

Loughborough University

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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 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 Innovation, Universities 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 (UK) 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* (FHEQ) 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 and the report, without the annex, are published in hard copy. The summary, the report and the annex are published on QAA's website. The institution will receive the summary, report and annex in hard copy (*Institutional audit handbook: England and Northern Ireland 2006* - Annexes B and C refer).

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Loughborough University (the University) from 10 to 14 March 2008 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the learning opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers.

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

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

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

Institutional approach to quality enhancement

The University's approach to quality enhancement is based on several key principles, which include strategic purpose, departmental focus, student involvement, partnerships within the University, an enquiry-based culture and continuing professional development. There is evidence from a number of sources that the University is taking deliberate steps to enhance the quality of learning opportunities. The establishment of quality enhancement officers, who work closely with departments, is considered a feature of good practice by the audit team.

Postgraduate research students

Since 2006 there have been several developments relating to the University's management of its postgraduate research provision. These include the establishment of a Graduate School, the appointment of a Director of the Graduate School, and a review and revision of postgraduate regulations. Research degree qualification rates are high and, overall, there are indicators of a strong institutional research environment. The audit team concludes that the University's processes and procedures for postgraduate research programmes make an effective contribution to its management of the quality and standards of those programmes.

Published information

The University publishes a wide range of information both in hardcopy and on its website. Students confirmed that the publicity material and prospectuses, both printed and on the University website, gave an accurate account of the institution. The audit found that, overall, 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 prioritisation of students in the institutional culture
- the thorough approach to the promotion and management of industrial links and placement opportunities to enhance the educational experience of students and the future employability of graduates
- the integration of the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in learning and teaching to enhance student support and the student experience
- the development of the role of quality enhancement officer and its close link with departments to support enhancement activities.

Recommendations for action

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

The team advises the University to:

- review the management of assessment, progression and degree classification procedures to ensure that they test that programme learning outcomes are met and that equitable treatment of students across the institution is assured
- review the strategic oversight and overall management of collaborative provision to ensure that procedures and practice take appropriate account of the precepts of *Section 2* of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, *Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- reflect on the processes of programme approval, monitoring and review with a view to ensuring that the opportunities for enhancement afforded by external involvement are capitalised upon and the outcomes of the processes are fully reported so that good practice is effectively captured and quality enhancement supported.

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

The audit found that, overall, 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. However, the audit team advises the University to reflect further on its application of the *Code of practice, Section 2*, published by QAA, as noted above.

Report

1 An institutional audit of Loughborough University (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 10 March 2008. 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 was Ms Hilary Johnson, Dr Richard Latto, Dr Aulay Mackenzie and Mr Jon Rowson, auditors, and Ms Kathryn Powell, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr Gillian King, Deputy Director, Reviews Group.

Section 1: Introduction and background

3 The University traces its origins to 1909 when Loughborough College was founded. It became a College of Technology in 1957 and became Loughborough University of Technology in 1966. It amalgamated with the former Loughborough College of Education in 1977 and with Loughborough College of Art and Design in 1998. The Charter and Statutes were amended in 1996 when the title of the institution was changed to Loughborough University to reflect the growth in breadth of its subject disciplines.

4 At the time of the audit there were 12,627 full-time students (10,505 undergraduate, 1,241 taught postgraduate and 881 postgraduate research students). There are 2,062 part-time students (381 undergraduate students, the vast majority of whom are repeating module assessments, 1,499 taught postgraduate students and 182 postgraduate research students). International students number 944 undergraduates, 936 taught postgraduates and 429 postgraduate research students, making a total of 2,309.

5 The University describes its collaborative provision as modest in scale. It has recently withdrawn, or intends to withdraw, from several partnerships. Nevertheless, the overall numbers of students on collaborative programmes are increasing. There has been a steady expansion in the numbers of students on validated Foundation Degree programmes at Loughborough College and new programmes have been introduced year-by-year to provide a comprehensive portfolio in the area of sport, exercise and fitness. The most significant recent development has been the University's involvement with the British University in Egypt (BUE), leading in September 2007, to the decision to approve the validation of the current degree programmes at BUE to lead to dual awards of BUE and the University.

