in managing the students' learning opportunities and the audit team saw evidence reflecting how internal processes are reviewed in line with revisions to the *Code of practice*. The University Academic Standards Committee has oversight of a number of working groups established to analyse QAA's *Outcomes from Institutional audit* series one and two, and these groups have recommended changes to processes to ensure that the institution follows good practice. Revised guidance documents to highlight the application of the components of the Academic Infrastructure were produced in 2008 for programme teams and panel members involved with programme approval and review.

23 The audit team saw evidence of guidance and support for the process of programme approvals developed for staff in both the Quality Handbook and in the form of 'Rough Guides' on key areas such as learning outcomes and assessment for staff. Further support is offered from school learning and teaching coordinators and the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement for programme teams. The revised periodic review process requires the panel to identify innovation and good practice for the consideration of, and dissemination by, the University Approval Panel.

24 The annual monitoring process provides opportunities for module, programme and subject teams to review a range of information gathered from feedback - internal and external - and student performance data. This also includes information from student evaluations. As a result

of the 2004 audit, the University developed an electronically based student evaluation process, Teesside Questionnaire System (later to become known as Teesside Online Evaluation System) on student evaluation. The audit team saw evidence of an evaluation of this system by the University Academic Standards Committee which has led to further enhancement of the process.

25 The audit team saw evidence of consideration, at all levels, of data from the National Student Survey (NSS) and the resulting action plans generated by schools to take forward identified actions to enhance the student experience. The University uses internal management information, NSS, the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and the International Barometer data to inform the annual monitoring process and enhance the quality of learning opportunities and student satisfaction. NSS results are discussed within the academic governance structure to identify good practice and generate action plans, and they inform 'issue specific' groups. The team saw evidence that the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement closes the feedback loop to students and supports enhancement activities by producing and disseminating an annual synthesis of issues, actions, feedback and best practice.

26 The audit team found that the University has effective mechanisms for using internal and external data to enhance learning opportunities for students, and the team considered that the proactive use of a range of outcomes from external evaluations to enhance student learning opportunities constituted good practice.

27 The audit team found evidence of strong commitment to working with the Students' Union to enhance the role of the student voice. This was characterised by effective and practical engagement with representatives and a culture of open communication. The University conducts regular audits of student representation and intends to continue to improve representation, feedback and inclusivity.

28 Students are represented on all the main University committees and on key working groups through officers of the Students' Union and meet regularly with the Vice-Chancellor. Student members are able to make valuable contributions to a range of committees and working groups. The audit team found further evidence of effective student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement processes through the roles of paid Student e-Assistants and of paid school representatives who meet regularly with students, course representatives and the assistant deans (Learning and Teaching) to resolve issues affecting the students' learning experiences and support improvement.

29 The audit team found that the University works positively to support its stated commitment to collaboration with students and considered that the effective partnership between the University and the Students' Union to support student representation processes on taught programmes at all levels of the institution represented good practice.

30 Programme approval and review processes examine the ways in which research informs the curriculum and the student learning experience, to the effect that research informed teaching has emerged as a priority area in the 2009 to 2012 Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy. An action plan has been developed to encompass research informed teaching approaches and schools develop their own corresponding plans at operational level. These initiatives are supported by staff development activities including the long-established Teaching Fellowship Scheme. The audit team saw evidence of well-organised institutional structures to ensure that links between research and teaching are developed and maintained.

31 Technology enhanced learning and work-based learning are priorities of the Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy and there has been a recent step-change in the use of e-learning with the provision of e-induction for students prior to their enrolment and of electronic assessment feedback. The University's virtual learning environment provides main access to resources and its use is monitored. School e-learning coordinators and trained student e-assistants review the quality of module sites and provide feedback. The University sees distance learning as a

key strategic area for future growth and is investigating potential areas of development. Expected outputs include a quality framework for distance learning. A Work-Based Learning Working Group and consultants support the learning and teaching aspects of work-based learning provision, provide guidance for staff and help to disseminate best practice. The audit team took the view that there were effective overall arrangements in place to support other modes of study and that the development and implementation of a comprehensive and responsive structure to support e-learning constituted good practice.

