



Institutional audit

University of Huddersfield

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Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and the quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes
- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research
- the reliance that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the institution publishes about the quality of its educational provision and the standards of its awards.

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

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

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

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

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website.

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Huddersfield (the University) from 15 to 19 March 2010 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers. On this occasion the team carried out a hybrid Institutional audit. The hybrid process is used where QAA considers that it is not practicable to consider an institution's collaborative provision as part of a standard Institutional audit, or that a separate audit activity focusing solely on this provision is not necessary.

To arrive at its conclusions, the audit team spoke to members of staff throughout the University and to current students, and read a wide range of documents about the ways in which the University manages the academic aspects of its provision. As part of the process, the team visited two of the University's partner organisations in the UK, where it met with staff and students, and conducted by videoconference equivalent meetings with staff and students from one overseas partner.

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

Outcomes of the Institutional audit

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

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The audit team found that the University has structures in place to ensure there is quality enhancement at an institutional level, driven through the University's Strategy Map and associated Teaching and Learning Strategy.

Postgraduate research students

The audit team found that the institutional framework for postgraduate research students provided an appropriate research environment and student experience. The institutional arrangements, including those for support, supervision and assessment, were rigorous and effective and met the requirements of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

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

- the use of the Strategy Map to drive and coordinate change across the University
- the proactive approach taken by Computing and Library Services to ensure that it meets the needs of a diverse student body
- the comprehensive and systematic support the University provides for its students
- the contribution to quality enhancement made by the various ways of recognising staff and student achievements.

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- review regulations and policies with respect to assessment in order to eliminate potential inconsistencies of practice
- review the University's committee arrangements to ensure that Senate has full oversight of academic matters as specified in its terms of reference
- take steps to ensure full adherence to University policies with respect to public information regarding courses offered by partner organisations
- formalise the University's processes for the ethical approval of research projects and the appropriate reporting of such approvals
- ensure that all postgraduate research students receive appropriate training before they undertake teaching duties.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- use experts external to the University in all validation panels.

Reference points

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

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

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

Report

1 An Institutional audit of the University of Huddersfield (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 15 March 2010. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of the awards that it delivers and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2 The audit team comprised Mrs Fiona Church, Professor David Heeley, Professor Kenneth Newport, Miss Aleshia Sampson, Dr Ann Read and Mr Lawrie Walker, auditors, and Mr David Coombe, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Professor Paul Luker, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The University of Huddersfield traces its roots back to the 1825 Huddersfield Scientific and Mechanical Institute, through the 1884 Technical School and Mechanics Institute, the designation as a Polytechnic in 1970, to the granting of degree awarding powers and University designation in 1992. The University is based on three campuses: Queensgate, in the centre of Huddersfield, and two smaller campuses established in 2005 at Barnsley and Oldham.

4 The University's vision is 'To be an inspiring, innovative University of international renown'. This vision underlies the University's mission, which is:

- 'To deliver an accessible and inspirational learning experience
- To undertake pioneering research and professional practice
- To engage fully with employers and the community'.

5 As of December 2009, the University had a total of 20,836 students studying on its three campuses. Queensgate, the largest campus, had 10,111 full-time and 3,522 part-time undergraduates; 589 full-time and 2,186 part-time postgraduate taught students; 658 postgraduate research students; 682 overseas students, of which 241 were postgraduate; and 558 sandwich students on placement. Barnsley was base to a total of 1,326 students, which comprised 745 full-time and 381 part-time undergraduates; 20 full-time and 177 part-time taught postgraduates; and three overseas undergraduate students. Oldham had a total of 1,206 students, composed of 712 full-time and 391 part-time undergraduates; 18 full-time and 78 part-time taught postgraduates; and seven overseas undergraduate students.

6 At the same date, the University collaborated with seven international partners and 30 partners in the UK, of which 27 participated in a national Consortium for Post Compulsory Education and Training. In all, 5,025 students over and above the on-campus numbers were studying under collaborative arrangements. Collaborative provision in the United Kingdom supported 238 full-time and 2,975 part-time undergraduates, and 11 full-time and 62 part-time postgraduates. Overseas provision comprised 1,069 full-time and 661 part-time undergraduates, and four full-time and five part-time postgraduates.

7 The audit team was largely satisfied that the University had responded positively and effectively to the recommendations of the 2004 Institutional audit. As three of those recommendations focused on aspects of regulations and their application and as the University had recently been engaged in significant changes to its regulations, the team looked carefully at University practice in those areas. The team concluded that there remained some potential for inconsistencies in assessment practice, especially in the use of discretion (see paragraphs 26, 27 and 29).

8 The audit team also confirmed that the University had taken steps to respond to the 2006 Review of postgraduate research programmes, although it identified inconsistencies relating to the training of postgraduate research students who undertake teaching (see paragraph 89).

