



University of Warwick

Institutional Review
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

March 2013

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About this review

This is a report of an Institutional Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the University of Warwick. The review took place from 25 February to 1 March 2013 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Ann Read
- Professor Timothy Softley
- Professor David Watt
- Dr Elizabeth Ingle (student reviewer)
- Mr Alun Evans (review secretary).

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

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

A summary of the [key findings](#) can be found in the section starting on page 2.

[Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 4.

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

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.² Background information about the University of Warwick is given on page 3 of this report. A dedicated page of the website explains the method for [Institutional Review](#) of higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland³ and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

¹ For an explanation of terms, see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

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

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about the University of Warwick

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

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

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at the University of Warwick:

- the resources available to all staff to support their professional development (paragraph 2.2)
- the simultaneous periodic review of teaching and learning in all departments, which promotes enhancement across the University (paragraph 4.2)
- the integrated work of the library, the Institute of Advanced Teaching and Learning (IATL), the Learning and Development Centre (LDC) and the Student Careers and Skills (SCS) service to facilitate innovation in teaching and learning (paragraph 4.3).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to the University of Warwick:

- share external examiners' reports more consistently with all student representatives (by the beginning of the academic year 2013-14) (paragraph 1.9)
- develop robust arrangements for assuring itself that information produced for students is fit for purpose and trustworthy (by the beginning of the academic year 2014-15) (paragraph 3.3)
- ensure that course handbooks contain sufficient and accurate information (by the beginning of the academic year 2014-15) (paragraph 3.3).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- the harmonisation of assessment regulations, including pass degrees (paragraph 1.11)
- the implementation of the policy for monitoring timeliness and quality of assessment feedback (paragraph 1.14)

- the implementation of the new personal tutoring guidance and policy to ensure consistency across the University (paragraph 2.7)
- the review of postgraduate research students' teaching workloads to develop an institutional protocol (paragraph 2.26).

Student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement

The University places high value on student engagement and uses a variety of mechanisms to involve students at all levels in quality assurance and enhancement. The University provides students with ample opportunities to feed back on their experiences, and students generally felt informed about the actions taken in response to their input. There remains, however, variability between departments in terms of student engagement.

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

About the University of Warwick

The University of Warwick was founded in 1965 and is situated on a 700-acre campus in Coventry. Its ambition is 'to become a universally acknowledged world centre of higher education, firmly in the top 50 of world universities'. The University currently employs over 5,000 staff and has 22,418 students, made up of 12,704 studying at undergraduate level and 9,714 engaged in postgraduate studies. These figures include over 6,500 non-EU international students. There are four faculties, consisting of 29 departments and more than 50 research centres and institutes.

The University's Vision 2015 Strategy, launched in 2007 and updated in 2011-12, sets out the University's values and its ambitions across all key activities. The University has recently revised both the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the Collaborative Strategy and Policy to align more closely with the revised Vision 2015 Strategy and with the outcomes of the Institutional Teaching and Learning Review. The University's mission is:

- to become a world leader in research and teaching
- through research of international excellence, to increase significantly the range of human knowledge and understanding
- to equip graduates to make an important contribution to the economy and to society
- to serve our local region - academically, culturally and economically
- to continue to make a Warwick education available to all those able to benefit from it, regardless of economic or social circumstances.

The key challenges faced by the University are similar to those facing other publicly funded higher education institutions. These include: the new fees regime leading to increasing expectations of both students and their parents; the complexities of student number control; and the potential effect on recruitment of increasing overseas competition and more stringent immigration legislation.

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

Explanation of the findings about the University of Warwick

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

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

1 Academic standards

Outcome

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

Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1 The University has developed a credit framework, aligned with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), which enables this expectation broadly to be met.

1.2 The University has robust processes at both faculty and institutional levels to ensure that the level of awards and units are considered as part of course approval and monitoring. The process for ensuring a volume of study sufficient to demonstrate learning outcomes at unit level is less transparent, with units offering substantially the same teaching, and learning outcomes being assigned different credit values to promote interdisciplinary study.

1.3 All award titles are listed in the University Ordinances, but not directly linked to the levels of the FHEQ which are listed in the Credit and Module Framework. Each type of award has its own regulations, using course-related terminology which is out of date and not always aligned with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). The University's regulations allow some flexible features, such as students following an individual collection of units rather than those validated in the course regulations, but there is no evidence that these are widespread practices or that significant issues exist in terms of standards or Quality Code Indicators. In addition, the University has recognised the need to ensure that nomenclature is aligned with the FHEQ.

1.4 The review team recognises that the University is harmonising its regulations (see paragraph 1.11), and that there are still solutions that need to be developed and fully implemented. For example, from the beginning of the academic year 2013-14, extra credits taken above the volume required for the particular award will only count in borderline cases, although the specific criteria are yet to be approved.

