QAA

University of Cambridge

February 2008

Annex to the report

Contents

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Cambridge (the University) from 25 to 29 February 2008 to carry out an institutional audit. 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.

The audit team comprised Dr PC Garnsworthy, Professor TJ Kemp, Mr P Lloyd and Mrs J Lyttle, auditors, and Ms C Smith, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Professor R Harris, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

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 University's current and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards

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

The University's approach to quality enhancement

The University's arrangements for postgraduate research students

The audit found that the University is committed to enhancing the learning opportunities of its students through a range of formal and informal processes based on a shared ethos.

The audit concluded that the University has put in place effective procedures for the management of its research programmes, which meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes.*

Published information

The audit found that reliance can reasonably be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the University publishes about 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 robust approach taken in the periodic learning and teaching review process (paragraph 83)

- the range of admissions-related initiatives, especially those promoting the widening participation agenda (paragraph 107)

- the exemplary manner in which the Senior Tutors' Committee discharges its responsibilities (paragraph 119)

- the quality of published information (paragraph 173).

Recommendations for action

The audit team recommends that the University consider further action in some areas. In particular it would be advisable for the University to ensure that:

- it implements, without undue delay, the recommendation of the General Board's Education Committee that the award of BA with Honours should necessarily involve the successful completion of Part II of the Tripos (paragraph 43)

- it develops further the annual quality statements by incorporating within them an analysis of the outcomes of the procedures described therein (paragraphs 85, 95, 140)

- all graduate students with supervisory or teaching responsibilities are appropriately trained (paragraph 127)

- it confirms an early date for the General Board to assume full responsibility for the award-bearing programmes offered by the Institute of Continuing Education (paragraph 148).

It would be desirable for the University:

- to introduce a template for external examiners' reports (paragraph 32)

- to consider the introduction of a University-wide approach to penalties for late-submitted assessed work (paragraph 57)

- to use student-related data regularly to inform the development and implementation of strategy and policy relating to the management of academic standards (paragraph 64).

Section 1: Introduction and background

The University and its mission

1   The University of Cambridge was established in 1209, to examine students and confer degrees. The colleges were established from 1284 onwards as autonomous and independent chartered institutions. Their main original purpose, to teach and house students, is reflected today in the fact that all degree students are members of a college as well as the University. Over the 800 years of its existence the University has grown to 31 colleges, three of which admit only women and two of which admit only graduates, supporting (as at academic year 2006-07) 11,729 undergraduates, 4,423 research students and 1,626 taught graduates.

2   In addition to the University's global reputation for academic excellence, its mission is 'to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence'. Its core attributes include the fundamental nature of its relationship with the colleges, the stimulus to teaching and learning brought about by the colleges' interdisciplinary nature and the enhanced experience college membership brings to students and staff alike.

3   The University's undergraduate teaching is organised around 27 triposes (two-part programmes of study, usually taken over three years). Its taught graduate provision comprises over 100 courses at master's level and 25 graduate level diplomas and certificates. The University undertakes teaching; manages all aspects of summative assessment; makes academic awards; provides learning and personal support for students (in addition to that provided by the colleges); and admits, supervises and trains graduate students. Undergraduate selection and admission are the responsibility of colleges, which, as well as complementing the teaching and learning support provided by the University, provide the majority of academic guidance and personal support. The contributions of the colleges, though central to the student experience at Cambridge, fall outside the scope of the present audit.

4   Academically, the University is divided into six schools, each with a governing council, which in turn are subdivided into faculties and sometimes, particularly in the sciences, departments. Within the University, these bodies are collectively referred to as institutions, though for reasons of clarity where possible this report eschews this term. The schools are: Arts and Humanities; Biological Sciences including Veterinary Medicine; Clinical Medicine; Humanities and Social Sciences; Physical Sciences; Technology. Faculties are responsible for organising teaching and research.