32 The Head of Learning Environment is responsible for general teaching accommodation, and school managers have responsibility for managing specialist learning and teaching spaces. The learning environment was a priority area of the 2005 to 2008 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and the audit team saw evidence that pedagogical principles are considered when developing learning spaces. A rolling programme of development to upgrade all teaching spaces and incorporate contemporary electronic teaching aids has been supported by the Learning Environment Project.

33 The University's Library and Information Services Department provides student-focused resources, services and support. A high level of student satisfaction with the service is recorded. Increasingly, resources are provided electronically and students have access to a wide range of other resources through partnership schemes. Work on the enhancement of the whole learning environment is based on an annual Development Plan. This is informed by the University's strategies, by close relationships with schools and departments and by feedback, including that gained through the work of the Subject Information Team Leaders who lead on learning resource development. The Library and Information Services Department offers induction and supports skills development to ensure that students can effectively use the resources provided. Subject information team leaders partner academic staff in this work and also provide one-to-one support. The Drop-in Student Skills Centre offers in-depth academic skills support. Services provided for international and transnational students include a new University Transnational Student Handbook and enhanced digital delivery. Library and Information Services provide support for international students on-campus working with English for Speakers of Other Languages tutors. Joint provision for students studying at the University's Higher Education Business Partnership colleges (a collaboration between the University and local and regional colleges) is developed in partnership with the Colleges. The audit team formed the view that in relation to maintaining the quality of students' learning opportunities, the institution's arrangements for the provision, allocation and management of learning resources were effective at both the strategic and operational level.

34 The Admissions Policy relates the admissions process to the University's core aims. Clear generic statements of principle and practice are provided and the Policy includes detailed sections on relevant topics including an Admissions Appeal Procedure. Applications are assessed individually and admission is based on an applicant's relative merits and an assessment of their ability to fulfil the learning outcomes of the course and achieve the standard required for the award. Specific course entry criteria are set by the responsible school and are scrutinised as part of the approval/review process. The Admissions Committee is responsible for recent enhancement activity including the new University Admissions Policy, equal opportunities in admissions, and a periodic review of University practice in relation to the *Code of practice, Section 10: Admissions to higher education*. Academic Registry has overall operational responsibility for managing University admissions, for liaison with UCAS and other external bodies and for admissions data in the University's Student Information System. Responsibility is devolved to schools for setting entry criteria, updating entry profiles and other information for applicants, recruitment, selection, and (except in the case of international admissions which is centralised) offer-making. The Graduate Research School has specific responsibility for postgraduate research student admissions (including international students) and is involved in decision-making. Schools are responsible for ensuring alignment with academic expertise in the school and the availability of an appropriate supervisor. The audit team took the view that the University had a clear and well-understood admissions policy which is administered effectively.

35 Support for students is delivered through a partnership between schools and departments and the Graduate Research School. The Academic Board has formal oversight of student support and the University Learning and Teaching Committee, via the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, oversees the enhancement of student support systems. Student support is managed through the annual planning process (see paragraph 14). Some universal aspects are structured into programmes and the University specifies the requirements for the school support systems. Programme approval, and annual monitoring processes are also used to scrutinise student support arrangements.

36 The Department of Student Services is the principal central provider of student support. The audit team found that the use of co-located services and collaborative working practices allow students access to services and aim to provide a seamless transition between each service. Student Services also work collaboratively with the Students' Union which is promoted as an independent and complementary source of support and advice. The Learning and Teaching Development team in the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement supports the development of student support systems, enables the sharing of good practice and makes recommendations for further enhancement. The Retention Team in the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement and school-based retention support officers provide a focus on individual student needs, monitor interaction with the programmes and follow up non-attendance. The Team and the support officers are responsible for developing and implementing retention strategies, supporting peer-mentoring schemes, and implementing personal development plans. The team formed the view that the institution has effectively planned and operated mechanisms for student support that benefited from a collaborative approach.

37 Staff development is strategically focused and the 2009 to 2012 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy gives it a higher priority. The audit team found evidence of a commitment to further enhancement. Strategic priorities are identified in the University's Human Resource Strategy and Implementation Plan, and mechanisms are in place to assist staff in the assurance and enhancement of the quality of teaching and the student learning experience. The Staff Development Team provides support for all staff, with the Learning and Teaching Development Team providing additional support to academic staff.