6 The University's mission is to:

- increase knowledge and understanding through research which is internationally recognised
- provide a high quality international educational experience with wide opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds which prepares graduates for the global workplace
- influence the economic and social development of individuals, business, professions and communities.

7 The previous institutional audit in March 2004 found that broad confidence could be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards. The audit report contained four recommendations that the University was advised to consider, concerning the pivotal role of the Associate Deans (Teaching), an external peer perspective in programme approval, the appointments process for external examiners, and the development of the Corporate Information Services. The audit found evidence that the University has seriously considered all these recommendations and had made good progress in addressing them.

8 Recommendations for desirable action were also made, concerning quality management of collaborative provision, dissemination of good practice described in reports from professional, statutory and regulatory body reviews, specific quality issues in relation to joint courses, and aspects of the periodic programme review. On the whole, the audit team considered that these had been addressed satisfactorily by the University, although the team made further recommendations concerning management of collaborative provision (see paragraphs 44 to 51).

9 The 2004 audit report noted several areas of good practice which the University has subsequently taken steps both to maintain and strengthen further, including development of the Quality Enhancement Officer and pedagogic research associate roles; the development of the virtual learning environment 'Learn'; links with employers; and the work of its Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

10 Other key developments since the 2004 audit include the publishing of a new Strategic Plan, 'Loughborough University - Towards 2016'; a decision to establish a Teaching Centre; major revision of the academic regulations; and several developments related to the University's postgraduate research provision.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

11 Senate, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, is the overarching body responsible for the standards of awards and quality of provision. The Learning and Teaching Committee, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching), advises Senate on matters of policy relating to teaching and learning and is responsible for the maintenance and enhancement of quality in learning and teaching. There are two student members of the Committee appointed by Loughborough Students' Union, one of whom is a postgraduate.

12 The Learning and Teaching Committee's Curriculum Sub-Committee is responsible for scrutinising all proposals for new programmes and maintaining an overview of the entire range of programmes. The Programme Quality Team, under the executive direction of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching) and with a Senior Assistant Registrar as team manager, oversees the operation of the quality management framework in respect of taught programmes and acts as a policy advisory committee to the Learning and Teaching Committee.

13 The University's procedures for the management of standards are defined in the web-based Academic Quality Procedures Handbook.

14 Associate Deans (Teaching) play a pivotal role in maintaining academic standards. These faculty-based roles provide an interface between academic departments and the central management. The importance and effectiveness of their role in this respect was confirmed by both the documentation the audit team saw and also the meetings the team had with the Associate Deans (Teaching) and with other staff. The pivotal nature of the Associate Deans (Teaching) is exemplified in the University's processes for programme approval, annual monitoring, and periodic programme review.

15 Approval for new taught programmes is sought in two stages: strategic and operational. Strategic approval starts with informal discussion between a department and the Associate Deans (Teaching) followed by high level consideration of a proposal in outline form. In this strategic phase, matters for consideration include the compatibility of the proposals with institutional strategy and departmental development plans, the availability of resources, and implications for other departments and the support services.

16 In the operational phase, a more detailed proposal incorporating any new module specifications, programme regulations and a programme specification is scrutinised by the Curriculum Sub-Committee which is concerned with securing academic standards and ensuring that account has been taken of external reference and professional accreditation requirements where applicable. Recommendations from the Curriculum Sub-Committee go via the Learning

and Teaching Committee and Senate to Council for final approval. The evidence the audit team saw confirmed the University's view that its two-phase approval process provides Senate with the assurance that any new programmes and major revisions presented to it for approval have received scrutiny regarding academic quality and standards.

17 All the University's programmes are subject to an annual programme review. Departments are required to provide on a programme by programme basis various statistical data, accompanied by relevant external examiners' reports, reports of any accreditation visits, staff/student committee minutes, and reports from any external advisory committees. Departments must provide an account of action taken on the feedback from these sources, and where appropriate from employers of former students, as well as on issues raised by the teaching staff. From 2007-08, departments are also being asked to comment on their National Student Survey results. A Departmental Review Body, expected to include appropriate programme directors, is responsible for overseeing the completion and accuracy of the annual programme review documentation. The outcome is a brief report for the relevant faculty board and the Learning and Teaching Committee. The examples the audit team saw confirmed that the process was being operated as intended, although there were some variations, particularly in the form and detail of the statistical data and analysis. The emphasis of the procedure was on the monitoring of quality and standards and the audit team confirmed that in this respect it was operating effectively. Further discussion concerning the contribution of the process to management of learning opportunities may be found in paragraph 34.