1.5 Important information about courses, including assessment requirements, is not easy for students to locate and understand. Information is spread over a number of

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

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

⁷ See note 4.

documents. Course specifications contain a very limited amount of information, and key information such as course structure, option choices and degree designation are included in the course regulations rather than the course specification. The review team noted that the University could take further steps to make such information more accessible to students.

Use of external examiners

1.6 Overall, the University makes scrupulous use of its external examiners. There are clear processes and criteria for the appointment of external examiners and the expectations of the role are clearly articulated. The appointment of external examiners for all taught courses is monitored centrally and nominations are considered by the Steering Committee against Senate-approved criteria. Nominations for external examiners of postgraduate research degrees are made by the relevant Head of Department and are considered and appointed by the Chair of the Board of Graduate Studies on behalf of the Senate. In addition to written material provided by the University, there is also a website offering comprehensive information to external examiners. As well as induction arrangements, many departments offer additional briefings and mentoring, although these are not monitored at an institutional level.

1.7 The University makes effective use of external examiners' reports in its monitoring processes. Reports for all taught courses are read and annotated by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education (Quality and Standards) before being sent to the relevant Head of Department for a response. For research degrees, reports are analysed by the Chair of the relevant Faculty Graduate Studies Committee. Annotated reports and responses for taught courses are scrutinised at various key committees as well as during the Annual Course Review and the Institutional Teaching and Learning Review (ITLR).

1.8 The University has made good progress in updating its procedures for external examiners to make them consistent with *Chapter B7: External examining* of the Quality Code and other relevant guidance. For example, the report template has been updated to reflect guidance in the Quality Code. The review team noted that the University could take further steps to align with the Quality Code, for example by including the name, position and institution of the external examiner on course specifications, and revising its regulation that permits external examiners to contribute examination questions and to act as third markers.

1.9 External examiners' reports are not consistently shared with student course representatives on committees, and the availability of reports to the general student body is limited. While Students' Union officers and student faculty representatives sit on some of the committees that consider reports, these are not consistently made available at Student-Staff Liaison Committees. The review team therefore **recommends** that external examiners' reports be consistently shared with all student representatives by the beginning of the academic year 2013-14.

Assessment and standards

1.10 The University's assessment strategies are effective in ensuring that students have the opportunity to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes of their awards. The University has a clear approach to assessment, with the strategy for each course and module being approved as part of the approval processes. The requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) recognition are taken into account during course validation and ITLR as a means of embedding appropriate learning outcomes and the achievement of relevant skills. All minutes of Exam Boards are received by the Academic Office, and decisions are checked. External examiners' reports are analysed and key themes are identified and presented to the Board of Undergraduate Studies.

1.11 Further work is required to harmonise and implement taught award conventions, including pass degree and first-year assessment boards. The University has recognised the former issue and new regulations are being approved to ensure that pass degrees have specific learning outcomes for each award and do not represent default exit awards. Rules for progression have been harmonised since 2009, and while this information is available, it can be difficult for students to find. The review team **affirms** the harmonisation of assessment regulations, including pass degrees.

1.12 Opportunities for staff development on assessment are extensive. Support is available both from the Learning and Development Centre and at departmental level, and funding is provided through the Institute of Advanced Teaching and Learning. Training on assessment strategies is included as a compulsory element of the mandatory training for all probationary staff and postgraduate research students who teach, but is also open to all teaching staff. At departmental level, discipline-specific training is available, as is a mentoring scheme where teaching staff inexperienced in marking assignments are paired with experienced markers.

1.13 As part of collaborative arrangements with partners, explicit consideration is given to assessment. For more 'traditional' collaborative partnerships, the University's assessment conventions are adopted, whereas for joint awards a moderation exercise is undertaken to ensure both parties are using compatible approaches to assessment.

1.14 Academic feedback to students on assessments is recognised by the University as a significant issue. Concerns have been raised through the National Student Survey (NSS), external examiners' reports, Student Experience Reports, the International Student Barometer and PSRBs. Students report considerable variation in the quality and timeliness of feedback between different departments. To address the issue, the University has recently introduced a new policy on feedback, to include a four-week turnaround policy, and is currently monitoring its effectiveness in terms of the timeliness and quality of feedback. The policy and guidance on timing and methods of delivery are outlined in a Good Practice Guide on providing feedback to students on assessment. Improving feedback is also an integral part of the Enhancing Student Satisfaction Action Plan, which was passed at Senate in October 2012. The review team **affirms** the implementation of the policy for monitoring timeliness and quality of assessment feedback.

1.15 The review team did not see evidence of how students are provided with direct and explicit guidance on how to query assessment marks in cases of errors of transcription or calculation, and suggested that this might usefully be included, for example, in student handbooks. The review team was informed that, initially, students should raise the matter informally at a departmental level. If the matter remains unresolved, the student should make a formal complaint or appeal. It is unclear how serious this issue is, as the University does not monitor the number of queries.