38 A detailed programme of staff development supports activity from induction through to Leadership Development in partnership with the Higher Education Academy and other regional universities. Staff development activities are also made available to staff in partner colleges, and academic staff contribute to development activities in international partner institutions. Teaching Fellowships and Associate Teaching Fellowship schemes are significant elements of the programme, and staff value the explicit parallel the Teaching Fellowship represents with Readerships in the research environment. The audit team took the view that the effective alignment of strategic aims and inclusive staff development activities in support of the University's mission constituted good practice.

39 The audit team found that confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

40 The Learning and Teaching Assessment Strategy (2009 to 2012) is a central component of the University's quality enhancement framework and is aligned to the Institutional Plan (2009 to 2012). The Strategy identifies priority areas for enhancement, including feedback and assessment; learner engagement; learning environment; research informed teaching; supporting teaching excellence; technology enhanced learning; and work-based learning.

41 University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy priority working groups are supported by the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement, and each working group has

specific, cross-institutional, enhancement areas, which together with school Implementation Plans for the Strategy, are considered by the University in order to 'provide a coherent and comprehensive framework for the enhancement of student learning opportunities'. Each school's Implementation Plan is overseen by its Learning and Teaching Committee. Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy activities are monitored annually through school Learning and Teaching committees, the University Learning and Teaching Committee and its working groups.

42 The University's quality assurance framework aims to promote enhancement of learning and teaching. The changes to programme approval, periodic review, annual monitoring, external examining, quality audit and review processes (as discussed in paragraphs 14-15) have ensured that the active identification of opportunities for enhancement is embedded in all of these activities. The audit team saw evidence of the identification, assessment and promotion of enhancement in the documentation provided by the University.

43 The University's strong performance in the National Student Survey provides a comparative measure against which enhancement activities can be judged and the University was seen to have effective mechanisms for the discussion of Survey data at institutional and school level.

44 The University's strategic approach to quality enhancement is implemented through both central and school-based structures. The Learning and Teaching Development Team and Quality Management and Enhancement Teams based in the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement, provide support and guidance for school staff involved in learning and teaching, including the dissemination of good practice. The Retention, Research Informed Teaching and e-Learning Teams based in the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement have been enlarged in recent years to provide increased support for schools. Centre staff work closely with student-facing departments, including the Library and Information Services.

45 In schools, a core team comprising assistant dean (Learning and Teaching), the Co-ordinator for Learning, and Teaching and Co-ordinator for e-Learning, has been established to provide guidance and support for school implementation plans of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. Students and staff who met the audit team commented on the effectiveness of this organisational structure.

46 Other components of the University's approach to quality enhancement include engaging students more strategically in enhancement activities; funding of learning and teaching research innovation projects; funding of professional development activities in learning and teaching for new and experienced staff; funding of staff professional development activities in the University's Higher Education Business Partnership Colleges; and supporting student and staff volunteering through the work of a Community Volunteering Project Co-ordinator.

47 The audit team found that the University's multifaceted approach to quality enhancement has helped to develop a strong ethos across the University which expects and encourages enhancement of learning opportunities and provides the means for opportunities for enhancement to be identified, supported and disseminated.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

48 The University operates several different types of collaborative arrangements with partners in the UK and overseas. The collaborative provision register reported around 6,750 students across 35 partnerships, six of which are overseas. It has developed a clear typology of partnerships, each with an identified set of processes and procedures for the management of quality and standards. Management responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement in each type of partnership is clearly defined and understood by relevant staff.

49 The University's arrangements for managing quality and standards in collaborative provision are designed to articulate with its overall framework for the management of academic

standards and the quality of student learning experience. As with other programmes, the University Academic Standards Committee, acting on behalf of Academic Board, has responsibility for quality and standards in collaboratively delivered programmes, and day-to-day responsibility for quality management rests with the school which originates the programme. Oversight of UK and overseas collaborative provision is the responsibility of the Director of Educational Partnerships and the Director of International Development, respectively, and each produces an annual overview monitoring report which ensures that generic issues are identified and dealt with promptly.

