QAA

Institutional audit

University of Greenwich

MARCH 2009

Preface

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

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

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

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

- ensuring that the awards and qualifications in higher education are of an academic standard at least consistent with those referred to in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree-awarding bodies in a proper manner

- providing learning opportunities of a quality that enables students, whether on taught or research programmes, to achieve those higher education awards and qualifications

- enhancing the quality of their educational provision, particularly by building on information gained through monitoring, internal and external reviews, and feedback from stakeholders.

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

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

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

Audit teams also comment specifically on:

- the institution's arrangements for maintaining appropriate academic standards and quality of provision of postgraduate research programmes

- the institution's approach to developing and implementing institutional strategies for enhancing the quality of its educational provision, both taught and by research

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

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

Explanatory note on the format for the report and the annex

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

- the **summary** of the findings of the report, including the judgements, is intended for the wider public, especially potential students

- the **report** is an overview of the findings of the audit for both lay and external professional audiences

- a separate **annex** provides the detail and explanations behind the findings of the audit and is intended to be of practical use to the institution.

The report is as concise as is consistent with providing enough detail for it to make sense to an external audience as a stand-alone document. The summary, 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 University of Greenwich, (the University), from 9 to 13 March 2009 to carry out an Institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

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

In Institutional audit, the institution's management of both academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are audited. The term 'academic standards' is used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the United Kingdom. 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 Greenwich is that:

- limited confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the taught undergraduate awards that it offers

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

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

As the University of Greenwich will be subject to a separate audit of its collaborative provision these judgements do not apply to that provision.

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

Since 2006, the process of enhancement has been managed by the Learning Enhancement and Student Support Working Group and by its successor, the Staff and Educational Development Working Group, which have sought to introduce a more corporate approach to enhancement and a greater impetus to central enhancement initiatives. The University has adopted a series of interrelated action plans, one of which, the Change Academy Action Plan, while not designated an enhancement strategy, nevertheless serves as such. For 2008-09, drawing on these action plans, four key themes have been highlighted, on which work has begun, and there is evidence of widespread and effective induction procedures, and employability initiatives, being developed.

Postgraduate research students

The framework of the research environment described in the QAA Review of research degree programmes in 2006 remains in place, but significant evolutionary change has occurred since that date.

The University's Research Degrees Committee has quickly developed a series of mechanisms to ensure regular and thorough review of all aspects of research degree study, which should further enhance support for students and for the continued maintenance of standards. Students met by the audit team confirmed that, in schools where there are very few postgraduate research students, the research environment does not present any problems of isolation.

There have been other incremental changes since 2006 (some in response to the 2006 Review) including the exclusion of members of the candidate's supervisory team from appointment as examiners; improved training on the selection of research students; improved training for supervisors; and the exclusion of a student's supervisors from any formal University appeals procedure.

Published information

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

Features of good practice

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

● the Greenwich Portal as a comprehensive and effective means of communication with staff and students.

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers essential:

● in order to eliminate ambiguity about the nature and standing of its taught undergraduate awards, to review the nomenclature and status of those awards that fall outside the scope of *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), but which nonetheless use its terminology

● to ensure that, in reaching assessment board decisions, the regulatory framework is applied consistently, and judgements do not undermine the University's assurance of the standards of its taught undergraduate awards.

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

● to reflect further on the ways in which central oversight of school-based periodic review is maintained, and consider in particular whether provision for 'light touch' reviews, and the relationship between professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) reviews and internal reviews, should be more closely defined

● to clarify the roles of individuals and deliberative committees in the approval and appointment of external examiners, and the operation of the external examiner system

● to implement mechanisms to maintain institutional oversight of the cumulative effect of minor changes and derogations on programmes

● to ensure the consistency, continuity, coherence and support of student representation in quality management at all levels

● in line with the recommendations of the 2004 audit, to make training compulsory for postgraduate research students who teach, and ensure institutional consistency in monitoring their teaching.

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 for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*

- The FHEQ and its equivalent in Scotland

- subject benchmark statements

- programme specifications.

The audit team found that whereas the University of Greenwich has responded appropriately to subject benchmark statements and programme specifications, further work will be required regarding the FHEQ and *Code of practice.*

Report

1   An Institutional audit of the University of Greenwich (the University) was undertaken between 9 and 13 March 2009. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the University's management of the academic standards of its awards and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

2   The audit team comprised Professor Jennifer Ghandhi, Dr Mark Lyne, Professor Tim Moscovitch, Professor David Phoenix, auditors and Ms Sarah Clark, audit secretary. Mr Derek Greenaway, Assistant Director, Reviews Group, coordinated the audit on behalf of QAA.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3   The origins of the University can be traced to the Woolwich Polytechnic, which opened in 1891. The name was changed to Thames Polytechnic in 1970 and University status was awarded in 1992. The University of Greenwich mission states that 'The University of Greenwich aims to provide high quality education, research and enterprise for international, national, regional and local communities. In so doing it focuses on: expanding opportunities for students of all ages and many backgrounds, providing programmes with an emphasis on employability and the application of enterprise and research to defined need'.

4   The University of Greenwich indicated in its Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) statistics that the internal student registered population in 2007-08 was 20,561, with 14,914 students at undergraduate level and 5,208 at postgraduate level. There are 11 schools/institutes located on three campus sites at Avery Hill, Greenwich and Medway.

5   The University states in its Institutional Briefing Paper that 'a commitment to access and widening participation, to the provision of vocationally relevant education and to partnership and each are important in shaping the character of the University'.

6   The University has a wide range of collaborative partnerships both at home and overseas. There is to be a separate collaborative provision audit by QAA for this part of the University's academic portfolio.

7   The University emphasises its strategic position regarding the management of academic standards by stating two key principles:

● authority for quality management is delegated to schools using mutually agreed frameworks, principles, policies and protocols.

● engagements with external evaluation of University standards and quality management processes is fundamental and provides an independent and critically supportive view of those standards and processes.

8   The principal University committee responsible for the maintenance of academic standards and for overseeing the quality of learning opportunities is Academic Council, the senior deliberative body of the University. Two committees support Academic Council and also report directly to it; they are the Academic Collaborative Committee and the Learning and Quality Committee. In addition, the Academic Planning Subcommittee of the Executive Committee reports annually to Academic Council.