18 Each department's complete portfolio of programmes is subject to periodic programme review on a five-year cycle. Periodic programme review documentation includes a self-evaluative commentary, organised under a range of predetermined headings, plus statistical data. The Review Panel is chaired by the relevant dean and includes an external assessor and the Associate Deans (Teaching). In the case of areas of joint provision, a link person from the other department involved attends meetings. During meetings in the course of the audit, the audit team was informed that plans are in hand to include a student representative on the periodic review panel, and this was welcomed by students.

19 The outcome of the periodic programme review is a brief and largely anonymous report prepared by the Academic Registry for consideration by the faculty board and the Learning and Teaching Committee. The audit team felt that more benefit could be obtained from the process if the reporting process was more detailed and specific (further discussion is given at paragraph 35) but they confirmed that in respect of its function of maintaining standards it was operating effectively.

20 The University has a Code of Practice for External Examining for Taught Undergraduate and Postgraduate Programmes. This defines very fully the way in which external examiners are expected to participate in the assessment procedures of taught programmes. External examiners report to the University Examinations Officer, acting on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor, using a standard template. These ask several questions about the standards of the work reviewed and in the sets of reports seen by the audit team the external examiners were always satisfied with the standards achieved by the students.

21 Completed forms are copied to heads of departments and faculty secretaries who summarise them for the Associate Deans (Teaching). The actual external examiner's report is sent to the Associate Deans (Teaching) only if major issues are identified. A list of institutional issues is extracted from the faculty summaries of external examiners' reports for consideration by the Programme Quality Team which recommends further action and feedback to heads of department as necessary. While the audit team saw evidence that such action was taken when appropriate, the examples of these summary reports seen by the team were mechanical collations without any analysis. There was no evidence of their use for the dispersion of best practice and the team concluded that this was one instance where the University might better capitalise on

the opportunities provided by external involvement in its quality assurance processes for the identification of good practice and quality enhancement. The report makes further comment about this in paragraph 34.

22 Overall responsibility for ensuring that the University's regulations and policies for undergraduate and taught master's programmes reflect the Academic Infrastructure lies with the Learning and Teaching Committee advised by the Programme Quality Team. At a local level, the University relies on an effectively informed staff and a system of checks in templates for programme specifications, periodic review and external examiner reports to ensure that external reference points are complied with. The Curriculum Sub-Committee of the Learning and Teaching Committee is responsible for monitoring new programme specifications for engagement with the relevant elements of the Academic Infrastructure. Monitoring of continuing engagement is primarily the responsibility of Associate Deans (Teaching), through external examiner reports, programme reviews, and through annual update of programme specifications, programme regulations and module specifications. The audit team found evidence of this process in outcomes of the processes and considered it to be well understood by staff.

23 One area of some concern relating to the FHEQ identified by the audit team, arises from the fact that although the University has a credit accumulation system for monitoring progress, it has not until recently required modules to be assigned to credit levels. This has resulted in some ambiguity in the assignment of levels to modules and the potential for modules to be at the wrong, usually lower, level leading to uncertainty about appropriate learning outcomes and assessment procedures. This was particularly the case for some master's programmes. The problem is recognised by the University and is being addressed. From the academic year 2007-08, the University is requiring modules to be formally assigned to credit levels. The audit team encourages the University to monitor this move carefully to ensure that there is full implementation of effective credit level descriptors as soon as possible. This would make a valuable contribution to addressing the recommendation given in paragraph 27.