50 The audit team found evidence that, as with provision delivered on-site, collaborative arrangements are subject to appropriate engagement with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points. There was ample evidence, for example, that the development of processes and procedures for the management of collaborative provision had taken account of the *Code of practice*, and that mechanisms are in place to ensure a dynamic engagement with this and other relevant developments.

51 The audit team found evidence of appropriate procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of collaboratively delivered provision, and that these procedures are effective in ensuring an appropriate level of scrutiny over such programmes. The University's risk-based approach to partnership development is effective in ensuring that detailed quality assurance arrangements for each programme are tailored to the level of risk identified, while conforming to the basic quality assurance and enhancement framework which the University has in place. Detailed operations manuals relating to each type of partnership ensure a consistency of approach and that the roles and responsibilities of University and partner staff are clearly understood. The team also found evidence that appropriate contractual arrangements, following 'due diligence' checks, are in place prior to the commencement of a partnership.

52 External examining arrangements in collaborative provision follow the University's standard approach, and are effective in ensuring a comparable level of scrutiny over academic standards. Where collaborative provision involves teaching and assessment in languages other than English, it is a requirement that the external examiner is fluent in both English and the language of delivery; the audit team notes, however, that the University has only one such partnership at present and that, following a review of the partnership in 2008, this is in the process of termination and no other partnerships of this nature will be entered into.

53 The processes and procedures detailed in the operations manuals for collaborative provision set out the detailed requirements for the involvement of students in quality assurance and for obtaining feedback from students. The audit team found evidence that the processes which have been developed are appropriate and effective in ensuring that feedback from students is incorporated into the quality management of collaborative provision.

54 The University has developed an approach to staff development and support in collaborative provision which is effective in supporting high-quality learning and teaching and the maintenance of academic standards. Different arrangements exist for local and overseas partnerships which reflect the differing logistical issues associated with each. The availability of University-based staff development programmes for partner institution staff, partner-specific events and annual quality visits to overseas partners all contribute to the provision of appropriate staff development opportunities for staff involved in the delivery of collaborative provision. Operations manuals clearly specify the responsibilities of University-based staff in providing staff development opportunities for partner staff.

55 Clear and effective arrangements exist for the provision of information to students in collaborating institutions, including generic handbooks for students undertaking study through the different kinds of partnership.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

56 The University has awarded research degrees since 1992 and offers Master's and PhD degrees, the more practice-based Master's in Professional Studies and Doctor of Professional Studies. In 2008-2009 there were 201 enrolled research students including 141 doctoral students; about two thirds of research students are currently part-time. Postgraduate student numbers remained constant in the five years to 2008-09 with doctoral students increasing by 11 per cent in that period.

57 QAA's Review of research degree programmes at the University in May 2006 concluded that the 'institution's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its postgraduate research degree provision was appropriate and satisfactory'. Collaboration with the University of Durham with respect to research skills training was commended as good practice by the Review. One issue raised by the Review was the low completion rates of postgraduate research students and there have been a number of initiatives since 2006 that have focused on improving this.

58 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise) has responsibility for postgraduate research students in consultation with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Learning and the Student Experience). The University Research Degrees Sub-Committee, supported by the Graduate Research School, has responsibility for the quality and standards of research degree programmes and approves all formal processes and decisions concerning postgraduate research students. For two meetings per annum the University Research Degrees Sub-Committee functions as the University Research Degrees Board, with the addition of student representation. School research degrees committees oversee the quality and standards of research degree programme supervision in schools. Schools have an assistant/deputy dean for research and a postgraduate tutor with specific responsibilities for research degrees. The audit team saw evidence of a robust reporting structure from schools to the University in the supporting documentation provided.

59 The establishment in 2008 of five virtual Research Institutes outside of the school structure has been an integral step in the development of the University's Research Strategy (2009 to 2012). In line with a recommendation from the Review to focus research degree programmes in areas of research strength, all new postgraduate research students are assigned to a Research Institute. The Research Institutes work closely with the Graduate Research School and schools to enhance the research environment. A Research Quality and Policy Manager is responsible for the coordination of all matters relating to the quality of research degree programmes.