Responses to previous QAA audits

9   The four 'advisable' recommendations in the 2004 Institutional audit related to the provision of additional guidance to support the quality assurance of provision through annual reporting and planning documents; in the interests of transparency to students; expediting the process of determining which aspects of assessment policy should be universally applicable and standardised across schools or incorporated into University regulations; strengthening

arrangements to ensure parity of treatment for combined honours students, and training support for research students involved in teaching or demonstration. The first of these has been acted upon by the University revising its Annual Reporting and Planning Document template and providing additional guidance notes. Following the 2006 Collaborative provision audit, further comments were made by the University about the annual reporting and planning documents, which have led to additional amendments to the template and a greater analytical and strategic steer being provided, with clear links to academic and resource planning.

10   The draft annual reporting and planning documents go to the Vice-Chancellor's Group, whose members, as line managers for particular schools and offices make their comments for schools or offices to revise or amend accordingly; the Office of the Vice-Chancellor then disseminates the component sections of the APRD to the appropriate managers and deliberative and executive committees and subcommittees of the University.

11   It was the view of the audit team that while the 2004 recommendation had been acted upon, the 'effective channel for institutional oversight' could be improved further through production of a combined feedback summary of all the component parts of the Annual Reporting and Planning Document, to be disseminated to the wider University community, in addition to the multiplicity of individual feedback mechanisms.

12   The University has extensive academic regulations for taught awards and also school assessment policies, which are approved by the Learning and Quality Committee. After the 2004 audit, these were amended to incorporate extenuating circumstances and provisions relating to the handing-in of late work, thus improving the transparency of information to students.

13   At the previous audit, recommendations were made to improve the parity of treatment for combined honours students. The University has subsequently put in place a number of actions to improve and enhance the support for these students, through cross-school induction timetabling; personal tutors and supervisors, with joint responsibility, being appointed in both schools; the establishment of lead school responsibility for progression and achievement at progression and award boards, and electronic digest for cross-school information. There is now also a combined honours portal group.

14   The University, in response to the previous audit, is now providing skills training for postgraduate research students, in addition to online research-skills modules. Teaching induction workshops are also available for postgraduate research students involved in teaching or demonstrating, but these are currently optional. Monitoring and support for students in this latter context does occur, but on an informal basis; both these mechanisms will in the future be the responsibility of the Research Degrees Committee.

15   It was the view of the audit team that the response from the University could be strengthened by making this mandatory, with the training requirement overseen and monitored by the Research Degrees Committee.

16   The 2004 Institutional audit contained five 'desirable' recommendations relating to the *Code of practice,* published by QAA; professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) reports; students' involvement in quality management; teaching and staff appraisal, and staff development for research supervisors. These were acted upon as described in the following paragraphs.

17   The University now formally notes new editions of sections of the *Code of practice* and requests feedback from relevant parts of the institution about their consideration of the precepts. Additionally, a Guide to Quality has been published, identifying which parts of the University are responsible for maintaining consistency with the *Code.*

18   The 2009 audit team noted that while reports from PSRBs proceed to the Learning and Quality Unit and are reported to the University via the schools' Annual Reporting and Planning Document, the full impact of these reports could be overlooked by other aspects of the

document. The team found strong evidence of influential practice in the PSRB section of the Architecture, Health & Social Care and Pharmacy Annual Reporting and Planning Documents which, in its view, could be of great benefit to the wider University community. Although it acknowledged that the Learning and Quality Committee now receives an annual overview report of the outcomes of PSRB visits, the team would encourage the University, especially in the light of its mission of vocational education, to become more proactive in disseminating the outcomes of PSRB visits and reviews to a more inclusive institutional audience.

19   The University acknowledges that it has sometimes struggled to ensure 'active and dynamic student participation in the formal student representation system'. Immediately following the 2004 audit, the University took steps to ensure that the Students' Union was providing consistent and appropriate training for its student representatives, accompanied by a student handbook. Due to the Students' Union's organisational change, the handbook and training was not available this academic year.

20   The audit team saw evidence of student representation at school and programme level, and also student officers on all of the senior committees of the University. However, representation within schools continues to vary in the level and nature of participation and the team is therefore of the opinion that the student body as a whole is not being truly represented (see paragraphs 57 to 62).

21   The University Staff and Education Development Working Group oversees schools' staff development, ensures its linkage to the Learning and Teaching Strategy and reviews appraisal activity. There are wide variations apparent from one school to another in respect of staff appraisal, with stronger links to staff development in some schools than in others.

22   Training and staff development for research supervisors does occur for both new and experienced staff, as was evidenced at the meeting with staff, but it is not mandatory. In addition there is a code of practice for postgraduate research supervision in the research students' handbook. The newly formed Research Degrees Committee has not, as yet, become involved in overseeing the coordination of training for research supervisors, nor is such training mandatory.

23   In order to satisfy the need for impartiality, University regulations for postgraduate provision now exclude a member of the supervisory team from also being a member of the review audit team convened in the case of an appeal.

24   In the view of the audit team the University has made progress in addressing the recommendations of the 2004 audit, but some areas for consideration still remain.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

25   The University describes two key principles underpinning its approach to the management of the academic standards of its awards:

● firstly, that authority for quality management is delegated to the schools through their delivery of programmes of study, within mutually agreed frameworks, principles, policies and protocols

● secondly, that engagement with external evaluation of University standards and quality management processes is fundamental and provides an independent and critically supportive view of those standards and processes.

26   All new programmes require authorisation or approval in principle, prior to more detailed academic development. Authorisation marks the interface between academic planning and quality assurance and requires all programmes to be associated with an appropriate host school or academic unit. Once programmes are approved, further changes are considered at the local level by the School Learning and Quality Committee. While this enables schools to operate in line with the University's devolved structure, the audit team was of the view that the University would

benefit from ensuring that local changes were more formally monitored, to ensure that there was an institutional overview of the cumulative effect of such minor changes on programmes.

27   Schools are able to decide upon the extent and depth to which programme and course monitoring takes place, on the assumption that assessment of risk will guide the level of reporting in each annual session, and that, within any given five-year cycle, all programmes will be amended, updated and formally reviewed. Panel events normally require a chair from outside the host school, but where the risk-based approach leads to a decision to undertake a 'light touch' review, this would normally be undertaken by the School's Learning and Quality Committee and that role would be filled by its Chair. The University recognises it has no formal definition of 'light touch', nor any formal means of reviewing such 'light touch' reviews against a set of central criteria.

28   PSRB visits were seen to play an important role within the University's approach to programme review and assessment of risk and from 2008-09 the Learning and Quality Committee will receive an annual overview report on the outcomes of PSRB visits. The audit team recognised that this would further strengthen the review process by providing central overview of PSRB recommendations. Although the team saw benefits from PSRB visits and consideration of their role in the review cycle, it took the view that the potential to use such visits in place of recognised internal review, without mapping the content of PSRB scrutiny onto University review requirements, could potentially limit the University's ability to ensure that its own review requirements were met in full. In the light of evidence seen by the team that some review cycles were being adjusted to align them with PSRB reviews, it is important that PSRB reports are considered centrally in order to identify generic issues, emerging themes and good practice.