24 As part of the assessment process, programme boards are responsible for receiving final examination marks. Such boards can only change individual module marks for Impaired Performance due to illness, for example, or as the result of viva voce examinations. The University's regulations do, however, allow programme boards to exercise discretion and classify students who have not met the requirements for passing a degree provided the module or modules involved have a total weight of not more than 20 credits in any part of the programme. This condonement can also be used to facilitate the progression of students between years. After the first year it requires the approval of external examiners, and programme boards are required to include specific details of the reasons for any condonement decisions in their reports. The audit team noted that the Learning and Teaching Committee has been exercised about variability in condonement practices between departments at least since 2004-05. Following discussion in 2007, when it was noted that condonement had sometimes been used inappropriately and that many departments had not included reasons for the exercise of condonement in programme board reports, the Learning and Teaching Committee reinforced the requirement to include the reasons for condonements in board reports. In 2008, the Learning and Teaching Committee noted again that there was variability in the extent to which condonement was being used.

25 Another point at which programme boards can exercise discretion is in determining programme mark thresholds. The average percentage marks for each year are combined in the ratio indicated in programme regulations to determine the programme mark. There is no standard University weighting. The programme mark leads to a classification according to the standard UK scale, but programme mark thresholds may be lowered (by not more than 3 per cent) at the discretion of the programme board.

26 The audit team concluded that, overall, there is a substantial degree of discretion available to programme boards in the weighting of different levels in degree classification, in the classification thresholds used, and in the condonement of failure to meet progression requirements and

classification thresholds. The team noted that the University was monitoring this variance between programmes, but was not convinced by the arguments put forward to justify its continuance. In particular, the team was concerned that it had the potential for giving rise to inequity, for example between students on different programmes taking the same module.

27 Bearing in mind the examples given above, the audit team considers it advisable that the University review the management of assessment, progression and degree classification procedures to ensure that they test that programme learning outcomes are met and that equitable treatment of students across the institution is assured.

28 This recommendation notwithstanding, the audit team concluded that confidence can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

29 A striking feature of the way that the quality of learning opportunities is managed in the University is the prioritisation of students in the institutional culture. The audit team noted numerous instances of this which led it to conclude that this is a feature of good practice in the University. For example, the team saw several instances of ways in which students are able, via various feedback mechanisms, to comment on and influence the operation of programmes. The team found that this contributes significantly to the management of the quality of learning opportunities. In addition, the team agreed that the University supports and values a wide range of student representation in its management and planning for enhancement of learning opportunities.

30 The University claims that 'common to all of the central support services involved is a commitment to delivering a high quality service focused on the needs of our students'. In their meetings with the audit team students provided several examples of the practical success of this approach. Another aspect of the support services that the team explored was the University's promotion and advertising of the services to the whole student body. Students were very positive in their assessment of the organisation and effectiveness of the services. All this served as a major practical example of the prioritisation of students in the institutional culture.

31 The audit team found that the University's student support mechanisms were highly effective in maintaining the quality of the student's learning opportunities. Students displayed a keen awareness of the range of academic and personal support services available and expressed confidence that they would be received well when seeking to make use of them.

32 It was also notable that the representative students from partner institutions felt positively supported in their use of resources on campus, another example of the prioritisation of students in the institutional culture already noted by the audit team.

33 Bearing these examples in mind, the audit team concluded that the prioritisation of students in the institutional culture of the University is a feature of good practice.

34 Annual programme review has the potential to contribute effectively to the management of learning opportunities. The annual programme review process considers, amongst other evidence, the reports of external examiners. However, the template used by external examiners does not include specific questions about areas such as resources, facilities or other broad areas of student support or access to learning opportunities. Together with the concise nature of the summary reports of issues identified by external examiners that are seen by central University bodies (see paragraph 21), this may limit the ability of the University to capitalise on the opportunity for independent views on student support issues and their contribution to quality enhancement.

35 Similarly, periodic programme review could be a more effective channel for identifying good practice and enhancing learning opportunities. The periodic programme review process results in a report produced by the Academic Registry according to standard headings. The reports of

periodic programme review seen by the audit team were summary reports, set out according to a format in line with expectations regarding publication of such reports for the Teaching Quality Information website. They gave little information, if any, about any contribution of the external assessor to the process and its outcomes. Given the size and diversity of provision frequently being considered in the course of one periodic review, the audit team felt that the summary nature of the periodic programme review reports did not allow the University to capitalise on the possibilities for identification of good practice that the process presented, and that outcomes and recommendations from individual periodic programme review might be more effectively captured and used.