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.16 Careful consideration is given to the design, approval, monitoring and review of courses to enable standards to be set and maintained, and to allow students to demonstrate the learning outcomes of the award. Academic approval of new and amended courses takes place at institutional level, and the use of standardised and comprehensive course and module approval forms helps to ensure consistency and rigour. Approval processes are clearly described and include effective guidance on what is required.

1.17 The course approval form requires a statement explaining how the requirements of the course match the relevant benchmarks. The course and module approval processes require consideration of the FHEQ, and external examiners are explicitly required to ensure

that standards are set at the appropriate level. All courses are subject to Annual Course Review and ITLR, and both processes require consideration of the FHEQ. New and revised processes for the review of collaborative courses were introduced at the start of the current academic year in recognition of the differing levels of risk associated with this type of provision. New modules, and amendments to existing ones, are approved at departmental level and are only reported to the faculty sub-committee. There is no process for reporting upon the volume of such changes at an institutional level. Each department determines its own process, and is subject to audit every three years. In smaller departments, approval may be by two members of staff, and there is no explicit requirement for student involvement or consultation in the departmental approval process guidance. Student representatives are members of department, faculty and University committees that receive and approve reports. Students also have the opportunity to comment through the NSS, end-of-year questionnaires and the ITLR process.

Subject benchmarks

1.18 The University uses subject benchmark statements and qualification statements effectively in programme design, approval, delivery and review to inform the standards of its awards. The course proposal form requires a statement on alignment with subject benchmarks or other relevant guidance, which is confirmed by an external subject specialist reviewer. Alignment with relevant benchmarks is also explicitly considered as part of the ITLR process. While external examiners can comment on non-alignment, this is not a specific requirement. The Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) has institutional oversight of PSRBs, including the continued alignment to PSRB requirements.

2 Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

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

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1 The University is committed to maintaining professional standards for teaching and support of learning, and provides staff development opportunities geared towards fulfilling this commitment. Resources such as the Learning and Development Centre and the Teaching Grid effectively meet the training and development needs for all academic and professional support staff, including part-time tutors and staff in partner colleges. Training covers a range of topics, including general teaching skills, assessment, working with international students, and the use of new technology.

2.2 Staff are effectively supported at each stage of their development. Members of staff with less than three years' experience of teaching in higher education are required to undertake the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic and Professional Practice (PCAPP), unless they can show sufficient previous experience to exempt them. The PCAPP is aligned to the UK Professional Standards Framework and, since the review visit, has been accredited by the Higher Education Academy. A mentor is also appointed for all new staff. The annual staff review is used to identify training needs, and the management of teaching quality is carried out at departmental level. The Collaborative, Flexible and Distributed Learning Sub-Committee has responsibility for approving non-University staff involved in collaborative courses. The review team heard that academic staff are clearly aware of, and value, the support available to them (see also paragraph 4.3). The review team considers

that the resources available to all staff to support their professional development is a **feature of good practice**.

2.3 The University recognises concerns regarding the level of training for postgraduate research students who teach, and a survey is being undertaken to investigate these issues in more detail (see paragraph 2.26). Students whom the review team met stated that training for postgraduate research students involved in teaching for more than 20 hours consists of the 'Introduction to teaching and learning in higher education' workshop, together with departmental training as and when appropriate.

2.4 The University prides itself on the quality of its 'research-led teaching and learning', and there is clear evidence of its strength and value. Opportunities exist for students to carry out research which feeds into their learning experience. Students also have the opportunity to highlight areas of good practice, which are then shared through various mechanisms, including the Warwick Awards for Teaching Excellence (WATE) and the Students' Union-led STARS of Warwick, which provide opportunities for staff and students to recognise and celebrate excellence in teaching and the support of learning. The Teaching and Learning Fora and the annual Teaching and Learning Showcase provide opportunities for staff development and exchange of ideas. It is worth noting that, since 2006, 11 members of staff have received National Teaching Fellow Awards. NSS results confirm the high level of satisfaction among students regarding the quality of teaching.

Learning resources

2.5 The University provides appropriate learning resources to allow students to achieve the learning outcomes of their programmes. There is a clear overall strategy for resource allocation, which is driven by the Vision 2015 Strategy and the Learning and Teaching Strategy, and is evidenced through scheduled meetings with individual departments and the explicit consideration of resources as part of the course and module approval process. The annual academic planning process takes place through the Academic Resourcing Committee.

