University of Bath

Institutional Review
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

May 2013

Contents

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 Bath (the University). The review took place from 29 April to 3 May 2013 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Gillian Butler
- Professor Jon Scott
- Dr Peter Smith
- Ms Helen Uglow
- Miss Amy Woodgate (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the University 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 standards[1]
  - the quality of learning opportunities
  - the information provided about learning opportunities
  - the enhancement of learning opportunities
- provides a commentary 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 the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The theme chosen for this review is 'Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement'.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[2] For background information about the University see page 3. A dedicated page of the website explains the method for Institutional Review of higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland[3] and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

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[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/IRENI/Pages/default.aspx

Key findings

QAA's judgements about the University of Bath

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at the University.

- The academic standards of the University's awards **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meet UK expectations**.
- The quality of the University's information about learning opportunities **is commended**.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meet UK expectations**.

Good practice

The team identified the following **features of good practice**.

- The promotion of student engagement and the University's willingness to listen and respond to student views (paragraph 2.14).
- The institution-wide commitment to placement provision and support (paragraph 2.44).
- The systematic provision of accessible, reliable and up to date information for students, staff and the public (paragraph 3.1).
- The University's Quality Assurance Code of Practice as a living document which is well established, maintained under active review and widely used across the institution (paragraph 3.5).

Recommendations

The team **recommends** that by July 2014 the University should:

- review the procedures for the induction of external examiners (paragraph 1.8)
- strengthen the University's oversight of the arrangements for sharing external examiners' reports with students (paragraph 1.10)
- ensure greater consistency in the involvement of the Learning Partnership Office and link advisers in collaborative partner Staff/Student Liaison Committees (paragraph 2.15).

Affirmations

The team **affirms** the following courses of action that the University has already identified.

- The expansion in the utilisation of e-learning technologies, including the virtual learning environment (paragraph 2.9).
- The commitment to continue to improve campus accessibility for all students (paragraph 2.28).

Student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement

The University of Bath has a well established reputation for the strength of its relations with its student body. Students are viewed as members of the academic community with shared responsibility for their education and the student experience. They play an active role in the management and governance of the University and are well represented in the deliberative structure of committees and working groups. The University and the Students' Union work closely together to ensure that students make an effective contribution to quality assurance and enhancement.

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 Bath

The University has its origins in the Bristol College of Science and Technology. Following the recommendations for the expansion of higher education in the Robbins Report in 1963, it relocated to a new campus on the outskirts of Bath and received its Royal Charter as a University in 1966.

The mission of the University is 'to deliver world class research and teaching, educating our graduates to become future leaders and innovators, and benefiting the wider population through our research, enterprise and influence.' The University's Corporate plan states 'We aim to deliver high quality, professional education that is intellectually challenging, offering excellent career prospects, a supportive environment for personal development, and equality of opportunity to anyone with the academic ability to benefit.'

In the Academic year 2011-12, the University had 15,137 enrolled students, of which 10,563 were on undergraduate programmes and 4,574 were on taught or research postgraduate programmes. Around 4,500 students were from outside the UK. There are 2,423 staff, of which 928 are academics engaged in teaching and research. The University has a 93 per cent completion rate for undergraduates and in the 2011 and 2012 National Student Surveys, 91 per cent of students reported being satisfied with their course.

The University has a well established reputation for its research and teaching, and values achievement, enterprise and creativity within its academic community. It has a particular strength in promoting the employability of its graduates. The majority of its undergraduate programmes and a number of postgraduate programmes include work placements. The University has links with over 7,000 employers. In 2011, 88 per cent of graduates progressed to employment or further study.

The Students' Union plays an active role in support of the learning experience of students. The Union has a national reputation for the service it provides and has been recognised by the National Union of Students by the highest rank 'Gold' award in The Students' Union Evaluation Initiative in 2011. The Union works closely with the senior staff of the University and supports extensive student participation in the governance and management of the University. The student voice is well articulated by the Union and is influential in institutional decision making. Relations between staff and students are strong and underpin a cohesive and vibrant academic community.