29   While therefore the approval, monitoring and review processes seem generally robust the audit team nevertheless has some reservations: the risk-based moderation of the review cycle may impact on the future ability of the University both to maintain effective oversight of the quality of its programmes and to make progress against the University's strategic framework. Where PSRB or other considerations are felt to warrant a 'light touch' approach, the University should ensure that there is limited scope for variation of the length of the review cycle around the five-year period, and that its own periodic review requirements are met in full. It was the view of the team that currently, the risk-based approach to review could reduce the level of rigour in the assurance the University was able to attain through its review cycle.

30   The team concluded that it would be advisable for the University to reflect further on the ways in which central oversight of school-based periodic review is maintained and consider in particular, whether provision for 'light touch' reviews, and the relationship between PSRB reviews and internal reviews, should be more closely defined.

31   The appointment of external examiners is a function of Academic Council, but in practice this function has been delegated to school boards, with University-wide records maintained centrally within the online reporting system by the Learning and Quality Unit. Discussion with staff involved in the process indicated that while there was clarity among staff over the central role of the Learning and Quality Unit, there was a lack of clarity among staff as to the body responsible for authorising appointments. In contrast to the regulations, which delegate authority for approval for appointment to the school boards, widely held views were encountered by the audit team that the Learning and Quality Unit had been given delegated authority to approve these appointments. The role of the Learning and Quality Committee, for example, in relation to that of the Learning and Quality Unit or Pro-Vice Chancellor (Learning and Quality), was also unclear to staff, especially in cases where approvals might fall outside current regulations. The audit team was therefore of the opinion that it would strengthen the integrity of the external examining system if the University were to clarify further the roles of individuals, offices and deliberative committees in the approval process, and that such clarification should give particular consideration to the institution's approach where applications fall outside the standard criteria. It is advisable that the University clarifies the roles of individuals, offices and deliberative committees in the approval and appointment of external examiners, and the operation of the external examiner system.

32   External examiners report directly to the University, using an online reporting template designed to reflect the guidance of the *Code of practice.* The report is immediately distributed by the automated external examiner system to senior School representatives, the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Learning and Quality) and the Learning and Quality Unit, allowing responses to external examiners' comments to be made directly online. This approach is effective and appears to enable the University to compare quickly external examiners' responses to fixed questions across the institution as part of its ongoing review of standards at both local and institutional levels. The audit team noted from meetings with staff and students that the student representatives who met with the team did not appear to have sight of examiners' comments which is now an expectation of HEFCE. The team encourages the University to consider how it might, as a matter of course, make external examiners' reports available to students' representatives.

33   The audit team noted from its review of material gathered during the audit trails that confusion had at times been reported about who was the appointed external examiner for a particular programme. A number of examples from the review documentation gave the impression that external examiners were not in place. While the team did identify that the external examiners in those cases were, in fact, covering a number of courses, there is a need to ensure that programme leaders and internal examiners are clear about their own role and the role of the external examiner, in relation to the awards.

34   The University considers that its external examining system is both robust and, in its use of the online system, innovative. The University adopts a dual approach, with schools and the Learning and Quality Unit responding to, and reporting upon, examiners' commentaries, thereby providing local and central coverage of the issues that arise. Most aspects of the system are sufficiently effective, although there are key areas for improvement. The audit team concluded that there would be benefits from clarifying for staff the roles and responsibilities of individuals, offices and deliberative committees in the approval process. This would help to ensure greater shared understanding of the appointment of examiners and their role with respect to assuring the standards of the awards.

35   The design of any new programme is required to adhere to key aspects of the Academic Infrastructure, in particular the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements, to which programme specifications are also expected to refer. This central principle is encapsulated within the academic regulations.

36   The programme specifications examined by the audit team adhered to the FHEQ, although the team was concerned that the University was granting generic credit-bearing awards, for example Greenwich Diplomas and Greenwich Certificates, to students who had obtained credits, but who had not achieved the defined outcomes for their original programmes. Such awards were not linked to the programme specifications reviewed and the University recognised that they did not meet descriptors given for corresponding qualifications in the FHEQ and credit framework. In the absence of predefined outcomes and a programme specification for the Greenwich awards, this situation is misleading, especially so when compared to the overall University statement in its Quality Assurance Handbook, which clearly states that '...All awards offered by the University must conform to the FHEQ'. The awards mentioned above are confirmed by the examination boards, but are not linked to assessed outcomes, and have credit ratings outside the credit framework referred to in the FHEQ. External examiners review individual modules but do not consider the overall award.

37   The University recognised that using the same terminology for its own awards as was used nationally within the FHEQ, such as 'diploma', when these awards did not meet FHEQ requirements, could lead to confusion and misunderstanding outside the institution. It is strongly recommended by the audit team that the University consider its approach to these awards and the terminology used to describe them, to ensure compliance with its own Quality Assurance Handbook regarding the need for all its awards to be part of the FHEQ.

38   It is essential that the University, in order to eliminate ambiguity about the nature and standing of its taught undergraduate awards, reviews the nomenclature and status of those awards that fall outside the scope of the FHEQ, but which nonetheless use its terminology.

39   Following the recommendations from the 2004 QAA Institutional audit, reports of PSRB visits are also sent to the Learning and Quality Unit, reported in the Annual Reporting and Planning Document and, as of 2008-09, the Learning and Quality Committee receives an annual overview report on the outcomes of PSRB visits. The current audit team recognises that this will further strengthen the review process, by providing, central overview of PSRB recommendations. It was noted, however, that despite the importance that the University has assigned to PSRBs, these changes have only recently been implemented, and consideration of PSRB reports is not taking place within the central deliberative structures.

40   The University Quality Assurance Handbook specifically allows for derogation from regulations. The audit team saw examples where such requests were being considered by Academic Council, with some approved and others rejected. The University maintains a central record of such derogations. The team was of the view that it would be useful for the University to review formally the list of approved derogations through its deliberative structures on a cyclical basis, to enable a judgement to be made on the extent of derogations by school and the potential impact that cumulative derogations could have on consistency across the institution. The team therefore considers it is advisable that the University implements mechanisms to maintain institutional oversight of the cumulative effect of minor changes and derogations on programmes.