2.6 Central resources - such as the library and Student Careers and Skills (SCS) - are widely praised by students, and the review team was impressed with the enthusiasm of professional support staff and the extent of communication and integration between support services. Professional support staff have a clear focus on improving the student experience and recognise the importance of listening to and acting upon student opinion. The review team heard that issues such as lack of study space had been identified by students and addressed through Student-Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs) and a library-specific feedback page. Several different learning spaces are now provided for staff and students, including the Learning Grid, the Learning Grid Leamington, the Teaching Grid and, specifically for postgraduate students, the Wolfson Research Exchange and Postgraduate Hub. Staff and students commented favourably on the effect that these spaces have had on the creation of learning 'communities' (see also paragraph 4.3).

2.7 The revision of the personal tutor system remains a work in progress. The 2008 Institutional Audit included a desirable recommendation for the University to 'review the operation at departmental level of the new central guidelines on personal tutoring with a view to enhancing consistency of implementation'. Reviews undertaken in 2009-10 and 2010-11 confirmed a lack of consistency of approach across departments. As a result, a new policy and guidelines were recently introduced. While there is no formal policy or schedule for their review, it is incumbent on the roles of both the Senior Tutor and the departmental Directors of Studies to keep the policy under review and to monitor its effectiveness on a regular basis. There remains some variation of practice and approaches between departments, for example in the number of recommended personal tutor meetings, or whether meetings

should be one-to-one or, as stated in departmental handbooks, in groups. Some instances of this variation were contrary to the University's own guidelines. The University's position is not to seek absolute uniformity but to recognise and accommodate differences between disciplines accordingly, although the review team did not see any firm evidence of this institutional recognition. Faculty reports from the ITLR highlighted the personal tutor system as an ongoing concern, and the review team heard of variable experiences among students. Therefore, the team **affirms** the implementation of the new personal tutoring guidance and policy to ensure consistency across the University.

2.8 Access to online resources is variable. There is currently no single virtual learning environment, but Moodle is gradually being introduced in response to the ITLR, and many departments have made their own provision for virtual learning environments. The review team recognise that the introduction of a virtual learning environment is in its infancy, and noted its potential for the future development of the students' learning experiences.

Student voice

2.9 Students make an effective contribution to quality assurance at the University, primarily through their involvement as representatives on SSLCs and the variety of ways in which the student body can express its opinions. SSLCs are student-focused; training is provided for elected student representatives, who are also expected to act as chairs for these committees. Specific arrangements are made for students on collaborative, flexible and distributed learning courses. The review team heard that postgraduate students are more satisfied with their representation on SSLCs than undergraduates. There were also differences in satisfaction between departments. The AQSC has overall responsibility for the monitoring of SSLCs. Besides SSLCs, student representatives sit on virtually all the University's major committees. Representatives are briefed on their roles by the Students' Union, which intends to provide more in-depth training for these roles in future.

2.10 Close attention is paid to student feedback at every level of the University. One example is the way in which feedback from students is used as a way of identifying and disseminating good practice, such as WATE and the use of NSS data and targeted institutional surveys to promote enhancement. Institutional funding for enhancement projects is awarded through the Institute of Advanced Teaching and Learning, and a key criterion for funding is student engagement in proposed projects. Professional support staff also welcome feedback from students as a means of developing services.

2.11 Students play a central and active part in the ITLR. They are trained by the University and Students' Union on how to be effective panel members. Positive attitudes towards student engagement in ITLR, and in general, were evident in both the staff and students whom the review team met.

Management information is used to improve quality and standards

2.12 The University makes effective use of management information to safeguard quality and standards and to promote enhancement of student learning opportunities. Information is collected centrally by the Management Information and Planning Office and monitored at appropriate levels. Management information reports on teaching and learning, progression, and complaints and appeals are considered by AQSC and the relevant sub-committees, with a view to informing the development of strategic and operational plans. Management information on student progression and achievement is used in Annual Course Review, ITLR and Collaborative Course Review. University-wide key performance indicators are considered by the Council and the Steering Committee, which both include Students' Union representatives.

2.13 Data is used by departments and support services for planning, review, resource allocation, setting strategy, widening participation, and to support and promote enhancement. The quality and usefulness of the data and the willingness of Management Information and Planning staff to produce relevant information was widely praised by members of staff. The University is currently exploring the potential of using the data in the future to predict where problems might arise, for example to identify potential situations where students are at risk of dropping out.

Admission to the University

2.14 The University uses policies and procedures to admit students that are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied. The University's Admissions Statement sets out both the admissions policy and the monitoring process, and is available to applicants. The University Regulations clearly set out conditions for admission, including the designated roles responsible for dealing with applications. Information provided for applicants at all stages of the application process is clear, easy to find and comprehensible. The admissions process has a separate complaints procedure for applicants, which again is clearly explained. The University effectively monitors the application process using a variety of methods, including Management Information and Planning data, surveys of decliners and information from the complaints procedure.

2.15 Appropriate information and training is given to all staff involved in admissions. The Student Admissions and Recruitment Office is the central department responsible for training staff and providing up-to-date information on admissions via the admissions website and annual conferences for course selectors.