The team was also satisfied that the University had, in the main, responded positively and sufficiently to the recommendations of the 2007 Collaborative provision audit, though there remained some concern about the accuracy of public information relating to partnerships (see paragraphs 73 and 98).

9 The University's Briefing Paper drew attention to a number of recent institutional developments, which included the substantial and continuing development of the estate and the establishment of two new campuses at Barnsley and Oldham; the establishment of the International Study Centre; the review of its classification and assessment regulations; and new and modified quality assurance processes, such as quality appraisals. The University's strategic objectives are encapsulated in a Strategy Map, which was introduced and strongly promoted by the new Vice-Chancellor, who took up his post in January 2007. The Strategy Map has associated key performance indicators and a clear relationship with constituent strategies, especially those for teaching and learning and research. The audit team found that the Strategy Map had been widely disseminated to the University community and that it was being used as a major reference point with respect to the University's values and strategic intentions. The Strategy Map was also found to inform the provision of resources for learning and student support. The team concluded that the use of the Strategy Map to drive and coordinate change across the University was a feature of good practice.

10 The audit team found that the organisational structure of the University was very similar to that which had been in place during the previous audit, as there has been little restructuring and only minor changes in the governance structure. The University is organised into seven academic schools, each led by a Dean. At the time of the audit, the schools were: Applied Sciences; Art, Design and Architecture; Business; Computing and Engineering; Education and Professional Development; Human and Health Sciences; and Music, Humanities and Media. Schools are themselves organised into departments.

11 The academic work of the University is supported by 10 services: Computing and Library Services; Estates and Facilities; Financial Services; Human Resources; International Office; Marketing and Public Relations; Planning and Information Service (incorporating the Admissions and Records Office); Registry; Research and Enterprise; and Student Services.

12 The University describes its governance structure as one that 'reflects its academic diversity, relatively devolved nature and responsibility', combined with a 'strong central coordinating and regulatory function'. The Senate is the 'supreme academic decision-making body in the University', and has responsibility for assuring the standards of the University's awards. Senate is supported by two central sub committees, the University Teaching and Learning Committee and the University Research Committee, together with seven school boards. The sub committees that report directly to the University Teaching and Learning Committee include the Student Council, the Quality and Standards Advisory Group, and the Standing Committee for Collaborative Provision. The seven school teaching and learning committees and school research committees report to the relevant school boards as well as to the appropriate University committee. School boards are also responsible for course committees with their associated course assessment boards, school accreditation and validation panels, and extenuating circumstances panels.

13 As the Briefing Paper stated that 'Deans have lead responsibility for [the assurance of quality and standards] and exercise it through their school boards and particularly their school teaching and learning committees', the audit team studied the operation of school committees and their interaction with central committees. The team's consideration of committee effectiveness was also informed by investigations carried out by the University itself during the year prior to the audit as part of its schedule of quality appraisals.

14 The audit team found that the University's committees, with one partial exception, act effectively to oversee the institution's management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. In particular, the team found that agendas align with terms of reference,

actions are followed through, and that there is an appropriate balance of monitoring, consultation and decision making. The team also found that there was good interaction between central and school-based committees. However, the team concluded that there was a risk to Senate's ability to maintain full oversight of the work of its own committees and could not see how its agendas completely fulfilled its published terms of reference. In the light of this, the team advises that the University review its committee arrangements to ensure that Senate has full oversight of academic matters as specified in its terms of reference.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

15 The University has a variety of approaches to new course approval and modification. The approach adopted depends on the amount of new credit to be validated as part of the approval process as well as other factors, such as the risk presented by the change. Courses with a significant volume of new or revised modules are dealt with by a University event, where there is a requirement for two members external to the University to participate and thereby provide an independent and objective review that standards are appropriate. Otherwise, the approval of courses is handled internally by a School Accreditation and Validation Panel, which requires the participation of a representative of the University Teaching and Learning Committee from another school.

16 The documentation required for validation panels is comprehensive. An innovative feature of the approval process is a compliance check of the documentation by an independent school panel prior to the event. Validation events are effectively recorded and the chair of the panel is responsible for approving the actions taken by the course team in response to any conditions and recommendations.

17 Modifications to existing courses follow a process similar to that for course approvals. Changes that affect fewer than around a third of course modules are normally approved by the School Accreditation and Validation Panel. Although not a formal requirement of the change processes, some schools encourage consultation with external examiners on module changes.

18 The recently introduced subject review and course revalidation process provides a comprehensive consideration of the past and current performance and the continuing currency of an area of provision. A scrupulous compliance check of the provision's adherence to University quality procedures is carried out. The event, which covers all the provision in a broad subject group, is undertaken in one day, therefore the amount of time dedicated to the detailed scrutiny of each course is quite limited. The outcome of the process, in addition to any conditions or recommendations of the panel, is the revalidation of all the courses, from which point the change history of all courses and modules starts again. Given that significant changes may have been made to a course without the involvement of external experts (see paragraph 15), the audit team concluded that broad subject review could lead to not reaping the potential benefits of having detailed external scrutiny at the course level in confirming the appropriateness of standards and quality (see paragraph 21).