41   The University has recognised the need to respond to the European Standards and Guidelines and is working on a Diploma Supplement, now due in 2009.

42   In response to recommendations in the QAA's previous Institutional audit, which referred to speeding up the process of determining which aspects of assessment policy should be universally applicable, the Academic Regulations were reviewed in 2005. The review aimed to ensure greater University-wide consistency in key aspects of the framework, for example, use of extenuation and penalties for the late submission of work. These changes to the regulations have been made, with University-wide penalties being implemented; those with respect to late submission have been captured in the regulations.

43   To assure standards of marking and the consistency of student progression and degree classification, the University operates a two-tier examination board system managed by its schools: in this, subject assessment panels and department assessment panels address course and cohort standards, and progression and award boards deal with individual students' progression and award. The remit and membership of these panels are defined in the Academic Regulations.

44   The University has recently undertaken further revisions to its regulatory framework, which were implemented in 2007-08. The changes were intended to enable progression and award boards to adopt a more sophisticated approach to student progression and classification through profiling, including the greater use of interim exit awards to recognise achievement.

45   After the review of its regulations, the University introduced a new degree classification system based on three possible ways of considering student achievement; the first based on a weighted grade point average across years two and three; the second based on final-year grade point average only; and the third based on module profiles. A Progression and Award Board is given three models for determining a result and is guided by whichever one gives the student the best outcome. Progression and award boards should only make recommendations that disregard these three methods where there are exceptional circumstances. The implications of using one or other of the three models for each student's overall result is considered by the Programme Award Board and the award is made in accordance with the most favourable outcome for the individual student. The system was implemented for the first time in summer 2008 and feedback from staff indicated that all three methods were considered when determining the classification to ensure equity across the student cohort.

46   The impact of the new arrangements in relation to the summer 2008 assessments was analysed by the Learning and Quality Unit and a report was presented to the Learning and Quality Committee at its September 2008 meeting. The report indicated that the revised classification system had led to an increase in First and Upper Second class awards, a situation that the University intends to monitor. The report also found, however, that around 7 per cent of the awards made did not fit with any of the three profiling methods. While this situation was noted by the Learning and Quality Committee, no clear action to investigate further was instigated. Meetings with staff confirmed that only the three methods approved and encapsulated within the regulations should have been applied, with variations around border lines considered by boards in exceptional circumstances. However, not all cases could be explained on grounds of exceptional circumstances. Although extending the number of methods of calculating the classification was intended to remove discretionary uplift at class boundaries, this had not happened and, in a significant number of cases students had both benefited from the 'best of three' calculations and also been given uplift. These cases did not fit with the profiling method and examination boards had clearly used some form of discretion.

47   Overall, therefore, the audit team was of the view that although there was a regulatory framework for managing academic standards, within which schools were expected to operate, the regulations have not provided clarity as to whether this can apply at borderlines when the year-three grade point average model has been used since it may give rise to 'double discounting', which the University acknowledges may be a problem. Additionally, there is no clear statement of an expectation that when the new regulations were introduced that borderline cases would become the exception, which does not appear to be the case. The Learning and Quality Committee had received a detailed analysis of the impact of the new classification system, which had indicated a clear discrepancy in the system, resulting in a significant number of awards being made that were outside the new standard regulations. The Learning and Quality Committee minutes commented on the extent of the discrepancy but did not appear to respond to its significance, and the team could find no evidence of an action plan to resolve this situation.

48   In the light of its discussion with staff, the audit team was satisfied that the system was not operating as intended, in that there was an expectation that only three methods would be used, with few exceptional cases, but their use is very poorly defined. No action had been taken by the senior deliberative bodies on the 6.98 per cent of exceptional circumstances, other than to continue monitoring classification in the future. The audit team agreed that it is essential for the University to ensure that, in reaching assessment board decisions, the regulatory framework is applied consistently and judgements do not undermine the University's assurance of the standards of its taught undergraduate awards.

49   The audit team believes that limited confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of the taught undergraduate awards that it offers.

Section 3: Learning opportunities

50   The major emphasis of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy is on learning enhancement and a continuous improvement in its students' learning experience. It highlights the appropriate use of new technology to support the learning process. The University makes use of external indicators and external benchmarking opportunities.

51   Whether programmes are being initially approved or subsequently reviewed, the associated documentation provides a summary of the resources and facilities required or being used. For new programmes, the documentation also describes the rationale for bringing the programme into being, both in academic terms and from the point of view of expected student demand, and refer to teaching, learning and assessment strategies.

52   The Academic Reporting and Planning Document plays an important role in the monitoring process by requiring schools to provide commentary on, among other things, the provision they have made for gathering student feedback; how they have addressed the needs of international students; their student progression profiles, and what their approach has been to the monitoring and review of programmes. On current evidence, the University believes that the approaches taken by schools to the monitoring of courses and programmes, as reported in their Annual Reporting and Planning Documents, are relatively conventional.

53   The University also undertakes some review of activity at programme level, and periodic review of a programme was noted by the audit team as taking account of the experience of students and the views of staff and external examiners.

54   The audit team saw evidence of the University using a variety of means to gather student feedback, including end-of-course module evaluation questionnaires and staff-student liaison meetings. Student representative systems appeared to be in place, but student representatives lacked any central training or guidance on their role and there appeared to be variations in the way responses to their feedback was given to students.

55   The outcomes of the National Student Survey and University Students' Survey are discussed widely at a range of levels: within schools, at the Learning and Quality Committee, and at Academic Council. Following the National Student Survey in 2007, the University required each school, along with the Office of Information and Library Services and the Office of Student Affairs, to draw up action plans based on the strengths and weaknesses identified.

56   There is evidence of intervention based on student feedback. For example, the Learning and Quality Unit conducted a substantial centrally funded project on assessment and feedback to students in the light of National Student Survey results. Improvements have been recorded in relation to the dissemination of clear assessment criteria; clear and fair marking; feedback being prompt and detailed and the fact that feedback on student work has helped clarify understanding.

Role of students in quality assurance

57   Opportunities for student representatives to contribute to discussions regarding curriculum delivery and evaluation matters exist in programme committees and school boards. Representatives on these committees are nominated by their peers or invited to participate by members of staff. At institutional level, Students' Union sabbatical officers are ex officio members of Academic Council and the Students' Union Vice-President (Education) is a member of other University-level committees, including the Learning and Quality Committee.