Complaints and appeals

2.16 The University has effective complaints and appeals procedures. Clear and accessible information is made available to staff and students through the University Complaints and Appeals Procedure. Additional support is offered to students through the Students' Union and the Senior Tutors' Office. Those studying on collaborative courses use the same procedures, unless the complaint applies only to the collaborative partner. Course handbooks explain this process clearly. The Academic Registrar's Office provides resources for staff and guidance on the handling of complaints and appeals. The complaints and appeals procedures are monitored by AQSC and an action plan is created to deal with outstanding issues.

Career advice and guidance

2.17 The University has an approach to career education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) that is adequately quality assured. SCS offers CEIAG to students. SCS has matrix accreditation and the University is a member of the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS). All SCS staff are appropriately qualified and additional staff development is available to advisers at all levels. Senior careers consultants are located in all academic departments and assist them in developing placement opportunities for students. Each department also has a Student Careers Representative, selected and trained by SCS. Feedback from students is gained through numerous channels, including student surveys, the ITLR process and SCS representatives sitting on SSLCs. SCS's close links with other support services has been identified as a feature of good practice (see paragraph 4.3). SCS has clear strategic objectives and presents reports to AQSC. Reports are presented to the Steering Committee each term.

2.18 The ITLR reports identified issues such as the variability in practice in referring students to SCS and the heavy reliance in some areas of the University on this central service rather than linking careers education more to individual courses. The University is addressing these issues, for example through the new guidelines for personal tutoring where the expectation is that tutors will monitor students' engagement in their personal and career development and more effectively direct students to SCS. This should ensure greater consistency of provision.

2.19 The students whom the review team met were very familiar with SCS and praised the resources available to them; in the review of personal tutoring, students also indicated that SCS was the support service most familiar to them. SCS resources and departmental courses are widely advertised to students. Resources include a Placement Learning Unit, extensive links with employers through Employer Connect, and a dedicated adviser for students with disabilities. Specific resources are provided for postgraduate research students and an online portfolio provides an effective resource for personal development planning.

Supporting disabled students

2.20 The University effectively manages the quality of learning opportunities to enable the entitlements of students with disabilities to be met. Strategic direction is provided by the Equality and Diversity Committee (EDC), which monitors admissions of students with disabilities and other relevant performance indicators. The committee is supported by an Equality and Diversity Network, open to all members of staff, and a Disability Interest Group.

2.21 The University has an effective Disability Service which forms part of Student Support Services. The Disability Service includes a Disability Coordinator, who sits on the EDC. The review team heard that guidance and specialist training are made available to staff responsible for teaching and supporting a student with a disability. Training is provided through the Disability Service and the Learning and Development Centre (LDC). Both the prospectus and the admissions process encourage students to disclose their disability early. For those students who do disclose early, a specific induction takes place. Assistive technologies are available in the library to all students with disabilities and are well used. Communication takes place between the Disability Service and the member of staff in each department who leads on disability. Despite the clear requirements for supporting students with disabilities, disparities still exist between departments regarding quality of provision and making reasonable adjustments. There is evidence, however, that disparities are reported to EDC and promptly acted upon, an example being the variations in examination arrangements.

Supporting international students

2.22 The University's quality of learning opportunities for international students is appropriate. Standard University processes are used to monitor and enhance provision, and student feedback from surveys is considered by AQSC. Internationalism has been identified and supported centrally as a key objective. The review team heard that the University has rapidly expanded its international population and now has an active student exchange programme, unusually achieving a good balance between incoming and outgoing exchanges. Around 500 students will go on exchange in 2012-13, supported by the Study Abroad Team in the University's International Office.

2.23 The International Office provides effective support for international students. Students whom the review team met reported that they felt supported, and over 90 per cent of the 2011 cohort were satisfied with the International Office. Students receive all the

necessary information pre-arrival and a four-day orientation programme is available on arrival.

2.24 International students are well integrated into the life of the University and there is a range of services and initiatives that has been developed to help with the transition to the UK and with the progress of their studies. The International Office works effectively with the Students' Union, examples being the joint production of the comprehensive Go Global Guide and the World@Warwick society. The society runs a number of initiatives to develop integration between home and international students, including free language classes and trips and tours. A comprehensive programme of English language support is available, both pre and in-session, through the Centre for Applied Linguistics. Students needing such support are referred by their tutors. SCS offers a wide range of training, including academic writing, CV production and interviewing skills. The University recognises the benefits to all students and staff from involvement with international students and the particular contribution they make to the life of the University community. The International Office and LDC provide training for staff on supporting international students.