19 The process for annual course evaluation is thorough and comprehensive. Evaluation reports show an appropriate amount of reflection and are considered thoroughly by course committees and school boards. The Deans, or their nominees, prepare a report of the outcomes of annual monitoring for the University Teaching and Learning Committee, which is complemented by a report from an independent representative of that committee. The process was subject to a recent quality appraisal which, although it noted some inconsistencies, identified no significant failings in the process.

20 While the University does not have a clearly articulated process for course closures, the audit team was able to review the process followed for the closure of a Foundation Degree. The team found that the closure was undertaken in an orderly manner, with due regard to the protection of the interests of students.

21 The audit team concluded that the University's processes for programme approval, annual monitoring and review are carried out in line with the stated procedures and in accordance with the precepts of the *Code of practice*. However, the team felt that the process for the validation of existing courses could be enhanced through the greater use of external participation. Consequently, the team recommends that the institution use experts external to the University in all validation panels.

22 The rights and responsibilities of external examiners are clearly articulated. School boards are responsible for the nomination and detailed scrutiny of external examiners against a common set of criteria. The University organises an annual induction day for external examiners, where their roles are explained and the regulations and assessment processes described. Report templates are provided for both the external examiners' reports and for course leaders to record both an interim action plan and final action plan confirming actions taken in response to external examiners' comments. The Registry produces an annual summary, which includes issues raised by external examiners for consideration by the University Teaching and Learning Committee.

23 The audit team found that external examiners play an active role in ensuring that the standards of the University's awards are set and maintained at an appropriate level, and the University closely adheres to the *Code of practice*. The University makes strong and scrupulous use of external examiners' reports.

24 The University has clearly taken into account the Academic Infrastructure in the development of its awards and the maintenance of standards and keeps a watching brief on quality assurance initiatives within the European Higher Education Area. The University has a standard template for programme specifications. Course learning outcomes are mapped against relevant subject benchmark statements as part of the validation process. The University makes use of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) but has not adopted the revised conventions of levels 4-8 as recommended in the August 2008 version of the FHEQ. Rather, it uses a variant of the previous version, which the audit team found to be potentially confusing. The team encourages the University to eliminate the potential for confusion with respect to its nomenclature for levels of study.

25 The university-wide assessment regulations are reviewed and revised regularly. One of the objectives of the Teaching and Learning Strategy is for '2/3 of students to achieve first and upper second degrees by 2012-13'. While the statistics indicate that there has been an increase in 'good honours' over the last few years, and the changes to the assessment regulations may have facilitated this, the audit team found no evidence to suggest that standards had been put at risk as a result of this aspiration or the regulatory changes.

26 The audit team found aspects of the University's assessment regulations difficult to understand and considered that they could lead to inconsistencies. For example, the University permits 'tutor reassessment'; that is, where a student fails an assignment at the first attempt, the work can be resubmitted for marking prior to the course assessment board for a capped mark of 40 per cent. The use of tutor reassessment is at the discretion of the module leader and there is no University process to determine which assignments will be eligible for tutor reassessment. The team found that students were confused about tutor reassessments. This confusion confirmed the team's view that there was no clear University oversight of tutor reassessment and that there was considerable scope for inconsistent practice (see paragraph 29).

27 Guidance on how to make a claim for extenuating circumstances is well publicised. However, the audit team found no common University process for the consideration of extenuating circumstances, no set membership for panels and no common remit for panels. Although students reported being clear about the processes that applied to their course, there is no University monitoring of extensions and extenuating circumstances to ensure consistency and parity between courses and schools (see paragraph 29).

28 The procedures and guidance relating to the conduct of assessment boards are clear and comprehensive. A University quality appraisal in 2009 reported inconsistency in practice and poor recording of decisions by course assessment boards, but found that the boards appeared to operate in a consistent and transparent manner. The audit team found no evidence to suggest that standards were at risk and noted that the University is seeking to address the inconsistencies.

29 Overall, the audit team found that the University's assessment policies and regulations make an effective contribution to its management of standards, and they take into account the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining, Section 5: Academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters, and Section 6: Assessment of Students*. However, the team identified a number of features of the regulations and their practice which could lead to inconsistencies that could potentially put the University's standards at risk. The team therefore advises that the University review its regulations and policies with respect to assessment in order to eliminate potential inconsistencies of practice.

30 Management information is used in the annual course evaluation cycle but the presentation of the statistical information varies between reports, making it difficult to compare course performance. The University is seeking to address this variability. The audit team found some evidence of the use of management information in monitoring and decision-making, and while the audit team felt the University had made good progress in starting to collect and use data, it had some way to go before it could be said to be making systematic use of data.