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[4] www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/IRENI/Pages/default.aspx

Explanation of the findings about the University

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

Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1 Responsibility for quality and standards of programmes rests ultimately with Council, as the University's governing body, and with Senate as the supreme academic decision-making body. Oversight of the University's quality framework and procedures is provided by the University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee which reports to Senate.

1.2 The University pays due attention to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) in the design and development of its programmes of study. Details of the relevant procedures are included in the University's Quality Assurance Code of Practice.

1.3 All new programmes are considered in detail and approved by a standing committee - the Programmes and Partnerships Approval Committee - including all programmes offered by partner institutions. The Committee also approves significant amendments to programmes. Evidence from Programme Specifications and approval procedures indicate due consideration by the Programmes and Partnerships Approval Committee of the FHEQ descriptors. External reviewers also normally comment on whether programmes are informed by the FHEQ. The volume and level of study are clearly stated in programme and module specifications.

1.4 Research degree programmes are approved by Faculty and School Research Students Committees. In addition the Programmes and Partnerships Approval Committee approves research degree programmes which include a taught element such as professional doctorates and integrated PhDs.

1.5 Many of the University's programmes are also accredited by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.

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[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.

Use of external examiners

1.6   The University has secure arrangements for the management of external examining which are fully compliant with *Chapter B7: External examining* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). Details are set out in the University's Quality Assurance Code of Practice. Advice and guidance is provided in a comprehensive handbook for external examiners.

1.7   The nomination of external examiners is approved by Boards of Studies on behalf of Senate. Information is provided about examiners' previous experience, current roles and other examinerships as well as any information about potential conflicts of interest. The appointment of external examiners for UK collaborative provision follows the same process and is managed by the Learning Partnerships Office. Nominations of external examiners for research degrees are considered by the appropriate Board of Studies.

1.8   The induction of new external examiners is the responsibility of individual departments. There is no formal institutional-level process. The handbook for examiners provides details of institutional procedures and programme leaders are expected to provide individual briefings for new examiners. Examiners are asked to comment on the quality of the support they have received on external examiners' report forms. The review team consider that there is potential for inconsistency in the induction of external examiners and a need to ensure that examiners have a full and comprehensive understanding of University procedures, including the New Framework for Assessment (see paragraph 1.11). The University is **recommended** to review the procedures for the induction of external examiners to ensure that all examiners are fully prepared for their role by July 2014.

1.9   A template is provided for external examiners' reports including sections on the standard of awards, the arrangements for assessment and the content and structure of the programme and assessments. Reports go to the Vice-Chancellor in the first instance and are then considered by Heads of Department. They are also reviewed by the Chair of the University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee and the Head of Student Learning Experience and Quality. Heads of Department respond to external examiners and any action points identified are progressed through annual monitoring reports. A summary of key issues and aspects of good practice is considered annually by the University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee.

1.10   It is University policy that external examiners' reports, together with responses, are made available to students through Staff/Student Liaison Committees. However, the evidence presented to the review team suggested that not all committees had received the reports on a regular and consistent basis. The University is **recommended** to strengthen its oversight of the arrangements for sharing external examiners' reports with students by July 2014.

Assessment and standards

1.11   The University has developed a New Framework for Assessment that applies to all taught awards. It provides a common approach to programme assessment, including both the requirements for student progression and final awards. It has been introduced in stages since 2008-09 and now covers the majority of the University's provision. There remain a number of programmes that are not fully compliant with the New Framework for Assessment, but are subject to alternative assessment procedures. The view of staff and students is that the new framework had been helpful in bringing a consistent approach to assessment across the University. The framework is currently under review following the first four-year cycle of undergraduate programmes.

1.12   Details of the membership and conduct of examination boards are clearly documented. The Registry provides training and/or guidance on University regulations and procedures for all participants in boards of examiners, including chairs and secretaries.

1.13   The University's policy on marking, moderation and feedback sets out clear guidelines for academic staff managing assessments. These include a requirement that all programme units include formative assessment to ensure that assessment practice promotes effective learning. This development has been welcomed by students. Departments also provide details of the feedback students can expect on assessed work. The University has a policy of returning work to students within three weeks (during semesters). Students have raised concerns about the adequacy of feedback arrangements in the past and the consistency and legibility of comments have been identified as an issue by external examiners. The University has taken steps to address these issues, including the provision of generic feedback on examinations.