Supporting postgraduate research students

2.25 The University provides appropriate support and guidance to enable postgraduate research students to complete their programmes and to enable staff involved in research programmes to fulfil their responsibilities. The University has a strong research environment within which postgraduate research students generally flourish. Students whom the review team met were complimentary about the Wolfson Research Exchange, a staffed space for collaborative and interdisciplinary research, but did comment on the pressure on work space within certain departments. Students also appreciated the support available from both staff and peers, and the opportunities to participate in collaborative research projects.

2.26 Despite the existence of the University's 'Guidelines on the Supervision and Monitoring of Research Degree Students', departmental student handbooks and induction training events, the review team found evidence of some variation in practice between departments. Examples include inconsistency in addressing skills deficits and ineffective monitoring of students' teaching workloads. The review team heard that the time taken to mark work was impacting on the time available to students to conduct research. The review team **affirms** the review of postgraduate research students' teaching workloads to develop an institutional protocol.

Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.27 The University has effective procedures for approving, managing and reviewing collaborative programmes, which enable students to achieve their awards. The University has a relatively small portfolio of collaborative provision, with partners in the UK and overseas, and has taken a cautious approach towards managing this provision. It is governed by a Collaborative Strategy and Policy that is clear and up to date. Most collaborations lead to a University of Warwick award only, although there are a small number of joint awards. Partnership agreements are agreed following careful and detailed consideration and fit well with the University's strategic objectives.

2.28 Collaborative course proposals must be approved using standard faculty and institutional procedures, supplemented by effective risk-based scrutiny through the Collaborative, Flexible and Distributed Learning Sub-Committee (CFDLSC). Collaborative courses are monitored in the same way as campus-based courses, using Annual Course Review reports and external examiners' reports. The review team heard that, from the beginning of the academic year 2012-13, collaborative courses are periodically

reviewed by CFDLSC separately from campus-based courses, with this review process again being risk-based. Operational management of each collaboration is delegated to the department concerned; this includes marketing information and student handbooks. However, any major issues can be escalated up to institutional level.

2.29 The University's key strategic collaboration is through the Monash Warwick Alliance, which was formally launched in 2012. This strategic alliance with Monash University, Melbourne, Australia encompasses joint doctoral and master's degree programmes, joint research initiatives, joint academic and management appointments, and staff and student exchanges. A Joint Programme Committee oversees the management of the joint doctoral and master's degree programmes, and a Pro-Vice-Chancellor is employed jointly by both Universities. These programmes go through the University's standard approval processes and should lead to broader international opportunities for students. The review team confirms that the University has been diligent in planning the arrangements with its partner organisations and has effective monitoring and review arrangements in place.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.30 The University effectively manages the quality of learning opportunities delivered through flexible and distributed arrangements, including e-learning. Although the University is well established in distance learning provision, its current provision, other than the Warwick MBA by distance learning, is relatively small scale. The MBA has around 1,400 students and was ranked second in the world in 2012 for distance learning MBAs. Students are well supported through online interaction, a 'virtual classroom', handbooks and a week on campus each year.

2.31 The University has robust processes for approval, monitoring and review of distance learning courses. Courses are approved using standard faculty and institutional processes, supplemented by scrutiny through CFDLSC. The approval process ensures that the department either has previous experience of distance learning or, at minimum, access to appropriate training to effectively deliver courses. The approval process also ensures that course materials have been tested and will be updated regularly, that a reliable delivery platform and library facilities will be available to students, and that students will be properly supported. External examiners cover all modes of study to ensure consistency.

Work-based and placement learning

2.32 The quality of learning opportunities delivered through work-based and placement learning is managed effectively by the University. It has a number of courses that incorporate work-based and placement learning, including courses with optional or mandatory years abroad, intercalated years in industry, professional or clinical experience, and work-based and experiential learning.

2.33 The University has clear guidelines on placement learning and maintains a comprehensive 'Good Practice Guide on Placement Learning'. The guidelines clearly set out the responsibilities of the department, the student and the placement provider. A forum also exists for departmental placement learning coordinators to share good practice. The approval, monitoring and review of placement learning takes place using standard University processes. As in other areas, variations in practice do exist between departments, particularly with respect to student support and assessment.

Student charter

2.34 The Warwick Student Community Statement was developed by a working group of staff and students and published in October 2012. Although strongly welcomed by the Students' Union, its impact on, and awareness among, the student body as a whole has been limited. The review team heard that the University has made a commitment to communicating the Statement more effectively in time for the academic year 2013-14. The Statement is comprehensive but concise and is written in accessible language. It makes clear what the University and its students should expect from one another and covers all types of students. It contains links to a variety of sources of information, including the complaints and appeals procedure, and a firm commitment by the University to the recently introduced four-week feedback policy.

3 Information about learning opportunities

Summary

The information about learning opportunities produced by the University of Warwick **meets UK expectations**. The intended audience finds that the information about the learning opportunities offered is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The team's reasons for this conclusion are given below.