5   The University's few collaborative arrangements include small Master of Studies (MSt), and Bachelor of Theology (BTh) programmes, the latter being offered jointly with the Cambridge Theological Foundation. The majority of such programmes, however, are locally certificated courses at the Institute of Continuing Education; these are discussed in some detail in this report (see paragraphs 148, 149).

The information base for the audit

6   The University provided a briefing paper and supporting documentation referenced to sources of evidence to illustrate its approach to managing the security of the academic standards of awards and the quality of its educational provision. The team had access to a range of internal and published documents, many of them on the University intranet. The University also provided audit trails of two recent programme level reviews, including all submitted documentation, the review reports, and the minutes of all relevant meetings. The audit team also had access to the report of the previous institutional audit (2003) and two sample reports from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. The Cambridge University Students' Union provided a detailed written submission reflecting student opinion expressed through focus groups, electronic consultation, and Junior Common Room and Middle Common Room open meetings. The team was particularly grateful for this submission.

Developments since the previous audit

7   The University's previous institutional audit in 2003 resulted in a judgement of broad confidence in the University's current and likely future capacity to manage the quality of its academic programmes and the standards of its awards. At that time the audit team identified the following areas of good practice:

● the recent General Board review of MPhil provision

● the Report of the 'Project on Indicators of Academic Performance'

● the detailed information about the University made available publicly through the medium of the Reporter and elsewhere

● the development of CamCORS, an online system for monitoring student progress

● the effective work of the Senior Tutors' Committee and its strategic role in assuring quality and standards

● the development of training for supervisors through University Teaching Associates (researchers with experience in giving undergraduate supervisions, who have been trained to train others for their role as supervisors).

8   The University was advised to:

● monitor the impact and success of the recent changes to quality assurance procedures, ensuring that they are embedded and understood by academic staff, and giving particular attention to the schedule for internal periodic review

● secure academic ownership of the new Quality Statements, developing their use as a means of annual monitoring, and considering the use that could be made of the information they provide about activities at local level to facilitate the sharing of good practice

- consider further whether the degree of variability permitted in the specific roles of external examiners across institutions is acceptable

- build on the review of MPhil provision by (a) considering the development of a common structure both for describing and for managing the standards of taught graduate awards; (b) exploring fully the learning resource implications of the planned further expansion in graduate student numbers (both part and full-time); and (c) establishing full student membership of the Board of Graduate Studies

- review, as a matter of high priority, the practices of the General Board so as to enable its Education Committee to receive the information it needs to assure itself that the quality and standards of all those programmes provided by institutions supervised by the General Board (including the Institute of Continuing Education, which previously was not under the direct supervision of the General Board), and offered in conjunction with bodies outside the University, fully meet the requirements of the University for the award of its qualifications.

9   It was considered desirable for the University to:

- develop a strategy and policies to ensure that it is able to comply with national requirements and legislation in respect of equality and diversity.

10   In addition, in 2006 the University's research degree provision was reviewed by QAA as part of the national special review of such provision. The University's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree programmes was considered appropriate and satisfactory.

11   The present audit team reviewed the University's progress in responding to the recommendations of the 2003 institutional audit. In the majority of cases the University is considered to have responded satisfactorily (indeed, its activities in relation to equality and diversity, the subject of a 'desirable' recommendation in 2003, are identified in this report as a significant strength (see paragraph 107)). For example, it addressed the issue of the then permitted variability in the roles of external examiners by asking Education Committee to undertake a review, which led to both clarification and the publication of detailed guidance.

12   The University has made considerable progress in responding to the advice relating to the MPhil, though it has some way to go before it can be said to have created the common structure which the previous audit team recommended. It has, however, obtained reassurance from the colleges that the planned expansion of numbers can be accommodated; it has implemented full student membership of the Board of Graduate Studies; and it has developed a template questionnaire for new MPhil proposals, requiring them to be accompanied by a programme specification and financial planning model.

13   Nevertheless, MPhils continue to operate on a continuum ranging from wholly taught to wholly research; programmes last between nine and 11 months; and the number of papers and the length of dissertation required vary. The importance of establishing a framework for comparability of student load is self-evident, and the audit team believes it would be very helpful for the University to complete the implementation of the recommendation, made in 2007 in the report of the internal review of graduate education, that MPhils wholly by thesis should be absorbed into MSc/MLitt degrees (see paragraph 44).