1.14   Grade descriptors have been developed for all Departments, approved by Faculty Learning Teaching and Quality Committees. These are published in programme handbooks and provide clear guidance for students on what they need to do to attain expected levels of performance. There is also specific guidance regarding late submission of work and the process for claiming mitigation.

1.15   The University has clear policies on academic malpractice, including plagiarism and has taken appropriate steps to ensure that students are fully aware of the expectations. Students are required to undertake training and a test as part of their progression procedures. Coursework is routinely checked using computer software.

1.16   Academic staff are encouraged to develop new and innovative approaches to assessment. The University's programme for new lecturers and teaching fellows, the Bath Course in Enhancing Academic Practice, includes a focus on assessment methods and the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office offers workshops on assessment. In addition the University has introduced an institution-wide project on the review and enhancement of assessment practices which is promoting the use of different modes of assessment.

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.17   There is a two-stage process for the approval of new programmes. The Academic Programmes Committee provides outline planning permission following an assessment of the business case and resource requirements of an individual programme. Subsequently the Programmes and Partnerships Approval Committee scrutinises the detailed arrangements for the programme and makes a recommendation to Senate. The process is informed by a report from an independent external reviewer. There are additional requirements for programmes delivered through a collaborative arrangement.

1.18   The approval of major changes to programmes are considered by the Programmes and Partnerships Approval Committee. Minor changes, including the approval of new units for existing programmes, are delegated to Faculty or Department Learning, Teaching and Quality Committees.

1.19   Annual monitoring of programmes is conducted by exception, although all reports include student progression and outcomes data and are accompanied by external examiners' reports and associated responses. The annual monitoring reports are considered by the relevant Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee.

1.20   Periodic review of programmes (termed Degree Scheme Review) is conducted on a five-year cycle based on a Programme Evaluation Document and involving input from

students and from an independent external reviewer. The University's Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee maintains oversight of the process and considers any institutional matters arising from the reviews. The QAA review team examined a range of Degree Scheme Review reports and concluded that the process is both rigorous and reflective.

Subject benchmarks

1.21   QAA subject benchmark statements and qualifications statements are considered in the development of new programmes of study and reference to them is included in programme specifications. The mapping of programmes against the benchmarks and the FHEQ is also checked as part of the Degree Scheme Reviews.

2   Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

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

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1   The University's requirements for staff and students undertaking teaching activities are set out in the University's Quality Assurance Code of Practice. It is mandatory for all new academic staff and graduate teaching assistants to undertake development appropriate to their role. Training for new staff is provided by the Bath Course in Enhancing Academic Practice which aligns with the UK Professional Standards Framework and is accredited by the Higher Education Academy. All new teaching staff are also assigned a mentor. The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office provides training for research students with teaching responsibilities.

2.2   Students have previously raised concerns about the quality of teaching by graduate teaching assistants and the assistants themselves have also voiced concerns about the level of support that they receive. The University has responded by the development of a revised training programme, Teaching Introduction for Postgraduates, which has sought to address these matters and additional support is being offered through the University's virtual learning environment.

2.3   The University has a Teaching Development Fund which supports projects that lead to the improvement of current practice in learning, teaching and the student experience. Bids for funding need to be supported by evidence of student engagement in the proposals. It has recently been reviewed to enhance its impact at institutional level. The University actively encourages the dissemination of innovations in teaching practice through a variety of discussion fora and other activities, including the annual 'Exchange!' conference.

2.4   In addition, high quality teaching is recognised through Teaching Awards to staff, following nominations from both staff and students. Five teaching awards are given each year. The University also encourages and supports staff for the Higher Education Academy's National Teaching Fellowship Scheme. To date five members of staff have been awarded Fellowships. Exceptional performance may be rewarded through the University's Contribution Pay Scheme.

2.5   It is a requirement for new staff to have teaching observed during their probationary period. Existing staff are also expected to engage in peer review of teaching which includes a range of developmental activities. It is not currently linked to the formal appraisal system or

to the identification of training needs. The review team learned that the scheme has been viewed positively by staff.