58   The University acknowledges that it has sometimes struggled to ensure 'active and dynamic student participation in the formal student representation process'. However, it did, as a response to the QAA's recommendation in its 2004 Institutional audit report, work with the Students' Union to implement a programme of activity to improve student representation. This resulted in the production of a comprehensive student representatives' handbook, which sets out clearly the various levels of student representation and the role of the Student Representatives Council in providing a forum for selected school representatives to meet with Students' Union officers. Student representatives were, until recently, trained and supported by the Students' Union training officers, who were delivering the wider, Be Involved to Evolve (BITE) skills and employability training programme, with the involvement of the Learning and Quality Unit.

59   In the current year, however, organisational change in the Students' Union has meant that it did not provide training for student representatives and a student representatives' handbook was not available. Students' Union officers continue to participate in committees at institutional level and, after an unsettled period, are meeting with the University Secretary and Registrar to develop further the positive working relationship between the University's senior managers and the Students' Union, referred to in the student written submission.

60   Students met by the audit team reported that they were either representatives themselves or knew who their representatives were. However, evidence from academic staff, students and Annual Reporting and Planning Documents confirmed that participation in committees was variable and that the recruitment of representatives continued to be a challenge. Annual Reporting and Planning Documents also suggested that there was variation between schools in their expectations of student representation. In the absence of formal training, variation was also apparent in the extent to which representatives had been prepared for their role.

61   Student representatives are also involved in a range of other activities including interviews, questionnaires, periodic reviews and focus groups. For example, the Students' Union is currently working with the University on student induction, and with library managers on a project related to library opening hours.

62   The audit team noted that although significant developments had taken place, with the involvement of the Students' Union since the previous QAA audit, in relation to the training and support of student representatives, the University had not been able to sustain this activity in the current academic year. The team also noted that the representation that continues to take place within schools varies in terms of the level and nature of participation. The team therefore considered it advisable for the University to ensure the consistency, continuity, coherence and support of student representation in quality management at all levels.

Links between scholarly activity and learning opportunities

63   It is the University's aim to be 'fully research-informed' with a culture that is characterised by enquiry and innovation. To this end, the Learning and Teaching Strategy aims to set out the ways in which teaching can be linked to research, scholarship and advanced professional practice for the benefit of students. The Strategy aims to ensure that curriculum development and approaches to learning should enable students to engage in scholarly activity and develop research skills. To this end, it is specified in the University's QA Handbook that Level 3 and master's courses should be delivered by teaching teams which have to include active researchers. The University also has an expectation that the majority of its staff should be involved in research or scholarship. The audit team was able to confirm from the curricula vitae presented during validation and review that this was the case. Students met by the team also confirmed that their learning had been informed by staff research activity.

64   The development of the relationship between learning and teaching and research articulated in the Learning and Teaching Strategy is supported by the aim of enhancing the skills of academic staff as practitioners. An increasing level of support has been provided for the involvement of staff in pedagogic research. In particular they have been encouraged to share effective practice through the Learning Enhancement website (LENS). Another valuable, more recent (2008) publication to support staff taking their first steps in pedagogic research was the Post-Conference Reflections and Abstracts from the Greenwich e-learning conference. The University acknowledges that these developments have been a little slow in implementation, but hopes that a publication planned for May 2009, Pushing the Boundaries: A Staff Publication for Research into Learning and Teaching, will provide further impetus.

65   Reading evidence from the Teaching and Learning Strategy, supported by discussion with students, the audit team found that the University's approach to supporting and developing links between research and scholarship and the curricula is a strength and makes a positive contribution to the quality of students' learning opportunities.

Other modes of study

66   The University's corporate plan states that 'the development of, flexible, accessible and vocationally relevant programmes for a wide range of students lies at the heart of the University's mission'. In support of this, the Part-time and Flexible Learning Working Group has produced plans that focus on the development of flexible, part-time provision and short courses, including

continuing professional development. A four-year, 'UG-FLEX' project, funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee, has been established to 'involve stakeholders from across the University in developing new shared models of flexible curriculum design' and to support the changes in business processes and information systems that will be necessitated by these developments.

67   The University's requirement for all Foundation Degrees to contain work-based learning as a minimum of one-quarter of the curriculum has placed a renewed emphasis on the involvement of employers in curriculum development and delivery, including guest lectures, case-studies and the provision of work placements. In recognition of the importance of work placements in developing the employability of students, a Work Placement Group was established to develop a strategy for increasing the number of placement opportunities.

68   A Higher Education Academy (HEA) benchmarking exercise undertaken in 2007 reported that, arising from its dispersed nature across the institution, the University's e-learning was characterised by its diversity in both policy and provision. The 2006-11 e-learning strategy, which forms part of the Learning and Teaching Strategy, aims to provide a set of developmental targets and focused central provision, in support of a policy of 'managed diversity'. Monitoring and review of the strategy is undertaken by the e-learning Implementation Group, chaired by the Head of Information and Library Services. The active engagement with e-learning is a recurring theme within school annual reporting and planning documents, and many schools have identified blended and e-learning as priorities for continuing staff development.

69   The University offers a wide range of staff development opportunities in support of the development of e-learning and innovations in learning and teaching with technology. The University has provided funding to support e-learning innovation projects for a number of years. The value of these small-scale projects has been enhanced by the recent appointment of a learning technologist who is providing support in the use of technological advances, such as webstreaming and podcasting. The annual e-learning@greenwich conference has grown in the seven years since its inception, from an internal event, to one which attracts international participants and high-profile keynote speakers and sponsors. This provides an excellent opportunity for staff carrying out University-funded e-learning projects to showcase their work.

70   An outcome of the HEA e-Benchmarking Exercise was a realisation by the University that although there was a widely held view amongst academic staff that e-learning enhanced the learning experience, there was no evidence base to substantiate this belief. A subsequent bid was successfully made for HEA funding to support a Pathfinder project; the Student Experience of E-Learning Laboratory investigates the student experience of e-learning and e-support, and further enables the University to review and develop its provision.

71   The audit team noted the strategic way in which the University and its schools were actively promoting and supporting the development of blended and e-learning through University and externally funded projects, a comprehensive range of staff development opportunities and the annual e-learning conference. The team also noted the University's activities in relation to flexible and part-time provision and work-based learning, and concluded that the University's management of 'other modes of study' is a strength and makes a positive contribution to the quality of the students' learning opportunities.

Resources for learning

72   A key aim of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy is the development of an appropriate infrastructure to support the learning of a diverse student body. The Office of Information and Library Services has the main responsibility for the provision of these resources. Three groups within the Office of Information and Library Services each deal with specific aspects of its work: Corporate Information Systems manages the University's key business systems including Banner Student Support, the Greenwich Portal (Portal) and support for WebCT;

Information and Communications Technology provides the information technology infrastructure; and Learning Services are responsible for library and computer laboratory facilities across the University campuses.