31 Overall, the audit found that the University's management of academic standards is operating as intended. The application of the institution's regulations and policies is largely consistent and the associated guidance reflects consideration of the elements of the Academic Infrastructure, although the audit team concluded that there is scope for inconsistencies of practice with respect to some aspects of assessment. The University's approval and review processes align with the *Code of practice*, although the use made of external experts could be more widespread. There is also strong and scrupulous use of external examiners in the summative assessment of provision. All of these features support a judgement of confidence in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

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

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

34 The audit team concluded that the University was making careful and consistent use of those elements of the Academic Infrastructure relevant to its stewardship of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

35 The evaluation of learning opportunities is a key part of the annual course evaluation process and the course evaluation template requires consideration of the student experience, including National Student Survey results, and teaching, learning assessment, and curriculum developments. Through the summary reports, the issues and examples of good practice are brought together across courses for consideration at school and University levels. Revalidation and subject review is a further process that enables reflection on the learning opportunities and their management at course, school and institutional level.

36 The audit team was able to confirm that the University makes effective use of the processes of programme approval, monitoring and review to assure the provision of learning opportunities in existing and proposed programmes.

37 There is a comprehensive range of opportunities for student feedback to be gathered across the institution. The audit team saw clear evidence of a positive working relationship between students, their representatives, staff and the senior management of the University. The Students' Union reported a very good working relationship with the University and feels that it is consulted regularly and constructively. The team saw several instances of ways in which students were able, through a variety of mechanisms, to comment on and influence the University's provision.

38 The audit team found clear evidence that staff engage with feedback and are responsive to student concerns, with an action-focused attitude to dealing with issues raised. The University Teaching and Learning Committee has engaged positively with discussions on improvements to student representation and responded to student feedback on areas for improvement. The audit team met a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate students, on differing study modes and at various sites and collaborative partners of the University. All of these students were positive about the student feedback mechanisms available to them.

39 The VOICE08 and VOICE09 Student Representatives' Conferences were viewed by students and the audit team as a positive vehicle for ensuring that student representatives are supported in their role, which provided further evidence of a proactive approach to student feedback across the institution.

40 The audit team found that the University responds proactively and thoroughly to National Student Survey results, which are used to inform a range of committees. Action plans are produced and reviewed regularly by senior management and senior University committees. National Student Survey results and other statistical information are considered at school level, where appropriate actions are identified. The team concluded that the degree of attention given to the National Student Survey outcomes is noteworthy and confirms a robust approach to student feedback.

41 In addition to the wide range of feedback mechanisms there are clearly specified opportunities for students to engage with quality assurance matters across the University. Students play an active role on key committees, including the University Student Council, the University Teaching and Learning Committee, and Senate. Within schools, they are represented on school boards, course committees and student panels and the University periodically reviews the effectiveness of such representation. The Annual Evaluation process involves student evaluation and an analysis of the student questionnaire feedback.

42 The University regularly commissions thematic reviews and quality appraisals on a range of topics. Students are involved in these, both as members of review panels and as participants in meetings. It was clear to the audit team that the University values and facilitates student participation in a wide range of quality assurance matters.

43 The University's Strategy Map and Teaching and Learning Strategy state the intention to ensure that students are able to 'learn from staff at the leading edge of knowledge and application'. The audit team found clear links between research and scholarly activity and student learning opportunities.

44 The University supports pedagogically-orientated research, which contributes to the student experience, and is establishing an Institution of Teaching and Learning to provide coordination, evaluation and dissemination. The University has adopted the UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education. Staff are expected to seek recognition through becoming Associates or Fellows of the Higher Education Academy. Opportunities are provided for staff to engage in further training and gain recognition for their pedagogic and research achievements. Students reported to the audit team that they were aware of the research activity of tutors and were satisfied with the opportunities provided to engage with research.

45 The University has a wide range of students on a variety of modes of study spread across three campuses and in partner institutions in the UK and abroad. Part-time students form a large proportion of the student body and the need for flexible access to learning resources and support is clearly recognised by the institution. In 2009, a thematic review of part-time student experience noted high levels of student satisfaction, which was reflected by part-time students in meetings with the audit team.

46 In line with the *Code of practice*, the University clearly distinguishes in its procedures between flexible and distance learning and more traditional 'taught' provision. Additional requirements must be met in the validation, revalidation and annual course evaluation of such courses.

47 The University has an active approach to work-based learning, which it defines as direct work-based learning (for example as experienced by Foundation Degree students or part-time professional students), placement learning or self-employment as an alternative placement year. A range of monitoring and support activity is in place to ensure students are able to benefit fully from such experiences.