Learning resources

2.6   The University aims to maintain an effective infrastructure for learning through appropriate investment and response to student feedback. The resources are rated highly by students in the National Student Survey with 91per cent satisfied in 2012, up from 87 per cent in 2011. Requirements are monitored through the procedures for course approval, annual monitoring and Degree Scheme Review. Approval for collaborative provision involves a detailed assessment of on-site facilities.

2.7   There is a continuing programme of modernising teaching facilities, including the provision of a new teaching building. The University has also introduced a policy for the effective management of space, to ensure sustainability and accessibility to resources. Students are generally appreciative of the developments that have taken place, although some concern has been expressed about the number of work spaces available for postgraduate students in departments. This has been off-set to an extent by the opening of a separate Graduate Centre.

2.8   The University library houses an extensive collection of books and journals, including an expanding collection of electronic resources. It is open 24 hours a day all year round. The students consider the library to be an 'excellent resource' with 86 per cent of undergraduates and 84 per cent of postgraduates rating the library as suitable to meet their needs. The students were particularly positive about access to online library provision.

2.9   The Bath University Computing Service provides comprehensive support for Information Technology facilities across the campus (including Wi-Fi) and is generally appreciated by students and staff. The University has promoted new approaches to programme delivery through the use of online tools and through the facilities offered by its virtual learning environment. There have also been innovative developments in feedback, dissemination and student communication. These developments have been well received by students and staff, although the review team noted that there is currently some variability in the take-up of these opportunities by teaching staff in some areas. The University has also made extensive use of these resources in the development of its distance learning programmes. The review team recognises the significant progress that has been made in this area and **affirms** the expansion in the utilisation of e-learning technologies, including the virtual learning environment.

Student voice

2.10   The 'Informed Student Voice' is a key principle of the University's approach to quality management, underpinning the student experience at the University. Students are viewed as 'active citizens in the academic community' and play an important role in the governance and management of the institution.

2.11   There is a commitment to involve students in all levels of decision making, including full membership of all relevant committees and regular contact with senior institutional managers. The Vice-Chancellor chairs a joint committee of the University Council, the Senate and the Students' Union which considers any matters relating to the student experience. The committee reports to both Council and Senate. At Faculty level students are members of Boards of Studies, the Graduate School Committee, Learning and Teaching Quality Committees and Research Students' Committee. Students are also represented on Degree Scheme Review Panels.

2.12   Student representatives on committees are elected through online elections managed by the Students' Union. All new student representatives receive training jointly delivered by the Students' Union and the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office. This now includes an online training module on the University's virtual learning environment. The students that met the review team confirmed that these arrangements are effective and that student representatives feel well supported in their role.

2.13   There is a close working relationship between the University management and the senior officials of the Students' Union. Regular meetings are also held between Students' Union Officers and Heads of professional services, including the Director of Learning and Teaching Enhancement and the Academic Registrar. Students are regularly consulted on the development of University policy and the Student's Union contributes an annual list of priority issues, derived from student opinion surveys and other committee discussions, that form an agenda for working with the University to bring about improvements for students. However, the review team were also informed that students would welcome more involvement at a higher level with strategy development and planning.

2.14   The University has a strong track record of working with students to engender a culture of co-ownership of learning and teaching and to assure the maintenance of academic standards. The review team consider that the promotion of student engagement and the University' willingness to listen and respond to student views is **a feature of good practice**.

2.15   Staff/Student Liaison Committees are the principal fora for considering the student experience and for regular dialogue between academic staff and students at Faculty and Departmental level. The majority of Staff/Student Liaison Committees are chaired by students. Each committee makes an annual report of the issues that have been discussed. A summary of these reports is presented to the University Learning and Teaching Quality Committee, together with an action plan. There are also separate Staff/Student Liaison Committees for collaborative partners. Evidence from the minutes of Staff/Student Liaison Committees indicated that these committees did not always involve participation from the Learning Partnership Office, or from link advisers. The University is **recommended** to ensure that there is greater consistency in the involvement of relevant personnel in these meetings.