14   The audit team noted that the recommendation relating to the General Board's oversight of programmes of the Institute of Continuing Education (which had hitherto not been under its direct supervision) has yet to be fully addressed; the present report accordingly contains a strong recommendation to similar effect (see paragraph 149). Issues relating to the representation of such students were also drawn to the team's attention by the Students' Union (see paragraph 94).

15   Since the 2003 audit, the University has taken a number of significant strategic and policy initiatives. A new Vice-Chancellor has established a senior academic management team of five Pro-Vice-Chancellors with responsibility for Planning and Resources; Human Resources; Education; Research; and International Strategy. In addition, changes to the annual strategic planning cycle mean that councils of schools now play an increasingly central role in shaping University strategy; the senior management team has instituted a number of wide-ranging reviews; and in March 2007 the University approved a statement of strategic directions prepared by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), relating to the student body, undergraduate and graduate education and lifelong learning.

The University's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities

16   The University's characteristic as a community of scholars operating with participatory and consensual governance arrangements shapes much of its approach to quality assurance. The University and the colleges are separate legal entities, collaborating to provide teaching and student support in the manner described above, with the colleges particularly ensuring that, in a research-intensive university, proper emphasis is given to undergraduate education. Naturally, therefore, the University's relationship with the colleges is key to managing and enhancing students' learning opportunities.

17   The University's governance arrangements are based in part on a separation of powers between the University and the colleges. The colleges are chartered and independent institutions falling outside the scope of institutional audit; and, while dependent on the University for the allocation of public funds and strategic direction, they operate with a degree of independence unusual within the United Kingdom higher education sector. They are nevertheless central to the Cambridge experience, and the distinctive character of each college is a source of pride and celebration within the University. In addition, the University's prevailing philosophy of negotiated consensus means that decision-making on occasion proceeds at a very measured pace; in certain areas (notably those requiring college agreement or Regent House scrutiny) the University can have difficulty, either constitutionally or in practice, in responding quickly to external recommendations.

18   The University's constitution is based on a principle of academic democracy. The governing body is Regent House, comprising over 3200 members of University and College staff, and described by the University as a final measure of reflection on policies and proposals already considered at many other levels; normally only proposals for major change are scrutinised by Regent House.

19   The Council is the University's principal executive and policy-making body; the General Board, which is accountable to Council, has overall responsibility for educational policies and provision, including quality assurance and academic standards. It discharges its responsibilities for undergraduate provision through its Education Committee, and for graduate education (taught and research) through the Board of Graduate Studies, which reports to it indirectly, through Education Committee.

20   Regulations governing courses and examinations are published in the University's Statutes and Ordinances. The weekly University Reporter is the official publication through which members of the University are consulted about, and advised of, changes to teaching provision (see also paragraph 173). The University's teaching quality assurance mechanisms and expectations are found in the Guide to Quality Assurance and Enhancement (the Guide). While it is clear from this document that minimum expectations exist, with which faculties and departments are obliged to comply, the University prefers to proceed in a spirit of delegation to, and consultation with, those directly responsible for course delivery and assessment. The audit team noted that quality contacts, normally within faculties, act as local custodians of the Guide, both explaining it to colleagues and overseeing its implementation.

21   The University's Learning and Teaching Strategy has two main aims: to maintain and enhance the excellence of student learning opportunities at undergraduate and graduate level; and to provide a stimulating environment, in which teaching is recognised and rewarded, for all those who teach and support student learning. The Students' Union has taken the initiative in preparing a parallel Learning and Teaching Strategy, developed partly in response to the University's document and partly to ensure an 'institutional memory' which could otherwise be lost due to annual changes in sabbatical officers. This was made available to the audit team.