48 The student written submission expressed high levels of satisfaction with library and IT facilities and this has been recognised externally, with the Library and Computing Centre and its associated Learning Resource Centres in Barnsley and Oldham having received the Cabinet Office Customer Service Excellence Standard award. A variety of other quality benchmarking and testing schemes is implemented to ensure an excellent level of service. The audit team identified the proactive approach taken by Computing and Library Services to ensure that it meets the needs of a diverse student body as a feature of good practice.

49 Students expressed to the audit team their satisfaction with the University's virtual learning environment. The University's commitment to flexible access is demonstrated by a range of initiatives designed to ensure the full range of University students can access provision as required in relation to both library and online resources.

50 The audit team found that the resourcing of programmes is systematically addressed by the University's annual planning process and processes for programme approval, monitoring and review and concluded that the institution was adopting an effective strategic approach in dealing with the issues of learning resources provision.

51 The University's commitment to widening participation is clearly expressed in its Strategy Map, its mission, and its Teaching and Learning Strategy. The University's admissions and widening participation policies are clearly articulated on its website.

52 A thematic review of admissions in November 2007 identified variability in practice across schools. Schools were required to respond to this through annual evaluation processes. The admissions policy was further reviewed in 2009. Students were generally positive about their admissions experience and received clear advice about entry criteria. However, the audit team found a few examples of inconsistency in the application of the University admissions criteria for one programme and would suggest that the University may wish to re-emphasise its admissions policies and criteria to schools to ensure future consistency.

53 Students receive detailed information on their programmes and on general support mechanisms through induction and a comprehensive range of information provided in the form of handbooks and information on the University's website.

54 All students have a personal tutor who is an academic member of staff. Tutors provide guidance, assistance and support in helping to manage the student's academic experience, referring students to support services as necessary. The audit team felt that the personal tutor system was effective. The team found clear evidence of personal development planning taking place and the University has a comprehensive policy on this. All schools have at least one academic skills tutor to provide one-to-one or small-group support.

55 The 'Back on Track' programme offers support to students who may be struggling to engage with their programme. This has been identified by teaching teams as a useful resource, which has led to improved retention.

56 Student Services provides an excellent range of central support services, which are accredited with the Matrix Quality Standard. Students who met with the audit team were aware of the wide range of services and were very appreciative of them. The University benefits from an active Students' Union. The students met by the panel were clearly engaged with Students' Union activities and aware of its support functions.

57 In the view of the audit team the University has a comprehensive and systematic framework for academic and personal student support, which operates very effectively. The team concluded that the comprehensive and systematic support the University provides for its students was a feature of good practice.

58 The University has a clearly articulated human resources strategy, supported by a comprehensive range of policies and procedures. Staff are supported by comprehensive handbooks and web resources. A full range of staff development opportunities is coordinated and organised by the Human Resources department following the annual planning cycle and staff appraisals. This is monitored regularly by the University Teaching and Learning Committee, which also consults with school teaching and learning committees and annual course evaluation committees to identify future staff development needs. Periodic thematic reviews identify matters relating to staff development and the dissemination of good practice.

59 The University has a peer observation of teaching scheme and there is an annual appraisal system. Reflection and forward planning are incorporated into appraisal discussions. The University has a Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Development to support its adoption of the UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education, as noted in paragraph 44. The staff research degree scheme is open to all staff.

60 The planned Institute of Teaching and Learning is designed to enhance the dissemination of good practice and there is an internal teaching and learning grant scheme for staff to support the implementation of teaching and learning strategy. The Annual Teaching and Learning Conference, the termly Teaching and Learning Matters publication and the recently created online Teaching and Learning Innovation Park serve to update staff on teaching and learning innovations and projects. The 'Extra Mile' awards positively recognise staff achievements in enhancing the student experience.

61 The University has a clear promotions policy with criteria for the conferment of the title of Professor (for both research excellence and distinction in teaching), Reader and University Teaching Fellows. Staff are regularly surveyed to ascertain levels of engagement. The most recent survey showed that levels of satisfaction were generally high, with most categories exceeding scores of benchmark comparator groups.

62 The audit team found that the University's systems for the management of learning opportunities were fit for purpose and largely operating as intended. The University engages well with the Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points. There is an extensive framework for student participation in quality assurance and students are involved in policy development. The team found that students are well provided with resources for learning and that the University's arrangements for student support are highly effective. There are effective arrangements for staff development and support. These features support a judgement of confidence in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of learning opportunities.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

63 The University defines quality enhancement activities as those which 'ensure the learning and teaching strategies are subject to reflection and critique in ways that secure continuous improvement and provide a range of experiences to support individual learning needs and personal plans'.