2.16   Students have the opportunity to provide anonymous feedback on their learning experience and individual teaching staff performance through unit evaluations. These are now conducted online and the results are reported to the Academic Staff Committee where they may be taken into consideration for staff probation and promotion. Since the introduction of online evaluations there has been a significant decline in response rates. The University is considering innovative ways, in collaboration with the Students' Union, for addressing this issue. In 2011-12 the University introduced a programme-level evaluation survey which includes provision for distance-learning students.

Management information is used to improve quality and standards

2.17   The University has effective policies and systems for the collection of relevant management information. Key Performance Indicators were introduced in 2005 which draw on a wide range of data and provide information for both the University Senate and Council, including information on entry qualifications, retention and student achievement. Senate and Council also receive Corporate Performance Indicators annually. The Student Records and Examinations Office maintains records of current students and the Careers Advisory Service collects information about student destinations. Detailed information is reviewed at Department, Faculty and University level. The University's Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee considers student withdrawals and classification data before it is submitted to

Senate. Student destination data is reviewed by the Careers and Employability subcommittee of the University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee.

2.18   The University's Degree Attainment Group produced a report for the Equality and Diversity Committee in 2011 on student achievements, with a specific focus on race, disability and gender issues. The Careers and Employability Sub-Committee also produced a report in 2011 on graduate employment which highlighted concerns about socio-economic disparities.

Admission to the University

2.19   The framework for the admission of students is clear and comprehensive. Prospective students have access to online advice and guidance about how to apply to the University. There are additional guidelines for the recruitment and support of international students. Undergraduate applications are handled centrally by the Admissions Office. Postgraduate applications are managed by the Graduate Schools. Partner Colleges are assigned a named contact in the Learning Partnerships Office to support admissions. The review team confirmed that staff in the Colleges felt sufficiently supported in this process.

2.20   Links with partner colleges provide a route for students from communities with limited experience of higher education to gain access to the University. The University's targets for widening participation are relatively low, but the strategy is currently under review. Steps are also being taken to support students from under-represented groups once they are at the University. Students act as ambassadors and mentors for the University's outreach activities in schools and colleges.

Complaints and appeals

2.21   The University's procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals are set out in its regulations. Details are provided in programme handbooks and are available online on both the Students' Union site and the official University pages. The review team found the Students' Union guidance to be clearer and more helpful, although not so easy to locate.

2.22   A Postgraduate Research Ombudsman advises, where required, on issues raised by research students that cannot be resolved at department level and reports annually to the University Research Students Committee and to Senate. The Students' Union has an Advice and Representation Centre which offers impartial and confidential support for students involved in complaints or appeals procedures. The Centre handled 935 contacts with students in 2011-12 on academic issues. Of these, 34 per cent were specifically about appeals. The remainder covered a wide range of enquiries and concerns.

2.23   The monitoring of student complaints and academic appeals is carried out by the Council/Senate/Students' Union Group on behalf of Senate. The group receives summary annual statistics on complaints and appeals and discusses any relevant issues identified. The arrangements for complaints and appeals were reviewed by Senate in 2011-12, following an internal audit.

Career advice and guidance

2.24   Advice and guidance on career opportunities is offered both by Departments and by the University's Careers Advisory Service. The University has a strong focus on promoting the employability of its graduates and the students are generally appreciative of the support that is available for them. The National Student Survey in 2012 recorded a 94 per cent

satisfaction with the University's career provision. Lower scores have been recorded by the University's own programme evaluation survey, which covers students in all years of study. There were particular issues about the level of support available for students on distance learning programmes.

2.25 The University has supported a number of initiatives to promote the employability of graduates including student enterprise and skills training. The Bath Award, managed by the Students' Union and supported by private sponsorship, provides a means whereby students can gain recognition for their skills and experience achieved alongside their academic studies. Details include a range of extra-curricular activities and are recorded on degree transcripts. The initiative is appreciated by students. Recent changes in the amount of time required for the award have been introduced to increase participation in the scheme and have been broadly welcomed, although some students have expressed a concern about the impact that this may have on the perception of the scheme.