73   Pursuing its emphasis on flexibility and widening opportunities, the University has established a specialist team to support off-campus users, which provides 'self-help' materials, email and interactive help facilities and support for the use of the Portal. The University has responded to the challenges arising from the increased complexity and range of web-based services and the growing demands of users by developing the student and staff Portal, which features as a key target within the Corporate Plan (see paragraph 122).

74   It is a University requirement that the resource implications of new course proposals are identified and submitted to the Academic Planning Subcommittee. These are signed-off by resource managers, including the Head of School and those responsible for resources, to ensure that the potential impact on University systems and any requirements for significant additional resources have been considered. These processes constitute a robust approach to resource management and allocation.

75   Students have access to the University's library resources, which are located at each of the three campuses: Drill Hall-Medway campus, Avery Hill and Dreadnought-Maritime campus. Resources include more than 39,000 books, and a large and expanding holding of electronic resources in the form of both online journals and books.

76   Feedback on academic and service matters from schools and students is considered particularly important in the context of both the broad range of responsibilities held by Information and Library Services and the speed of technological change and the resulting changes in user expectations. Feedback from the National Student Survey shows an improvement in responses in relation to resources; however, the University acknowledges that there is further work to be done to bring these responses to the level of the sector median.

77   The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for allocating and managing its learning resources made an effective contribution to the quality of student learning opportunities.

Admissions policy

78   Through the work of Aimhigher, the Access and Widening Participation Unit, the Education Liaison Team within the Recruitment and Admissions Office and Lifelong Learning Networks, the University is involved in developing partnerships with local schools and further education colleges, and working with employers, adult learners and other targeted groups to pursue its commitment to access and widening participation.

79   The University's Recruitment and Admissions Office has responsibility for ensuring that central admissions policies and procedures are fairly and consistently implemented at school level. It achieves this through the comprehensive and well-established administrative systems of Banner Student Services. Admissions procedures enable prior learning, such as relevant certificated learning or work-based experience, to contribute to study at Greenwich. The University considers this valuable in offering recognition for knowledge and skills gained outside formal university courses or education and training programmes offered by external organisations. Students commented in particular on the clarity and promptness of the admissions process.

80   The audit team found the University's arrangements for admissions made an effective contribution to the management of the quality of the students' learning opportunities.

Student support

81   The University's Student Support Programme is intended to provide a comprehensive framework for the provision of support, with a focus on delivering key objectives at each level of undergraduate study: Level 1 personal and pastoral support, Level 2 employability and Level 3 independent learning and autonomy. Schools identify the most appropriate ways in which to provide personal and pastoral support. These include the use of diagnostic tools for literacy and numeracy and the inclusion of study skills in credit-bearing elements of the curriculum. The structured personal development planning opportunities, which are expected to be provided to all students are also offered at school level in a variety of ways. Students met by the audit team were able to confirm that schools were effective in providing academic and pastoral support, and opportunities for personal development, and they were positive about the tutorial support available. Staff are provided with a manual that provides comprehensive guidance on the role of the tutor.

82   The Student Retention Policy is central in identifying the importance which the University places on providing student support prior to entry, at induction and on-programme. One established initiative that has been successful in supporting prospective students and those progressing between different levels of study is the Summer University, which consists of a suite of short, stand-alone, credit-bearing courses that are also intended to enhance employability skills.

83   The University has made significant efforts in recent years to enhance its students' experience at induction, in the light of feedback from staff and students. This has included the publication of 'Student Induction at the University of Greenwich 2008-09: Guidelines for Academic Staff', which has informed recent developments. Students met by the audit team confirmed that induction had been a useful and positive experience for them, and that the improvements made by the University had been successful.

84   The Office of Student Affairs also provides a wide range of support for students through 'one-stop shop' campus student centres, as well as the work of the Welfare and Student Support section and the Student Finance and Financial Support Team. This includes pastoral support and counselling, welfare and medical care, screening for dyslexia and other factors that might hinder learning, and the provision of resources for students with disabilities. A comprehensive report produced by the Welfare and Students Support section, as part of the University's annual return to HEFCE, explains clearly how the University is meeting its Equality and Diversity responsibilities through the support provided.

85   The Office of Student Affairs Guidance and Employability Team also provides student support in four key areas: careers, volunteering, mentoring and the Jobshop. In 2007, the Guidance and Employability Team services achieved the Matrix Quality Kite Mark for the provision of information, advice and guidance. The Office of Student Affairs Annual Reporting and Planning Document noted that National Student Survey scores for careers and welfare were below the national average. However, they concluded that this was due to a lack of awareness of the services on offer, rather than to the dissatisfaction of students with the services themselves. The Annual Reporting and Planning Document provides information on both the efforts being made to promote the services available and the resultant increase in the numbers of clients.

86   The audit team concluded that the University's arrangements for the management of student support made an effective contribution to the quality of the students' learning opportunities.

Staff support (including staff development)

87   Schools and offices are required to report in their annual reporting and planning documents on their arrangements for staff support, including staff development priorities and appraisal. Individual annual reporting and planning documents identify priorities for staff development, ranging from a strong school-based emphasis on the development of the use of

WebCT, through to an example in which it was the intention to identify more individual teaching and research development needs through appraisal, in the context of the school's objectives. In response to its previous Institutional audit, the University has made efforts to strengthen its staff appraisal programme. A large majority of schools and offices reported that they were on-target to complete their appraisals within the prescribed two-year cycle. However, in the case of one office, 48 per cent of staff had not been appraised during the previous two years.

88   New appointees to the University are subject to a probationary period, which for academic staff includes teaching observation and support for any immediate staff development activities. Those who have fewer than three years' teaching experience and who are not already qualified are required to gain a teaching qualification, offered by the University, within three years of appointment.

89   The University recognises excellence in teaching by the designation of University Teaching Fellows. Such staff have a developmental role in the enhancement of learning and teaching within schools. A second designation of Associate Teaching Fellow, whose role is more explicitly directed to working on enhancement, exists for those in the process of developing a Teaching Fellow profile. Both roles are intended to be stepping stones for staff aspiring to National Teaching Fellowship Scheme recognition.

90   The University's Educational and Professional Development Programme provides academic and support staff with an integrated, University-wide listing of staff development opportunities. The audit team noted the growing range of activities and events, with a strong learning and teaching emphasis being informed by the work of the schools' Learning Enhancement Coordinator, and the effective way in which this was being brought to the attention of staff.