60 The Graduate Research School's remit is to provide a strong central support system for postgraduate research students and takes the lead in the implementation of new initiatives. The Graduate Research School, together with the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement, are also involved in staff training in relation to the admission and supervision of postgraduate research students. The University has also enhanced communication between research students through Postgraduate Research Forums, Research Days and a monthly 'Postgraduate Research Network' meeting.

61 The University Admissions Committee oversees all student admissions activities. The University's normal minimum entry requirement for a research degree is a 2:1 honours degree or an equivalent qualification, although alternative qualifications and publications can be taken into account. There is a two-stage procedure for selection and admission, which includes the development of an initial work plan and training needs analysis.

62 All students must be interviewed by at least two staff and the offer letter includes details of the Director of Studies (who acts as the principal supervisor and leader of the student's supervisory team) and the Supervisory Team and the entrant's training requirements. The Graduate Research School runs tri-annual University induction days. Copies of the University's regulations, policies, procedures and guidelines are given to all new students and research supervisors. Subject-specific induction and programmes of study are the responsibility of the relevant school research degrees committee and the student's Director of Studies. The audit team

heard from students that the selection and induction processes were inclusive and supportive and found that the systematic programme for admission, induction and support of postgraduate research students at both the institutional and school level represented good practice.

63 The school dean and postgraduate tutor are responsible for establishing each student's supervisory team. Supervisor's roles and responsibilities are described in the University Code of Practice and in the Research Degrees Handbook. New supervisors must attend a training module run by the Graduate Research School and the School of Social Sciences and Law. Existing supervisors and administrators are kept informed at the bi-annual Supervisors and Research Administrators' Forum and the Graduate Research School's intranet has all relevant documentation for staff. The audit team heard from students that, in their opinion, the quality of supervision and support generally was high.

64 Quarterly monitoring of progress against targets is compiled by the Graduate Research School and reported to the University Research Policy Committee. A formal Progression Board has been introduced for all postgraduate research students at the end of years one or two for full and part-time students, respectively. In other years, students complete an online Annual Monitoring Form for review by the Postgraduate Tutor. A Log Book system was introduced in 2004 where supervisors and students must record a minimum of three meetings per year; this is submitted as part of the Annual Monitoring process. The audit team heard that the revised progression arrangements have been positively received by staff and students.

65 Since the Review, the University has introduced a comprehensive generic training programme for postgraduate research students to meet the requirements of the Research Councils' Joint Skills Statements. The University established the position of Research Governance and Training Manager in the Graduate Research School in 2008 and formalised the embedding of training needs analysis for each student. A feature of the training programme is that it offers a flexible set of training options to accommodate the needs of part-time students.

66 There are various opportunities for postgraduate research students to interact and discuss their work with other students and staff as mentioned above. The University is active in regional engagement with research training through the VITAE Yorkshire and North East Hub, and the North East Collaborative Researcher Development Group.

67 Postgraduate research students who teach are encouraged to take a specially designed training module, although this is not a compulsory requirement. The audit team heard that all postgraduate research students who taught and were also involved in assessment would not necessarily receive formal training in support of this. The team therefore concluded that, in order to improve the quality of learning opportunities for research students, it was advisable for the University to ensure that all postgraduate research students involved in the assessment of students are appropriately trained and prepared for this work.

68 Central to the internal mechanisms for obtaining the views of individual students is the online annual monitoring process which allows students to respond to comments made by their supervisory team and discuss any confidential issues with the Postgraduate Tutor. The University has taken part in the national Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and reports findings to the University Research Degrees Sub-Committee, University Research Degrees Board and the Postgraduate Research Network. The University reflects on actions that could be taken on its 'Response to Survey Responses' site. The audit team heard from students that the feedback processes were clear and they were aware of actions taken by the University in response to student feedback.

69 The assessment process is operated by the Graduate Research School in conjunction with postgraduate tutors. Training is available to students in preparation for the assessment procedures during their degree programme including the final viva voce examination. Assessment is part

of a training programme for all new supervisors and is discussed at Supervisors and Research Administrators' Forum meetings. The Director of Studies nominates external and internal examiners for approval by the University Research Degrees Sub-Committee. Members of the supervisory team cannot act as internal examiners. Subject to the candidate's agreement, the University Research Degrees Sub-Committee is now required to appoint an independent non-examining chair for the examination panel.