Supporting disabled students

2.26 The University takes an inclusive approach to all of its students ensuring that they can benefit equally from the opportunities available. The Equality and Diversity Committee oversees arrangements and reports annually to Senate and Council. The Equality and Diversity Committee is chaired by the University Secretary. Clear information for prospective and current students is provided on the Student Disability Advice web pages and the Student Disability Advice team provide guidance on programme development to ensure that accessibility issues are addressed. Assisted technologies are available to support the learning experience of students with disabilities.

2.27 The Students' Union provides support for students with disabilities in cases that are brought to their attention. The Union has difficulty in developing a more comprehensive strategy for disabled students as information about students with disability, held by the University, is restricted due to data protection issues.

2.28 The University has taken reasonable steps to ensure physical access to buildings and facilities, although some problems remain. The review team were made aware of the difficulties that this creates for individual students. The team appreciates the actions that the University is taking to address the needs of disabled students in its redevelopment of teaching resources and other facilities, and **affirms** the commitment to continue to improve campus accessibility for all students.

Supporting international students

2.29 The University has a significant international student community, with around 30 per cent of its full-time student population coming from outside the UK. It seeks to ensure that international students are well supported to succeed in their studies and their social life. Provision for international students is covered by the University's Quality Assurance Code of Practice and the recently created role of Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Internationalisation) includes responsibility for international student recruitment and experience. International students are represented on a number of University committees.

2.30 The University has used the results of the International Student Barometer to inform the management of the student experience at Bath, although the University has not participated in the survey since 2009. It is participating again in 2012-13. The results from the survey indicate that the overall experience of international students is positive.

2.31   Specialist advice and support is provided by the International Student Advice Team and the Students' Union's International Student Association supports and represents the views of the international student community. If required, the English Language Centre provides additional language training for students both pre-sessional and alongside their other studies.

2.32   The student written submission commented on a number of issues for international students that the University is currently addressing. These include the availability of placements for international students, the integration of international students in group work and the high proportion of international students on some postgraduate programmes.

Supporting postgraduate research students

2.33   The University has approximately 1,100 postgraduate research students. Oversight of research activity is provided by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) who chairs the University Research Committee and the University Research Students Committee. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor is also responsible for the development and implementation of the University's research strategy. Graduate Schools have been established in each Faculty to manage taught and research postgraduate provision. Faculty Research Students Committees oversee the quality of the research experience of students. Postgraduate students are represented on all relevant University committees.

2.34   The University participates in the Higher Education Academy's postgraduate research experience survey and the postgraduate taught experience survey. Both indicate a rising trend in postgraduate student satisfaction, although the results are significantly lower than comparable results from the National Student Survey for final year undergraduates.

2.35   The University promotes a vibrant, sustainable and supportive research community. The Researcher Development Unit provides development opportunities, workshops and projects to support research students and encourage collaboration and interaction between staff and students. The University has also provided a Graduate Centre as a dedicated work and study space for research students.

2.36   There are appropriate arrangements in place for the identification of research supervisors. The University encourages the formation of supervisory teams to support research students. All staff new to supervision are expected to undertake training to develop their supervisory skills. Progress and review procedures are clearly articulated in the Postgraduate Student Guide. Directors of Studies conduct annual monitoring of postgraduate research provision in individual departments and report to Faculty and School Research Student Committees and the University Research Student Committee.

Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.37   The University's collaborative arrangements include franchised provision, licensed partner organisations, articulation agreements, student exchanges and placements. The procedures for the management of collaborative arrangements are set out in the University's Quality Assurance Code of Practice. All provision is subject to the same quality assurance processes that apply to on-campus programmes. The Learning Partnerships Office manages the relationships with UK-based partners. All partnerships are underpinned by a written agreement which defines the responsibilities of both partners and provides protection for the interests of students.

2.38   The evidence reviewed by the team provided assurance that the current arrangements for the management of collaborative partnerships are working effectively.

Staff and students whom the team met from partner organisations were positive about their experience and the opportunities that the provision affords to students.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.39   The University offers a number of distance-learning programmes at postgraduate level which are predominantly designed to provide continuing professional development for staff in employment. It is also actively investigating the provision of materials for newly developed Massive Open Online Courses.