36 Bearing in mind the examples identified above and elsewhere (paragraphs 17, 19 and 21) where the audit team considered that quality assurance processes might more effectively contribute to quality enhancement, the team recommends that it is desirable for the University to reflect on the processes of programme approval, monitoring and review with a view to ensuring that the opportunities for enhancement afforded by external involvement are capitalised upon; and the outcomes of the processes are fully reported so that good practice is effectively captured and quality enhancement supported.

37 Management of placement activity is an area where the University is actively enhancing the experience for students. Some 900 students are involved in placements each year. The Careers Centre coordinates an annual meeting of departmental industrial training tutors who coordinate all aspects of placement activity. This provides a vehicle for sharing good practice and confirmation was provided in the audit team's meeting with academic staff involved that this was of great value to them in their work. Minutes of these meetings showed evidence of extensive monitoring of the uptake of placement. In particular, the factors preventing or discouraging students from taking placements had been analysed and responses had been developed. One example of a measure that had subsequently been adopted further to encourage students to participate in placements was to start promoting placements to Part A (first year) students. Overall, the thorough approach to the promotion and management of industrial links and placement opportunities to enhance the educational experience of students and the future employability of graduates is considered a feature of good practice.

38 The University has two Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs), both established in 2005. engCETL's origins are in the provision of teaching and learning support within the Engineering Faculty and the Engineering Education Centre. While engCETL now has a wider remit it continues to provide a valuable resource to students and staff. Academic staff within the seven associated departments can bid for time from core staff within the Centre to aid them in various ways, including the development of learning and teaching resources, and the enhancement of industry links. engCETL has also been instrumental in the provision of newly developed design teaching space. Engineering students that the audit team met were particularly enthusiastic about the facilities this offered to them for their group project meetings. Their collaborative project with industry was another benefit provided through engCETL's extensive industrial network.

39 sigma CETL has its origins in the Mathematics Education Centre but has widened its concern from the teaching of mathematics to engineers to include support for mathematics education across the University. The ready accessibility of useful help was praised by both undergraduate and postgraduate students that met the audit team. Other students described the benefits of the support rooms and associated equipment. Postgraduate students were appreciative of the one-to-one help and individual study programmes provided for them by the Centre.

40 The audit team considers that the integration of the CETLs in learning and teaching to enhance student support and the student experience is a feature of good practice.

41 The above evidence led the audit team to conclude that 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.

Section 4: Institutional approach to quality enhancement

42 The University's approach to quality enhancement is based on several key principles, which include strategic purpose, departmental focus, student involvement, partnerships within the University, an enquiry-based culture, and continuing professional development. There is evidence from a number of sources that the University is taking deliberate steps to enhance the quality of learning opportunities: the Learning and Teaching Strategy includes an objective which seeks to enhance systematically the quality of learning and teaching provision; the recruitment of additional staff to support quality enhancement, including a Head of Academic Practice and Enhancement, two full-time quality enhancement officers in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities and in the Faculty of Science, and a Pedagogical Research Associate in the Faculty of Engineering; the planned establishment of a University Teaching Centre which will develop and lead the University's quality enhancement strategy.

43 The University characterises the quality enhancement officers (taken here to include both quality enhancement officers and the Pedagogical Research Associate) as being engaged in an organised process of the dissemination of 'effective practice'. The University uses this term in preference to 'good practice', since it considers that it denotes 'the situational nature of practice', whereas good practice is taken to imply an absolute judgement. An example quoted of this is the identification of good practice in student induction, which has been written up by the quality enhancement officers as pedagogically focused case-studies. The quality enhancement officers have also recently been engaged in the review meetings within the annual programme review process and have effectively distilled evidence of good practice and are in the process of disseminating this to departments. The audit team considers the development of the role of quality enhancement officer and its close link with departments to support enhancement activities is a feature of good practice and illustrates an institutional prioritisation on the learning experience.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

44 The University describes its collaborative provision as 'modest' in scale and collaborative provision is not central to the institution's strategy. Management of the acquisition of new partners is a responsive one, as opportunities arise. At the time of the audit, the University's collaborative provision comprised eight partnerships, of which four were international.