91   The audit team concluded that the arrangements for staff support make an effective contribution to the quality of the students' learning opportunities.

92   The audit team agreed that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's present and likely future management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

93   The University of Greenwich has traditionally adopted a relatively light touch for centralised enhancement initiatives but now intends to increase the momentum for enhancement while maintaining its balance between devolution and centralisation.

94   Since 2006, the process of enhancement has been managed by the Learning Enhancement and Student Support Working Group and by its successor, the Staff and Educational Development Working Group, headed by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Learning and Quality), which have sought to introduce a more corporate enhancement agenda and a greater impetus to central enhancement initiatives. Following the Change Academy, the University developed an action plan which, while not designated an enhancement strategy, serves as such. For 2008-09, drawing on this and other interrelated action plans, four key themes have been highlighted: employability; student retention; assessment and feedback, and internationalisation. Work has begun on these themes, and there is evidence of widespread and effective induction procedures and employability initiatives being developed in schools.

Enhancement initiatives

95   The newly formed Educational Development Team, which encompasses both central staff and also school learning enhancement coordinators, who are partially seconded to the Educational Development Team, undertakes both professional development for staff and helps manage the policy of enhancement.

96   The Educational Development Team's Learning Enhancement Coordinator structure is designed to create a direct enhancement link between the centre and schools in order to grow enhancement from the 'grass-roots' up, but to do so in line with corporate objectives; funding for learning enhancement coordinators is, however, currently of limited duration, which may limit the scope of this initiative. There is evidence that learning enhancement coordinators, who meet regularly as a group, in addition to meetings with the Educational Development Team, can enable local-level innovation to feed into the central agenda, while acting as a conduit for ideas and themes from within the broader educational development team to flow into schools.

97   In 2007-08, the University commenced a specialised consultation on assessment and feedback prompted by the National Student Survey. This continuing project has sought to identify current and effective practices and is now moving towards the dissemination of good practice through staff development activities and the revision and enhancement of support materials.

Enhancement dissemination

98   The Annual Reporting and Planning Document is a well established reporting and planning mechanism which, in addition to allowing schools to reflect on the quality and standards mechanisms in use, also allows a school to review its strategic aims and provide an insight into the ways in which it has addressed the University's enhancement agenda. The University recognises that while the Annual Reporting and Planning Document is an excellent reflective document, it needs to encourage the dissemination of good practice delineated in annual reporting and planning documents. At present, there appears to be dissemination of good practice between schools by means of membership of committees.

Role of students in quality enhancement

99   Students evaluate and provide feedback on their experience through such mechanisms as course evaluations; feedback from programme representatives; the National Student Survey; the University Student Survey, and the Postgraduate Research Student Satisfaction Survey.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

100   The University is to undergo a separate audit of its collaborative provision.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

The Research environment

101   The framework of the University's research environment, described in the QAA Review of research degree programmes in 2006, remains in place, but significant evolutionary change has occurred since that date. Research activities in the University are overseen by the Research and Enterprise Committee, which deliberates on policy, promotes the research and enterprise culture in the University, and receives regular reports on research activity in the schools. It reports to Academic Council.

102   Following its identification of some differences in the policies and procedure, but not standards, adopted by schools in connection with research degrees, the University established a central, institution-wide Research Degrees Committee in 2008-09, in order to ensure greater commonality and consistency of practice. This replaced the four existing research degree committees. The Research Degrees Committee has quickly developed a series of mechanisms to ensure regular and thorough review of all aspects of provision in connection with research degrees, which should further enhance support for students and the maintenance of standards.

103   The Research and Enterprise Committee has devolved responsibility for research degrees to the Research Degrees Committee, which is chaired by the Director of Postgraduate Research. The day-to-day administrative oversight of research degree students is managed by the Research Students Administrative Office.

104   The University's Academic Regulations for Research Awards and the Research Students Handbook are both reviewed annually, with the current versions posted on the web.

Selection, admission and induction of students

105   The admission of students to research degrees is overseen by the Research Degrees Committee, which ensures both consistent and robust application of the designated admissions criteria that the University has adopted.

106   All new research students are required to attend a University-wide induction day at the first available opportunity, following registration with the University, and to confirm attendance on the Annual Progress Report. Attendance is monitored by the Research Degrees Committee and failure to attend induction will normally result in a student not being permitted to progress to the subsequent year of the programme. For students whose main place of study is at a distance, there is a WebCT version of the induction programme available.

Supervision

107   A list of events and take-up figures of the 2008-09 Educational and Professional Development Programme make evident that the University provides training for all new supervisors and includes workshops for the more experienced.

108   The Research Students Administration Office monitors allocations on a periodic basis to ensure no supervisor has an excessive student load. This Office reports to the Research Degrees Committee, which will intervene to rebalance supervisory loads where necessary. Reports to the Research Degrees Committee and the resulting minutes confirmed that the Committee is seen to investigate and take appropriate action.

Progress and review arrangements

109   The Research Degrees Committee monitors the progress of research students. Research students are required to complete an annual progress report, which is submitted to the Research Degrees Committee. At the University's induction day, it is made very clear to research students that it is their responsibility to initiate submission of these reports and this is also reiterated in the Research Students Handbook. Failure to return an annual progress report may result in a student not being permitted to continue on the programme.

110   The audit team saw evidence that the return rate of annual progress reports has been less than optimal and the new University-wide Research Degree Committee is seeking to ensure all students return their annual progress reports, and is enforcing the requirement to return the Annual Progress Report, in order to progress.

111   The process of transferring from MPhil to PhD registration is a major review point and the outcome of the transfer process, which involves an oral examination with assessors who are not part of the supervisory team, is presented to the Research Degrees Committee, which makes the decision about whether or not to support the request for transfer.

Development of research and other skills

112   The feedback from the QAA Review of 2006 considered '…the Postgraduate Research Student Log and the way in which this is used to record the student's Skills Audit and Skills Development activities...' to be an exemplar of good practice. Further enhancement since the 2006 Review includes the provision of an online suite of modules covering such topics as intellectual property, ethics, project management, working with a supervisor, getting published and career planning.

113   In response to recommendations at the previous Institutional audit, the University has developed a teaching-skills course for research students. Schools may also provide training, for example in the use of specialist laboratory equipment. However, contrary to the recommendations of the 2004 Institutional audit, it is not mandatory for students undertaking teaching for the first time to undertake any prior training. There is evidence, however, that in many cases, schools provide mentoring for research students who are undertaking teaching for the first time. Schools are asked to report to the Research Degrees Committee on their monitoring and support processes for research students undertaking teaching, and the majority of schools are complying, through reports to the Research Degrees Committee. The audit team agreed it is advisable that, in line with the recommendations of the 2004 audit, the University make training compulsory for all postgraduate research students who teach, and ensure institutional consistency in monitoring their teaching.