64 Enhancement is driven through the University's Strategy Map and Teaching and Learning Strategy. Institutional oversight and direction of quality enhancement is driven through the University Teaching and Learning Committee. The University has a number of processes in place to enable enhancement of learning opportunities, such as thematic reviews, quality appraisals and internal quality audits. While these rigorous processes are powerful tools for internal evaluation and reflection, the audit team found that recommendations were often not followed up with appropriate actions. The team would encourage the University to ensure that such processes do lead to subsequent actions, and that progress on these actions is monitored.

65 Historically, the University has used its Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund allocation to support developments in learning and teaching, however, with the cessation of this funding, it has established the online Teaching and Learning Innovation Park and is setting up an Institute for Teaching and Learning to support future enhancement opportunities (see paragraph 60).

66 The University's Computing and Library Services has received high scores in the National Student Survey and contributes to enhancement activity through continuous improvement to its services and access to learning opportunities. The University is committed to improving standards through benchmarking exercises and routinely seeks external recognition as part of its commitment to ensuring an excellent service for students. The student written submission notes students' broad satisfaction with Computing and Library Services. The students met by the audit team were also highly complementary of the service for its contribution to learning opportunities (see paragraph 48).

67 The University has a culture of celebrating student and staff achievements and sharing best practice. Staff and students are aware of, contribute to, and appreciate the range of celebratory activities on offer and the benefits it has on learning and teaching. The audit team concluded that the contribution to quality enhancement made by the various ways of recognising staff and student achievements was a feature of good practice that is well established within the University.

68 The University encourages staff to participate in personal development, and staff can access these through the University website, where staff are also able to make suggestions for future training courses. Events and opportunities for staff can be found on the staff pages of the website, in the form of a staff bulletin, which also contains information for staff development.

69 The audit team found that the University has structures in place to ensure there is quality enhancement at an institutional level, driven through the University's Strategy Map and associated Teaching and Learning Strategy.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

70 The University has rationalised its collaborative partnerships to align better its off-campus provision with its strategic vision for the future, which places an emphasis on wider access, employability and the vocational relevance of its courses. Most of its collaborations are with UK partners, who are members of a consortium that provides teacher training and professional development for those in the post-compulsory pre-higher education sector. There is a small number of overseas partnerships. The University also has a partnership that provides professional development at degree level for health sector professionals, and a partnership that provides a suite of external access courses for international students, which are delivered at a specialised facility on-campus.

71 With very few exceptions, the courses offered by partners have been designed by University staff, usually under a franchising arrangement of existing courses. In some cases the courses are delivered and assessed by staff at the partner institution, but there are also a number where there is a significant contribution to the teaching and assessment by lecturing staff from the University. As these courses have already been validated for delivery at the University, they will have been subjected to the full range of scrutiny for quality assurance and academic standards at the time of their initial validation.

72 All of the courses, including the small number that are specific to one partner institution, are subject to the same University regulations as the courses offered on-campus, including the requirements for University-appointed external examiners and the procedures for the classification of degrees. Partner staff involved in teaching or assessment must be approved by the University as being suitably qualified and experienced before they are allowed to contribute to the course, and are given the title of University Tutor.

73 Approval of a collaborative partnership is a sequential process that comprises a number of stages, including testing of the business case, a due diligence scrutiny by a University panel of the partner, confirmation that the facilities for learning are sufficiently comprehensive and suitable for the course, and an investigation of the academic arrangements by a formal validation (approval) panel that includes external members who are experienced and senior academics and practitioners. Approval results in the drawing up of a formal contract that is specifically designed to protect the interests of students. Responsibility for admissions to the course, staff development and student support is usually devolved to the partner institution.

74 The contractual arrangements make clear that any publicity materials advertising or promoting the course must be submitted to the University for formal approval before use. While this arrangement was largely found to be operating satisfactorily in respect of the University's partners, the audit team did find evidence that some promotional material on the University's own website had become dated and contained other inaccuracies that might unwittingly mislead prospective students. As noted in paragraph 98, the team also identified a problem with respect to the website of a partner institution. The team felt that this remained an area needing attention and therefore advises the University to take steps to ensure full adherence to University policies with respect to public information regarding courses offered by partner organisations.

75 The day-to-day operational management of collaborative arrangements is the responsibility of a liaison officer appointed from among the University staff in the relevant subject area. Partner institutions are also required to nominate an equivalent member of staff, who may also carry additional responsibilities for academic and administrative matters. In the few cases where a number of courses are delivered at one partner, the University appoints an additional liaison officer at institutional level to oversee the strategic development of the link. The departmental-level liaison officer of the partner is required to prepare annual evaluation reports that are submitted to the University, and these must include discussion of student evaluations of the course and an action plan as a response to any matters raised by external examiners.

76 Broad oversight of collaborative arrangements lies initially with the appropriate school-level committees, with overarching responsibility for developing policy, monitoring and quality assurance falling to a senior committee of the University's Senate. The institutional approach is enshrined in a handbook available on the University's website, which supplements a number of other handbooks covering such matters as quality assurance and the regulations for awards of the University.