45 The 2004 audit gave rise to a recommendation that it was desirable to 'identify[ing] responsibility for overseeing the quality management of collaborative provision more specifically, and review[ing] whether, and how, its routine quality management arrangements might require enhancement to support collaborative provision'. No explicit reference to this was made by the University, either in its immediate response, nor in the Briefing Paper. The refocusing of collaborative provision away from subject areas not covered by the University's departments can be seen as accommodating some but not all of these concerns, and the management of quality and standards of collaborative provision remains an area of potential weakness, as detailed below.

46 Notwithstanding the general approach of not validating collaborative provision which does not reflect academic expertise at the University, an exception has been made in the area of petroleum and gas engineering for the BUE. The partnership with BUE has developed since early 2006 and has a much larger scope than the University's previous collaborative provision. Initial aspirations were for growth to 6,000 students in 2009-10. The University has adjusted procedures to try to accommodate the challenge of the scale and rapid start-up of this project, including the appointment of an Associate Dean (Teaching) for BUE.

47 An institutional validation panel report and subsequent BUE Validation Subcommittee meetings have followed up issues arising at validation and also identified some programme-level issues. Nevertheless, some concerns remain to be addressed. The audit team noted that public association of the University's name with BUE was made prior to validation and that retrospective approval of the partnership was made. The team considered that this had the potential to put the University's standards at risk.

48 In addition, in the case of BUE, there was at the time of audit no legal agreement in place (although a clear intention to have such is signalled in the initial Memorandum of Understanding). The audit team strongly advises that the situation with regard to the legal agreement is finalised quickly. The legal agreements seen by the team are variable in structure and content which might suggest a lack of oversight in this area and the University may also wish to review this.

49 The audit team noted a lack of clarity among staff whom it met concerning the University's differentiation between 'validated' versus 'collaborative' provision, and found that this extended to a confusion as to the appropriate regulations to apply to a particular programme. The team considers that it would be advisable for the University to review the processes and procedures for managing collaborative provision to provide greater clarity.

50 Monitoring of the publications and marketing of University programmes at partner institutions is in part devolved to the cognate department at the University, but there appears to be a lack of clear understanding regarding the dispensation of this role and who is responsible to ensure regard is made to the relevant precepts of *Section 2* of the *Code of practice*. The audit team could find no evidence of any systematic approach to reviewing relevant material published at or by partner organisations. There is some direct evidence from the audit team's review of partners' websites that some inaccuracies were present and that the websites of some collaborative partners did not consistently inform prospective students of the involvement of the University. Further, the legal agreements seen by the audit team made no specific reference to the responsibility of the University to oversee all publicity and the partner institutions to seek agreement on all such material. On this issue, the audit team recommends that the University refer specifically to precepts A26, A27 and A28 of *Section 2* of the *Code of practice* as it addresses the recommendation in paragraph 51.

51 Taking into account the findings above, the audit team recommends that it is advisable that the University review the strategic oversight and overall management of collaborative provision to ensure that procedures and practice take appropriate account of the precepts of *Section 2* of the *Code of practice*.

52 It was apparent that there was evidence of some effective links with collaborative partner staff, and the relatively small student cohorts on most collaborative provision schemes allowed sufficient overview of most elements of provision. There was also evidence of some good practice, including some overseas collaborative partner staff undertaking staff development when on the University campus.

Section 6: Institutional arrangements for postgraduate research students

53 Quality management for research degree programmes is the responsibility of the Research Team whose recommendations are subject to the approval of the Research Committee and Senate. Both the Research Team and the Research Committee are chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research).

54 In 2006, the Research Team established a Regulations Review Group chaired by the Director of the Graduate School with a very wide remit to review the University's Regulations for Higher Degrees by Research. Its initial concerns have been with introducing standards for supervisory contact and progress monitoring. Although this is still largely left to departments, the audit team saw good evidence that departmental procedures are now strong in these areas.

55 Since 2006, there has been a suite of developments, notably the establishment of a Graduate School; the appointment of a Director of the Graduate School; the extension of the research students' skills training programme to include personal development planning opportunities; the establishment of Research Schools as a focus for interdepartmental research activity; and a review and revision of the postgraduate regulations under the Regulations Review Group.