3.1 The University makes the information about itself available primarily through a good-quality website. The vast majority of information for the public and for current and prospective students is clear and easy to find, including the Vision 2015 Strategy and the Learning and Teaching Strategy. Clear information for all prospective students is available on the Study at Warwick web pages, including easy access to descriptions of modules and supplementary information. There is a dedicated portal for postgraduate research applicants, giving links to departmental websites and useful information on the Graduate School website. The students whom the review team met indicated that more online information about the additional costs of courses would be desirable.

3.2 Students whom the review team met confirmed their satisfaction with the quality and completeness of the information provided for them, both pre-arrival and on-course. Both general and course-specific information is available pre-arrival. Although the University currently has no policy on what information should be provided, there is some guidance in the Good Practice Guide on Information for Students, and there is the intention to develop an institutional 'Transitions' website to standardise provision. Course and module specifications websites define learning outcomes and can easily be located via the Teaching Quality website. Less easy to find is information on examination conventions and regulations, and the Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS). The review team encourages the University to consider producing a single gateway to improve access for students to key academic information.

3.3 There is no central mechanism for checking the accuracy of information. The major source of information for current students is the departmental or course handbooks, which are universally available online via departmental websites. The handbooks are not directly indexed via the central website. While the Communications Office has responsibility for supporting departments as required in the production of promotional materials, the review team heard that responsibility for oversight of the information in these handbooks is entirely the responsibility of departments. There is a substantial 'Good Practice Guide on Providing Information to Students' for departments, but this falls short of defining what must be included in handbooks. The University's policy is to encourage departments to refer to standardised central information wherever possible, and the review team found evidence

that this is generally adopted by departments. There is, however, no periodic sampling or central mechanism for checking the accuracy of information. Therefore, to ensure that clear and consistent information on matters such as credit accumulation requirements and progression rules is provided, the review team **recommends** that the University should develop robust arrangements for assuring itself that information produced for students is fit for purpose and trustworthy. The review team also **recommends** that the University should ensure that course handbooks contain sufficient and accurate information. Both recommendations should be fully implemented by the beginning of the academic year 2014-15.

3.4 The Undergraduate Prospectus, Postgraduate Prospectus and information on admissions are signed off and checked for consistency by both the Admissions Office and the Communications Office, with course details verified by individual departments. The criteria and processes for admissions, entry requirements and equivalent qualifications are available online. For undergraduate courses, the criteria used to make decisions on offers, however, are described in general terms, not on a subject-by-subject basis, and not all subjects indicate whether or not admissions interviews are conducted.

3.5 The Teaching Quality Office and the Graduate School Office have responsibility for much of the Wider Information Set (WIS) and for ensuring that it is available. A useful 'wider information sets' website collates access to the information, and the Teaching Quality web pages provide clear information about the quality assurance system. The register of collaborative provision is available online and appears to be maintained and up to date. The Key Information Set (KIS) is available via the Unistats website and also in the form of 'KIS widgets' on the University's admissions subject web pages. KIS information was verified by a KIS working group and the Management Information and Planning Office, and appears to meet requirements.

3.6 The review team has already made a recommendation regarding the consistency of the availability of external examiners' reports to all student representatives (see paragraph 1.9).

4 Enhancement of learning opportunities

Outcome

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

4.1 Deliberate steps are being taken at institutional level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. Action plans have been developed for enhancing student satisfaction, with a clear link to annual planning and resource allocation, and for taking forward the key themes from the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2012-17. The action plans were recently approved by Senate and reported to Council. AQSC has oversight of enhancement activities across the University and for the review of progress on implementation and any necessary reprioritisation. The review team found evidence that strategic planning for enhancement at institutional level is strong, in particular with regard to the initiation of, and investment in, the Institutional Teaching and Learning Review (ITLR) and the Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning. Students whom the review team met confirmed the existence of an ethos of enhancement, but suggested that the autonomy and power of departments can undermine central efforts to enhance quality, particularly in instances where there is a perception that such efforts are overly prescriptive. Evidence suggests, however, that the University is strengthening its mechanisms for ensuring that while the benefits of departmental enhancement initiatives are recognised, departmental

autonomy does not hinder central initiatives, for example through a stronger role for the chairs of faculties, and resource allocation being linked to achievement by departments against key performance indicators.