22   The Education Section of the Academic Division plays a key role in teaching quality assurance through its support for the General Board and its Education Committee as well as for faculties; the Section Head also meets regularly with the Union's Academic Affairs Officer.

23   In general, committees responsible for the oversight of academic standards are responsible also for the oversight of teaching quality assurance. Nevertheless, the University delegates significant responsibility for the management of teaching to faculties. Schools are expected to endorse any major changes to faculty or departmental teaching programmes, with due regard to the resource implications, prior to approval by General Board. Faculty boards are responsible for ensuring that teaching, learning, assessment and the associated learning support arrangements are of an appropriate standard and quality - a responsibility normally discharged by a teaching committee or equivalent body, which is expected to report annually to its faculty board on matters within its remit. In addition, each faculty has a degree committee, responsible for recommending the admission of graduate students, making arrangements for supervision of their work and recommending the award of degrees, diplomas and certificates. Faculty boards do not have a formal reporting line, though the Senior Tutors' Education Committee, an intercollegiate body with strong integrative functions, maintains close liaison with them.

24   The Senior Tutors' Committee, chaired by (or on behalf of) the Vice-Chancellor, consists of all college senior tutors, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), the Secretary of the Bursars' Committee, the Chairman of the Graduate Tutors' Committee (who is a senior tutor) and the Secretary of the Board of Examinations, ex officiis. The Committee meets twice a term and once in the long vacation, and its wide remit involves coordinating the educational policy of the colleges and the University; initiating discussion on matters of common concern to both; discussing all matters of educational policy affecting colleges and all matters affecting student welfare; gathering and disseminating good practice in colleges; and responding to requests for views and decisions on matters referred to it. The Committee maintains formal and informal contact with relevant University committees, in particular the General Board's Education Committee, and faculties.

25   Given the general context outlined above, with one significant exception (see paragraph 14), the University was found to have made advances towards greater procedural consistency since the 2003 audit. In particular, the Guide was found to contain clear and accessible information on requirements and expectations and the Senior Tutors' Committee and its Education Committee to play a crucial role in ensuring the appropriate oversight and consistency of student learning opportunities. Overall, therefore, the audit found the University's framework for managing academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities generally effective.

Section 2: Institutional management of academic standards

Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

26   In its briefing paper the University stated that it assures the academic standards of its awards primarily through the work of the General Board's Education Committee. This Committee is responsible for policies and procedures in respect of programme approval, modification, monitoring and review; monitoring external examiners' reports; engaging with external points of reference; assessment policies and guidelines (including mitigating circumstances and appeals); and management information.

27   School and faculty-level quality contacts, who may be senior administrators or members of academic staff, are charged with ensuring that information is targeted, disseminated, and assimilated into local quality assurance processes, and accordingly play a key role in ensuring the effective delivery of University policy, for which purpose they liaise closely with the Education Section. The audit team learned, however, that their contribution to quality enhancement is variable.

External examiners

28   The General Board appoints all external examiners for undergraduate and one-year graduate (MPhil) programmes; the degree committee concerned appoints individual external examiners for doctoral candidates; the faculty board appoints external examiners for locally certificated courses. This report returns later to provisions for locally certificated courses (see paragraph 148).

29   On appointment, external examiners receive both central and local information, and their attention is drawn to the relevant section of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*), published by QAA. The audit found that, in general, external examiners consider the information with which they are provided appropriate to their roles and responsibilities. For undergraduate programmes appointments are for one year at a time; renewal, for up to a further two years, is contingent on factors which include submission of the previous year's report; instances also exist of the authors of reports deemed insufficiently informative being invited to develop them. Guidance on the appointment of external examiners, which stipulates that they must have appropriate experience and/or knowledge and the ability to command respect in the subject, is readily available, as is the list of such examiners.

30   The system involves two categories of external examiner: principal external examiners, with responsibilities both for examination papers and for commenting on overall student performance and award standards, and external examiners, who may be appointed for a single examination only and who do not have moderating responsibility. In addition, where necessary the University appoints external assessors, who do not have a classing or moderating role, as second-markers.