56 The Director of the Graduate School was appointed in June 2006 and has been co-opted to membership of Senate. The Director represents postgraduate (both taught and research programme) perspectives on internal and external committees and acts as a link between teaching and research and is responsible for the distribution of the postgraduate research student training funds from Research Councils.

57 There is a varied programme of transferable skills available designed to ensure that the training opportunities suggested in the *Code of practice* are available to all postgraduate research students. Analysis of student feedback to the transferable skills programme indicated some mixed attitudes to such training but a general majority indicating satisfaction with the perceived impact on research skills and future careers.

58 The feedback arrangements that apply to taught courses do not cover postgraduate research students, but during 2003 to 2006, exit surveys were conducted by the Research Student Office and the outcomes considered by the Research Committee. The analysis of the data from 2005 and 2006 does not indicate any consistent significant issues.

59 Postgraduate research student qualification rates are high. There is a clear institutional focus on research in the strategic plan and there are indicators of a strong institutional research environment. Overall, the audit team concludes that the University's processes and procedures for postgraduate research programmes make an effective contribution to its management of the quality and standards of those programmes.

Section 7: Published information

60 The University publishes a wide range of information both in hardcopy and on its website. The University's Marketing and Communications Office is responsible for producing prospectuses and other marketing material aimed at prospective students. The Office has in place a wide range of policies and procedures, published in the Academic Quality Procedures Handbook, for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the information for which it is responsible. It also produces good practice guidelines for the production of departmental information.

61 Concerning information on University websites, the Code of Practice for Online Publications advises that there should be one person responsible for the content, structure and maintenance of the information.

62 The ready access afforded to these various procedures and codes provided clear evidence that the University has responded effectively to the previous audit report's comment concerning the desirability of clarifying its procedures with respect to checking the accuracy of published information.

63 In meetings with the audit team, undergraduate students confirmed that the publicity material and prospectuses, both printed and on the University website, gave an accurate account of the institution that reflected their experience since arrival as students. More detailed course literature distributed during open days was also mentioned as being very helpful in determining their choice of degree programme.

64 Since the removal of qualitative information from the Teaching Quality Information site the University has reviewed the availability of its information and responded to the publication of the Higher Education Funding Council for England's document 2006/45 Review of the Quality Assurance Framework (HEFCE 2006/45). On the basis of this and other measures, the University

has recently adopted, such as the sharing of external examiners' reports with student representatives, the audit team was satisfied that the University had given a full and considered response to the actions required by HEFCE 2006/45.

65 The audit found that, overall, 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.

Section 8: Features of good practice and recommendations

Features of good practice

66 The audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

- the prioritisation of students in the institutional culture (paragraph 33)
- the thorough approach to the promotion and management of industrial links and placement opportunities to enhance the educational experience of students and the future employability of graduates (paragraph 37)
- the integration of the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in learning and teaching to enhance student support and the student experience (paragraph 40)
- the development of the role of quality enhancement officer and its close link with departments to support enhancement activities (paragraph 43).

Recommendations for action

67 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- review the management of assessment, progression and degree classification procedures to ensure that they test that programme learning outcomes are met and that equitable treatment of students across the institution is assured (paragraph 27)
- review the strategic oversight and overall management of collaborative provision to ensure that procedures and practice take appropriate account of the precepts of *Section 2* of the *Code of practice* (paragraph 51).

68 Recommendation for action that is desirable:

- reflect on the processes of programme approval, monitoring and review with a view to ensuring that the opportunities for enhancement afforded by external involvement are capitalised upon; and the outcomes of the processes are fully reported so that good practice is effectively captured and quality enhancement supported (paragraph 36).

Appendix

Loughborough University's response to the institutional audit report

The University welcomes the positive nature of the report of the audit team.

We especially welcome the fact that the prioritisation of students in the institutional culture has been commended as a feature of good practice. We believe this has helped to define the 'Loughborough student experience' and has contributed significantly to the high reputation which the institution currently enjoys.

We are pleased that other areas of good practice commended by the audit team recognise the commitment of staff across the University to providing our students with learning opportunities of the highest quality, and recognise our efforts to continue to enhance the student experience.

Appropriate steps will be taken to address the recommendations and other issues raised in the report as part of our continual re-evaluation of procedures for managing quality and standards, and our commitment to quality enhancement.