70 There is a formal structure of postgraduate research representation at university level on the University Research Degrees Board. At school and subject level representation is not formalised, but the audit team heard from both students and staff that all postgraduate research students are actively encouraged to raise any issues with their supervisory team, school postgraduate tutor or other member of the University as appropriate.

71 The Students' Union offers independent advice and support regarding complaints and appeals. The formal complaints and appeals procedures are available online. The grounds for appeal are detailed in the Assessment Review Regulations for Higher Degrees by Research (2009).

72 The audit team found that the University has a sound infrastructure in place through the Graduate Research School, schools and Research Institutes for the selection, admission, induction, training, supervision, progression and assessment of postgraduate research students. Institutional oversight is provided by the University Research Degrees Sub-Committee and its Chair, who also sits on the University Academic Standards Committee and the University Research Policy Committee. The University has taken appropriate action following the report of QAA's Review of research degree programmes in 2006. The research environment and postgraduate experience meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

73 The University has in place appropriate and effective mechanisms to ensure that its published information is accurate and complete. Published minimum standards for student handbooks produced at school level are effective in ensuring that all students receive a consistent level of information relevant to their programmes of study.

74 The University Approval Panel has oversight of all new and revised programme specifications following sign-off by the school academic standards committees at the conclusion of a programme approval and/or periodic review event. A standard programme specification is completed for all University programmes. At present, the audit team heard that students access programme specifications either through their programme leader or the University website. In response to actions arising from the review of programme approval processes in 2008, the programme specification template was revised in line with QAA guidelines. The team was advised that a project is currently developing an electronic programme catalogue to enable programme teams to input information directly into the catalogue which will, in turn, generate a programme specification and provide a central document management system for all approved programme specifications. It is also anticipated that the programme catalogue will be available to current and potential students.

75 Generic information provided to students falls under the responsibility of the University Student Information and Co-ordination Sub-Committee, and this body has been effective in overseeing the production and maintenance of a range of generic handbooks for different categories of student. The Sub-Committee is also effective in monitoring the effectiveness of student focused communications.

76 Overall responsibility for material published online rests with the Marketing and Student Recruitment Department. The Department issues clear and effective guidelines to schools which help to ensure that information remains accurate and of a consistent nature. The University also maintains a comprehensive online repository of rules, regulations, policies and procedures. These are the responsibility of the University Secretary's Department, and clear protocols concerning the publication of such documents ensure that only accurate and current items are included.

77 Clear guidelines exist for published materials which are issued by partner institutions. Effective oversight over these is maintained by the University's Marketing and Student Recruitment department.

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

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

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

- the proactive use of a range of outcomes from external evaluations to enhance student learning opportunities (paragraph 26)
- the effective partnership between the University and the Students' Union to support student representation processes on taught programmes at all levels of the institution (paragraph 29)
- the development and implementation of a comprehensive and responsive structure to support e-learning (paragraph 31)
- the effective alignment of strategic aims and inclusive staff development activities in support of the University's mission (paragraph 38)
- the systematic programme for admission, induction and support of postgraduate research students at both the institutional and school level (paragraph 62).

Recommendations for action

80 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- ensure that all postgraduate research students involved in the assessment of students are appropriately trained and prepared for this work (paragraph 67).

81 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- monitor the consistency of the use by programmes and schools of its internally generated performance data for taught programmes (paragraph 20).

Appendix

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

The report of the QAA Institutional audit has been welcomed by the University along with the positive judgements on the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards, and the quality of the learning opportunities available to students at Teesside. This achievement is alongside the recent double accolade of the award of the University of the Year and Outstanding Employer Engagement Initiative in the Times Higher Education awards.

The University is particularly pleased to note the five areas of good practice identified by the Audit Team and the endorsement of Teesside's approach to enhancing the quality of student learning opportunities and experience. The acknowledgement of the positive relationship between the University, the Students' Union and students is also greatly welcomed.

The University notes and appreciates the two recommendations and has put in place an action plan to continue to further strengthen these areas.

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