77 Overall, the audit team found that the processes put in place to manage the quality and standards of collaborative arrangements were robust and well designed and operating as intended. The approach was found to meet the expectations of the *Code of practice* in all relevant areas.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

78 Institutional responsibility for overseeing and maintaining the quality of the University's policies relating to postgraduate research students rests with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise), who also chairs the University Research Committee and represents the interests of research and research students on the University's Senior Management Team. School-level responsibilities are discharged by the school's Director of Graduate Education.

79 At the time of the audit, there were over 600 postgraduate research students enrolled at the University. In addition to the PhD, the University offers higher doctorates, professional doctorates, the degree of MPhil, an MEnt and an MA and MSc by research. As part of its strategy, the University has been growing research student numbers significantly through the creation of 375 fee-waiver scholarships.

80 QAA's Review of research degree programmes invited the University to consider three specific points. Two of these related to issues of consistency of the student experience, while the third related to the possible introduction of staff-student liaison committees at school level for postgraduate research students. The audit team found that there was an appropriate level of consistency of experience of postgraduate research students across schools, that the University had appropriate mechanisms for ensuring such consistency and that there was adequate opportunity for the postgraduate research student voice to be heard and acted upon at both school and university level.

81 The University is strategically developing its research environment. At the time of the audit, the University had more than 30 research centres and groups, which ranged across the schools. There is a policy of focusing the recruitment of research students to these areas of established research strength. There is a clear steer towards enhancing further the research environment within the University that is well understood by staff. The 'Convivium', which opened just before the audit, provides physical space for postgraduate students to meet and work.

82 Responsibility for the admission of students lies at school level. The pre-enrolment form reflects university-wide principles relating to the admission of postgraduate research students. Normally, up to four members of staff are involved in making decisions regarding the admission of postgraduate research students. The audit team found that the systems governing the selection and admission of postgraduate research students to the University were appropriate.

83 Induction is provided at both University and school levels. All new students are expected to attend a centrally organised Postgraduate Researcher Welcome and Induction as well as related events at school level. There is a follow-up to the University event approximately three months after the main session. Central to the way in which postgraduate research students are informed is the Virtual Graduate Centre and the G:R:A:D:PG folder.

84 All students can expect to have a minimum of two supervisors. One member of the supervisory team will either have experience of relevant-level supervision or have completed accredited training in research supervision. At the time of the audit, The University was developing its policy on the number of postgraduate research students that may be allocated to a supervisor.

85 The audit team was given to understand that supervisor allocation is formally the responsibility of the Dean but in practice much is delegated to the school-level Director of Graduate Education. Skills development and training for supervisors is clearly available at the University, including a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice (Research Supervision). The University is currently moving towards making research supervisor skills training compulsory.

86 Arrangements for monitoring the progress of research students are supported by a set of clear forms that provide unambiguous guidance and a clear time frame. The audit team took the view that these forms, and the underlying processes which they support, were fit for purpose.

87 Skills training is provided centrally through the University's Research Skills Development Programme, information concerning which is found on the University's virtual learning environment. The University has a Graduate Skills Coordinator who has specific responsibility for developing research degree support. Postgraduate research students undertake a training needs analysis soon after registration. This is discussed with the supervisor and a personal development plan drawn up.

88 Two Research Ethics modules are available to postgraduate research students. These modules provide a basic grounding in ethical issues. The audit team found the means by which ethical clearance for postgraduate research projects is granted somewhat unclear. The extent to which such approval, and the process by which it is given, is recorded by the University was also unclear to the team. The University is aware that, given the strategic growth in postgraduate research numbers across subject areas, an earlier system, whereby one particular school took the lead in dealing with ethical issues, is no longer appropriate. At the time of the audit the University was in the process of developing revised procedures, but these discussions had not been completed. Consequently, the audit team advises that the University formalise the processes for the ethical approval of research projects and the appropriate reporting of such approvals.

89 The University has stated that training for postgraduate research students who teach is compulsory. However, the audit team found that this requirement is not consistently put into practice before that teaching takes place. Consequently, the team advises the University to ensure that all postgraduate research students receive appropriate training before they undertake teaching duties.

90 There is ample opportunity for the postgraduate research student voice to be listened to and acted upon at the University and it is evident that the University makes use of this opportunity and takes other steps to gather and to examine critically feedback on provision. Reports on postgraduate research provision are reviewed at school level and an overview report is compiled by Research and Enterprise and considered at the University Research Committee.

91 Assessment procedures and required learning outcomes of research degrees are clearly spelt out and communicated, and assessment complies with external expectations. At PhD level, all students are examined by no fewer than two examiners, at least one of whom will be external to the University. Where the candidate is a member of staff and/or the PhD is by publication a second external examiner is appointed.