Feedback and representation

114   The University collects student feedback on an annual basis through students' annual progress reports. In addition, the Research Students' Administrative Office conducts a postgraduate research student survey every two years; the 2006-07 survey contributed to the agenda for improvements in training for supervisors, and regular review of facilities for postgraduates. Students expressed satisfaction both with the opportunities afforded to them to raise issues and concerns, and with the responsiveness of schools when matters were raised with them.

Assessment

115   In response to the QAA's feedback in 2006, the University has revised its regulations for research awards to exclude a member of a candidate's supervisory team from acting as an internal examiner. It has also introduced independent Chairs to manage the examination process. The appointment of examiners is monitored by the Research Degrees Committee which also reviews feedback from internal and external examiners on the assessment process. The University also conducts regular reviews of completion and success rates.

116   The audit team confirms that the University's arrangements for postgraduate research programmes meet the expectations of the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 1* and concludes that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of academic standards of the postgraduate research awards that it offers.

Section 7: Published information

117   The University is acutely aware of the increased competition for students and the introduction of variable fees for undergraduate students, as well as the Government's encouragement to increase delivery of knowledge transfer. It has made plans to improve its communication to students, in order that the distinct benefits of learning at the University of Greenwich are made clear to all prospective students.

118   The Marketing and the Planning and Statistics Offices are the two key organisations responsible for managing the accuracy of published information. The Planning and Statistics Unit manages the University's Higher Education Statistics Assessment return, incorporating the University's TQI/University statistical data. Marketing retains responsibility for all the core formal University publications. Each member of the marketing staff works with specific allocated schools to ensure that the process of assuring accurate public material is two-way and focused.

119   The University-wide Portal has become a key internal mechanism for ensuring that all students have accurate, regular and consistent information about the essential components of their learning, such as their examination timetable, course timetable, marks for courses, submission of coursework, University email, and access to, and updating of, teaching/course learning materials. During the audit team's various meetings with students, it became clear that they were satisfied

with the accuracy and completeness of information provided to them, both before their arrival at the University and also during their time there.

120   The Portal is run by a Steering Group providing strategic direction and a management group for operational issues. The Portal management group exists to ensure appropriate development of 'Channels and Protocols' and to link the seven channel managers. The use of the Portal project, as mentioned earlier in paragraph 73, has clearly identified the importance of this learning resource and the audit team received highly complimentary reports about the critical value of having such an effective educational tool for communication.

121   An evaluation of the Portal Project received by Academic Council in December 2007 concluded that the objectives of the Project had been met, providing a sound basis for future developments. Continuing evaluation and refinement are considered by the University to be essential for maintaining the currency of information and relevance of communication.

122   It is the view of the audit team that the Greenwich Portal is working exceptionally well and is acclaimed by both students and staff alike, leading to a position where the audit team considers that the Greenwich Portal it is an example of good practice.

123   During the audit team's various meetings with students it became clear that they were satisfied with the accuracy and completeness of information provided to them, both before their arrival at the University and also during their time at the institution.

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

124   The audit team identified the following area as being good practice:

● the Greenwich Portal as a comprehensive and effective means of communication with staff and students (paragraph 122).

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers essential:

● in order to eliminate ambiguity about the nature and standing of its taught undergraduate awards, to review the nomenclature and status of those awards that fall outside the scope of *The Framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) but nonetheless use its terminology (paragraph 38)

● to ensure that, in reaching assessment board decisions, the regulatory framework is applied consistently and judgements do not undermine the University's assurance of the standards of its taught undergraduate awards (paragraph 48).

Recommendations for action that the audit team considers advisable:

● to reflect further on the ways in which central oversight of school-based periodic review is maintained and consider in particular whether provision for light touch reviews, and the relationship between professional, statutory and regulatory body reviews and internal reviews, should be more closely defined (paragraph 30)

● to clarify the roles of individuals and deliberative committees in the approval and appointment of external examiners, and the operation of the external examiner system (paragraph 31)

● to implement mechanisms to maintain institutional oversight of the cumulative effect of minor changes and derogations on programmes (paragraph 40)

- to ensure the consistency, continuity, coherence and support of student representation in quality management at all levels (paragraph 62)

- in line with the recommendations of the 2004 audit, to make training compulsory for postgraduate research students who teach, and ensure institutional consistency in monitoring their teaching (paragraph 113).

Appendix

University of Greenwich's Response to the Institutional audit report

The University welcomes QAA's judgement that confidence can be placed in its present and likely future management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students and in the standards of its postgraduate awards, and it is grateful for the guidance given to improve its provision. We are disappointed that QAA has expressed limited confidence in the standards of the University's undergraduate awards. We believe that this judgement is based on slender evidence, but we are taking steps to consider the two specific matters raised by the audit team.

As regards the audit team's comments on the naming and status of the University of Greenwich's diplomas and certificates, we acknowledge that the wording of the relevant Appendix to the University's Academic Regulations needs to be clarified. In common with other institutions in the sector, these are not intended to be awards within the FHEQ, but follow guidelines provided by the UK credit consortia. The audit team did not request sight of the University's certification which confirms this, but the University has assured QAA that students simply receive certification of credit, with no university crest and without the Vice-Chancellor's signature. We will review the wording of the Appendix in the light of the audit team's comments, but this outcome undoubtedly calls for sector-wide discussion amongst the substantial number of institutions making such awards and using the same, or similar, terminology.

Turning to the consistency of the undergraduate awards, our view is that QAA has misinterpreted the intentions behind recent changes made to the University's regulatory framework. QAA has made the assumption that the models introduced for determining the classification of these awards were intended to be exhaustive and has criticised Progression and Award Boards for exercising discretion at the borderlines between classifications, when this is explicitly allowed for in the University's rubric. We will, however, give further consideration to these issues.

We have already put in place mechanisms to provide very robust central oversight of programme review arrangements across the institution (advisable 1); we believe our arrangements for external examining are already robust, but will nonetheless re-visit and clarify these in the light of the audit team's comment (advisable 2); we will maintain a watching brief on the cumulative effect of minor changes and derogations on programmes, while still retaining School-level autonomy where appropriate (advisable 3); we will continue our efforts to encourage and support student representation in all aspects of quality management (advisable 4), and we will make training for postgraduate research students who teach, compulsory (advisable 5).

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