31   The University specifies clear and appropriate expectations of external examiners, which faculty boards may supplement in the light of local circumstances (for example, in the case of student teachers external examiners were invited to attend observations). Such supplements are reported in faculty annual quality statements. Based on its reading of a sample of quality statements and external examiners' reports, the audit team confirms that supplementation is appropriate, and that variable practice has reduced since the 2003 audit.

32   The audit team noted that, despite variation in detail, length and coverage, most external examiners' reports cover the majority of the additional topics listed in the guidance notes, sometimes to the extent of using them as report headings. Given that the University considers the review of external examiners' reports a key mechanism for ensuring the standards of its awards, and given also that many external examiners are already using standard headings, the team believes the University would find it helpful to develop a template based on current guidance. Such a template would assist external examiners in writing their reports without precluding further comment as they see fit; it would ensure that the University receives consistent evidence as to the standards of all its awards; and it would facilitate both the review of individual reports and the identification of issues and good practice for inclusion in the annual overview report. Accordingly, it is considered desirable for the University to introduce a template for external examiners' reports.

33   External examiners' reports are sent initially to the Vice-Chancellor; Education Section then distributes them to the appropriate faculties or departments for consideration by their senior committee, increasingly frequently as unreserved business, though the audit team did learn that a

number of faculties continue to resist making such reports known to students. A prompt initial response is requested and a more considered one subsequently, but no later than the December following a June sitting. All documentation is forwarded to the General Board's Education Committee, which assigns one member to scrutinise individual reports and responses, highlighting issues for inclusion in the annual summary report prepared for the Committee. Such issues include reports not received, responses not made, general issues raised, specific issues with wider applicability, and instances of good practice.

34   Whilst procedures for external examiners of locally certificated higher education provision are expected to follow similar lines, the audit team notes that their reports are not forwarded to the Education Committee and are only reviewed formally in the course of periodic learning and teaching review. Following the recent review of Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning, however, the University intends that these awards will become formal University awards, and the team assumes that, once this happens, external examiners' reports for these courses will be integrated into the normal annual review process.

35   In its briefing paper the University cited a number of changes to policies and procedures as a result of this central scrutiny, including plagiarism, mitigating circumstances and clarification of external examiners' roles. From its reading of the documentation, the audit team confirms that serious consideration is given to external examiners' reports at both faculty and University level, and that instances exist of external examiners' reports having led, or at least encouraged, the University to modify assessment requirements and marking schemes.

36   The audit team reviewed a range of external examiners' reports and responses over a three-year period, tracing their consideration through to the summary reports presented to the General Board. Noting that summary reports are frank and detailed, that they highlight suggestions for enhancement and that they identify good practice, the team concludes that the University's arrangements for external examining have been strengthened since the previous audit. Accordingly, the audit confirms the University's view that external examiners are central to the maintenance of academic standards and that, albeit with a qualification concerning locally certificated provision, its external examining procedures are robust.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

37   The University stated in its briefing paper that it identifies engagement with external points of reference, including the Academic Infrastructure and the requirements and expectations of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, as one of the mechanisms by which it assures the academic standards of its awards.

38   So far as the Academic Infrastructure is concerned, it is the responsibility of Education Section to ensure that updated sections of the *Code of practice* and other external reference points are brought to the attention of the General Board's Education Committee; that proposals for new courses and major modifications are required to include a programme specification referring to the academic level of the award within *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and the appropriate benchmark statement, and that this is appropriately monitored; that learning and teaching reviews ensure that awards are at the appropriate FHEQ level and show a coherent progression route; and that academic staff are encouraged to engage in consultations about benchmark statements, new or revised, in their subject areas.

39   In respect of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, the Education Section supports faculties during the accreditation process; the Education Committee receives all reports and responses, raising any issues of standards or quality arising with the school or faculty concerned. The audit team considers the attention the University gives to such reports and responses detailed and appropriate.