2.40   The quality assurance of distance learning programmes is covered by the University's Quality Assurance Code of Practice, including guidance on the delivery, monitoring and review of programmes, the support for students and the roles and responsibilities of staff. Distance learning programmes are approved by the Programmes and Partnerships Approval Committee in the same way as all other University programmes.

2.41   Students studying via distance learning have access to online support and extensive use is made of the University's virtual learning environment in the provision of learning resources. There are currently a number of new web-based e-learning initiatives that will be helpful to students studying remotely from the University campus. Students are assigned to a tutor to support their studies and the appointment of work-based mentors is encouraged to assist with professional practice. Students also have the opportunity to interact with each other through online discussion fora.

2.42   The University attempts to gain feedback from distance-learning students. The programme level evaluation survey of postgraduate taught students, conducted in 2012, included responses from distance-learning students. It identified that many do not feel part of the learning community and that their voice is not well heard by the University. These results have been considered by the University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee and a number of actions have been identified to address the issue. A Teaching Development Fund project, looking into the needs of distance learners, has been implemented during 2012-13.

Work-based and placement learning

2.43   The University has a successful track record in supporting students in placement activity. Around 60 per cent of undergraduates undertake a study or work placement and work-based learning features prominently in postgraduate programmes and Foundation Degrees. The expectations for the management of placement learning are included within the University's Quality Assurance Code of Practice. Faculty and School placement teams review and monitor placement providers and handle all administrative arrangements. Students are offered pre-placement support and continuing pastoral care. The entitlements and responsibilities of students are set out in placement handbooks.

2.44   The review team met with students that had been on placement and discussed placement arrangements with staff. They confirmed that overall the provision of placements and work-based learning are well managed and resourced. The review team considered that the institution-wide commitment to placement provision and support is **a feature of good practice**.

Student charter

2.45   The Students' Union has developed a draft partnership agreement between students and staff that outlines the expectations of the University and its students with regard to the management of the student experience, the services provided by the University

and the commitments of students. The draft agreement is based on the life-cycle of a student at the University. The draft has been discussed by the Student Experience Forum and the Students' Union's Academic Council. The Students' Union has also organised a number of focus group sessions for students and the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office has arranged an online consultation for staff. The agreement is due to be considered and approved by Senate and Council before implementation in 2013-14.

3   Information about learning opportunities

Summary

The information about learning opportunities produced by the University **is commended**. The intended audiences find 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 takes the provision of information to its stakeholders seriously and has taken steps to improve the comprehensiveness, reliability and accessibility of its published information. The University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee has established a sub-committee on public information to oversee the future development and enhancement of information provision. The committee has mapped the expectations of Part C: Information about higher education provision of the Quality Code to the University's Quality Assurance Code of Practice and identified areas for further improvement. The review team consider the systematic provision of accessible, reliable and up to date information for students, staff and the public to be **a feature of good practice**.

3.2   A significant amount of information about the University is generally available on the website including the Corporate Plan, Mission and financial statements. The University's prospectus is also readily available online (and in hard copy) and provides details of all the University's programmes as well as information about making an application to the University and key details about fees and living costs. The prospectus is accompanied by Key Information Sets for individual programmes, which provide additional information on student satisfaction, mode of study and employability.

3.3   Both undergraduate and postgraduate students, met by the review team, confirmed the usefulness of the information available on the University's website and the general availability of information about their programmes of study. The University's Quality Assurance Code of Practice contains detailed guidance about the expected content of programme handbooks. Standard sections on University regulations and central services are incorporated into all handbooks. Further work is currently in progress on the development of programme handbooks and programme specifications.

3.4   Information is provided for each stage of the student experience. Prospective students receive clear guidance on the application process. New students are offered pre-arrival advice and guidance and during their early months at the University there is a well planned induction programme and a dedicated induction website. The newly appointed student experience officers in the Faculties and Schools will also play a key role in providing information for students. Students receive advice on personal and career development and the University's commitment to the employability of its graduates is demonstrated through the information provided about placements and work-based learning opportunities.