92 There is a clear system in place for students to lodge complaints and/or to request a change of supervisor. The system of appeals is also clearly spelt out and understood. One of the 10 progression forms which punctuate the experience of the postgraduate research student is a confidential feedback form which goes straight to the Research Office.

93 In addition to the support offered through induction, the University has a postgraduate research student support tutor system. Such tutors complement the supervisory team in order to support the student in the case of any particular difficulty. Schools are largely responsible for ensuring that postgraduate research students have access to a personal tutor, who is often a research coordinator (except where the research coordinator is a member of the supervisory team). Postgraduate research students expressed to the team their satisfaction with their supervisory arrangements and the support they receive.

94 The audit team found that the institutional framework for postgraduate research students provided an appropriate research environment and student experience. The institutional arrangements, including those for support, supervision and assessment, were rigorous and effective and met the requirements of the *Code of practice*.

Section 7: Published information

95 The audit team found that students were broadly satisfied with the quality and accuracy of course information in the prospectus, relevant sections of which are written by the Students' Union. The students met by the team had all received module and course handbooks, and were satisfied with their content, although upon investigation the team recognised that there was some inconsistency between and within schools with regard to the emphasis on and information provided on procedures such as extenuating circumstances and academic misconduct. This lack of parity in content, could, in the team's view, lead to inconsistent understanding of processes among students. With respect to the University's regulations, students confirmed that, although they may not have a paper copy of the relevant documents, they were given a CD-ROM at induction and knew where and how to access the regulations and Registry when needed.

96 The audit team was provided with a selection of publicity materials from all schools, and was satisfied with the consistency of the information, which suitably reflected the diversity of courses, without compromising on content and information for students.

97 The information required by *HEFCE 06/45 Annex F* is publicly available on the Registry's Teaching and Learning pages of the University's website. The list of collaborative provision partners is publicly available on the website, and accurate information is also provided on the Unistats website and is generally complete. The students met by the audit team were generally satisfied with the University's website, but some found it difficult to navigate and used the search bar to find relevant information.

98 The audit team found some inaccurate content on the International Office's pages of the website, which the University quickly rectified. The team also felt that a partner's website had the potential to confuse prospective students (see paragraph 74).

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

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

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

- the use of the Strategy Map to drive and coordinate change across the University (paragraphs 9, 43, 64)
- the proactive approach taken by Computing and Library Services to ensure that it meets the needs of a diverse student body (paragraphs 48, 66)
- the comprehensive and systematic support the University provides for its students (paragraphs 54-57)
- the contribution to quality enhancement made by the various ways of recognising staff and student achievements (paragraph 67).

Recommendations for action

101 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- review regulations and policies with respect to assessment in order to eliminate potential inconsistencies of practice (paragraphs 7, 26, 27, 29)
- review the University's committee arrangements to ensure that Senate has full oversight of academic matters as specified in its terms of reference (paragraph 14)

- take steps to ensure full adherence to University policies with respect to public information regarding courses offered by partner organisations (paragraphs 74, 98)
- formalise the University's processes for the ethical approval of research projects and the appropriate reporting of such approvals (paragraph 88)
- ensure that all postgraduate research students receive appropriate training before they undertake teaching duties (paragraph 89).

102 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- use experts external to the University in all validation panels (paragraphs 15, 18, 21).

Appendix

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

The University welcomes the confirmation of the robustness of its quality assurance and enhancement procedures. It is delighted that the review team were able to identify so many features of good practice, including the use of the Strategy Map which drives the overall enhancement and development of the institution's work, the excellent support provided to students, the effectiveness of the planning undertaken by Computing and Library Services in delivering an outstanding service, and the celebration of success and achievement across the institution. The University was also pleased that prominence was given in the report to other aspects of its innovative work, such as in the thorough integration of the student voice, and the focused and effective activity of the past couple of years on assessment and feedback.

In the context of significant growth in research and enterprise activity, with FTE research student numbers growing by 165 per cent since 2006, of proactive internationalisation, which has ensured an increase in overseas student numbers by more than a third since 2007, and of ongoing improvements in taught student performance seen in degree classifications, student satisfaction, and positive outcomes (now the best among the larger universities in the region), the report is welcome confirmation of underlying strength at a time of rapid progress.

The University has been engaged in developments since before the start of the audit process which will address the panel's concerns about the ethical approval of postgraduate research student programmes of study and the enhancement of the already effective support for postgraduate research students who are involved in teaching (as indicated in the Briefing Paper) and will respond appropriately to the points made in the other recommendations.

The University is very grateful to its collaborative partners, and to its own students and staff, for their valued contributions to the audit process. It will continue to work in the context of its Strategy Map to ensure the security of standards and to enhance the quality of learning opportunities, and to engage with QAA in the refinement of its means of support for this work.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Southgate House
Southgate Street
Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel 01452 557000
Fax 01452 557070
www.qaa.ac.uk

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