4.2 The ITLR has been very successful in promoting enhancement across the institution. ITLR is a periodic review process whereby all departments undergo review in a single week, with the most recent taking place in November 2011. It was specifically targeted at enhancement and was used to share good practice across the University through thematic summary reports derived from all the individual departmental reviews. It succeeded in simultaneously engaging the vast majority of staff in considering teaching quality and enhancement. A trained student reviewer sat on each panel. The review team heard that the follow-up 'faculty engagement' discussions, involving both postgraduate and undergraduate students, derived key points from the reviews and led to the production of faculty action plans. Examples of initiatives to emerge from the ITLR are the development of an institution-wide virtual learning environment and the creation of new posts in the areas of quality assurance and enhancement, faculty projects, employability and postgraduate development. Reviews taking place simultaneously enabled the University to link enhancement initiatives across the institution in a way that would not be possible in the usual staggered process for periodic review. The review team considers that the simultaneous periodic review of teaching and learning in all departments, which promotes enhancement across the University, is a **feature of good practice**.

4.3 The Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning (IATL) is another initiative that promotes enhancement across the University. Established in 2010, it works with departments to promote innovation in teaching and learning. It does this by distributing funding for projects and disseminating the good practice arising from those projects. The review team heard that students are at the centre of IATL activities and serve on its Steering Group and Management Committee. Other resources praised by staff and students for promoting innovative teaching and developing flexible learning spaces include the Learning and Development Centre (LDC), the Teaching Grid, the Learning Grid, the Wolfson Research Exchange and the Postgraduate Hub. The library, LDC and Student Careers and Skills (SCS) have worked together with IATL to optimise the use of these spaces, and the review team was impressed by the team ethos of these different groups and their close contact with the academic staff and students at the University. As a result, the review team considers that the integrated work of the library, the IATL, the LDC and SCS to facilitate innovation in teaching and learning is a **feature of good practice**.

4.4 There are numerous opportunities for good practice to be identified and disseminated across the University. Some of these have been described elsewhere in this report, and include the following: the Annual Learning and Teaching Showcase attended by 120 staff; the IATL newsletter and website; Warwick Awards for Teaching Excellence (WATE); STARS of Warwick; and termly lunches of directors of undergraduate and graduate studies that provide informal fora in which to discuss quality and enhancement.

5 Thematic element

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

Student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement

The review team investigated student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement at the University of Warwick. The University places high value on student engagement and uses a variety of mechanisms to involve students at all levels in quality assurance and enhancement. The University provides students with ample opportunities to feed back on their experiences, and students generally felt informed about the actions taken in response to their input. There remains, however, variability between departments in terms of student engagement. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, student involvement would be further enhanced by making external examiners' reports more accessible to students.

Innovations in student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement

5.1 The University has introduced a number of innovations to further improve student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement. The ITLR process has already been identified as good practice (see paragraph 4.2) and includes student representation on both the departmental review panels and the follow-up faculty engagement panels. Both staff and students commented on the benefits of student involvement in this innovative process.

5.2 Students are engaged in institutional projects that are directly relevant to the student experience. Examples include the development of the Assignment Management System and the Warwick Student Community Statement. The Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning (IATL) makes student involvement a condition of funding for staff-led innovative teaching and learning projects. IATL also provides funding for undergraduate and postgraduate taught research projects. Students, as well as staff, can make nominations for the Warwick Awards for Teaching Excellence (WATE). The University also has the Students' Union-led STARS of Warwick awards for teaching excellence.

Staff experience of/participation in student involvement in quality assurance

5.3 The review team heard that there is strong staff support for student involvement in quality processes; the process for ITLR reflects this. Students are represented on key committees across the institution, and the Student-Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs) provide the opportunity for staff and students to discuss matters of importance to the student body. Student representatives are trained for their role on SSLCs and are responsible for chairing the meetings. The student submission does, however, comment on the variability of departmental engagement across the University.

Acting on student contributions and 'closing the feedback loop'

5.4 The student submission states that the University scores fairly low on the relevant NSS question on 'closing the feedback loop'. At institutional level, students are represented on all key committees, including the Council, Senate and Senate Steering Committee. This enables students to contribute directly to policy-making at the highest level and to hear the discussions being held. At departmental level, student representatives attend SSLCs and departmental committees, thus participating in processes such as course approval and monitoring. Again, however, this practice varies between departments. The review team saw evidence that the University had shown itself to respond quickly to students' concerns, for example through the creation of new guidelines in response to dissatisfaction with the quality and timeliness of assessment feedback.

5.5 It has already been noted that external examiners' reports are not consistently available to SSLCs (see paragraph 1.9), and are not made accessible to students on the courses concerned. The reports are seen by students on the Boards of Undergraduate and Graduate Studies, although there was little evidence of discussion in these meetings.

Glossary

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

The handbook can be found on the QAA website at:

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

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

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

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

Academic Infrastructure Guidance developed and agreed by the higher education community and published by QAA, which is used by institutions to ensure that their courses meet national expectations for academic standards and that students have access to a suitable environment for learning (academic quality). It consists of four groups of reference points: the **frameworks for higher education qualifications**, the **subject benchmark statements**, the **programme specifications** and the **Code of practice**. Work is underway (2012-13) to revise the Academic Infrastructure as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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