3.5   All staff have access to relevant information about quality and standards on the University's website, including the University's Quality Assurance Code of Practice. The code is a comprehensive and authoritative document that provides clear and up to date

guidance for staff on quality processes. It is meticulously maintained and updated to ensure its currency and it is widely referred to by staff at the University. The review team consider the Quality Assurance Code of Practice to be a living document which is well established, maintained under active review and widely used across the institution. It is acknowledged as **a feature of good practice**.

4   Enhancement of learning opportunities

Outcome

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

4.1   The review team recognised that measures are being taken by the University to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities and that there is a pervasive culture of enhancement at all levels across the institution. A blend of enhancement developments were noted including individual initiatives in Departments and Faculties as well as cross-institutional developments. The University claims a 'multi-stranded approach' to enhancement-supporting developments that arise through a variety of routes. It believes that '... enhancement does not come from a single document, process or mechanism, but is dynamic and relies on a number of approaches'.

4.2   Many enhancement projects originate from individual groups of staff. The Teaching Development Fund invites applications from individuals and teams for funding for small projects that have the potential for wider dissemination. Successful projects, that are related to the University's strategic priorities, may be rolled out more widely with central support. The review team considered that a strengthening of institutional coordination of enhancement initiatives could help to ensure that maximum impact was achieved from these activities.

4.3   Good practice is disseminated partly through a series of Good Practice Discussions that take place at Faculty and Department level. The outcomes are collated by the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Office and reported to the University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee. An annual event for staff also promotes the sharing of innovations in learning and teaching.

4.4   A number of institutional enhancement programmes have been facilitated under the auspices of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy. This includes improvements in the quality of placement provision, a review of the First Year Student Experience, the development of enhanced arrangements for providing feedback to students on assessed work, flipping lecture content and classroom time to improve the effectiveness of staff-student contact, and a campaign to raise awareness of plagiarism and to promote academic integrity. A further project is planned on the impact of assessment on the learning experience of students.

5   Thematic element: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

5.1   The University of Bath has a well established reputation for the strength of its relations with its student body. Students are viewed as members of the academic community with shared responsibility for their education and the student experience. They play an active role in the management and governance of the University and are well represented in the deliberative structure of committees and working groups.

5.2   The Students' Union, as the principal organisation for representing the interests of students, works closely with the University's senior management to ensure that the views and interests of students are fully appreciated. They have a key role in promoting student involvement in University activities and supporting the implementation of policies and procedures relating to the student experience. The Union has made a significant effort to ensure that the interests of all students are represented, including international students, students studying in partner institutions and those engaged in distance learning programmes.

5.3   The student written submission confirms the commitment of the Students' Union to engaging in the maintenance of the standards of academic programmes and the quality of students' learning experience. The University and the Students' Union work closely together to ensure that students make an effective contribution to quality assurance and enhancement.

5.4   The Students' Union is proactive in identifying issues for enhancement. Each year the Top Ten list of priorities and goals is drawn up on the basis of student feedback. The list is discussed at the Council/Senate/Students' Union meetings and feeds into the coordination of enhancement activities by the University Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee.

5.5   The Teaching Development Fund is one of the main initiatives for supporting teaching enhancement projects. Student involvement is a requirement for bids to be considered and students have played an active part in the delivery of projects. The Students' Union also bids for projects in its own right and has been successful in securing funding for a number of student-led initiatives.

5.6   The University is responsive to the student voice and gives due consideration to unit evaluation outcomes and the results of the National Student Survey. The views of students are well represented on committees and working groups and their contributions are respected and regarded. A Student Experience Forum has been established to provide a focus for discussion and action on student matters. Students are involved in Degree Scheme Reviews, both as members of the review panels and as participants in focus groups.

5.7   The Students' Union has its own Academic Council that discusses a wide range of matters related to the student experience. Student representatives on Department Staff/Student Liaison Committees are members of the Academic Council and play an important role in discussing learning and teaching issues. The Students' Union ensures that all student representatives and union officers are trained for their roles and receive appropriate support.

5.8   Better@Bath is a joint initiative between the University and the Students Union. It is an online facility designed to ensure that students are kept informed of developments at the University and to respond to comments and feedback from students. The site is also used to showcase University achievements and to highlight the outcomes of the University Teaching Awards. Better@ Bath is also periodically produced in hard copy.

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 (2011-12) 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.