40   The University requires programme specifications in approval, monitoring and review. All such specifications are publicly available, and archived to meet the requirements of the European diploma supplement. The advice on format and content published in the Guide is supplemented by further advice provided by the Education Section. As the University takes the view that its courses are academically rather than employer-driven and that preparation for employment is provided by way of skills acquisition already detailed in programme specifications, employers' views are, other than in respect of professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements, mainly addressed by the Careers Service.

41   The audit team reviewed programme specifications across a number of faculties. While noting that some variability in content continues to exist (in respect of which it encourages the University in its continuing exploration of ways of achieving greater consistency), it concludes that the necessary information is generally available to students through this means.

42   A recent review of the Tripos System, instigated by the Vice-Chancellor, highlighted issues relevant to the FHEQ, including clarity over progression routes for students transferring between triposes; the situation of students graduating without a Part II Tripos; the need for clear distinctions between the learning outcomes of Part I and Part II examinations; the introduction of formal end-of-year examinations; and the consequent abolition of two-year Part I courses. The same review highlighted a number of issues in the context of increasing collaboration between faculties and departments, ranging from timetabling to variability between concepts of classing and modes of assessment. The review was followed by a consultation process culminating in the General Board's Education Committee recommending, inter alia, that the award of a BA degree should require a Part II examination; a combination of two or three Part I examinations should without exception result in the award of an Ordinary Degree; clear distinctions should be drawn between the learning outcomes of courses leading to Part I and Part II examinations; and a more consistent nomenclature of Tripos examinations should be adopted. The General Board broadly accepted these recommendations in 2007.

43   Notwithstanding the General Board's decisions, debate is continuing on a number of issues raised by the review; in particular, the very small number of students (less than 1 per cent of the whole) who graduate without a Part II examination. Accordingly, the University is advised to implement without undue delay the recommendation of the General Board's Education Committee that the award of BA with Honours should necessarily involve the successful completion of Part II of the Tripos.

44   Comment has already been made about the University's progress towards achieving a common structure for the MPhil (see paragraph 13). In addition, following a wider review of graduate education, work is in progress to clarify the relationship between master's courses and the PhD. The University is currently piloting a Code of Practice for Masters Degrees with Taught Elements to complement the existing Code of Practice for Research Degrees with a view to full implementation in the next academic year. The audit team, which was told that the new Code has already led to increased consistency, considers this a very positive development and welcomes the University's planned move to full implementation at an early date.

45   The audit team concludes that the University is, for the most part, engaging fully with all aspects of the Academic Infrastructure.

Assessment policies and regulations

46   The key criterion for using a particular form of assessment is specified in the University's assessment policy as its effectiveness in assessing the intended learning outcomes of the course. Other expectations are that procedures and policies be communicated clearly to students; that forms of assessment and the procedures for implementing them be subject to regular review; and that forms of assessment be in no way discriminatory.

47   Examination regulations are published in Statutes and Ordinances; changes are published in the Reporter within a set timeframe. Students confirmed to the audit team that this is an effective mechanism. All changes, other than in very minor cases, are subject to the formal approval of the General Board's Education Committee, which, it is confirmed, takes this duty very seriously. Undergraduates receive advice through college tutors and directors of studies; for graduates, such advice is available from their course director.

48   At undergraduate level, formative assessment is delivered mainly through the college supervision system; the main source of summative assessment is unseen written examinations at the end of each Part of the Tripos. The University normally expects 65-70 per cent of marks to be available through written examinations, although exceptions are permitted, as are other forms of assessment, subject to faculty boards ensuring reasonable comparability.

49   All faculties are required to publish marking and classing guidelines; these form part of the annual quality statement. The audit team, noting that the student written submission identified variability in the level of detail available, investigated this area and concurs with the student view. On the other hand, the team notes as an instance of good, though variable, practice, that many faculties include marking and classing criteria on their websites or in programme specifications as well as in handbooks.

50   The student written submission expressed reservations about information given to students, and staff and students alike acknowledged that the guidance given to students in connection with their preparation for assessments is variable. Nevertheless, the audit team learned that the colleges are addressing this issue by holding periodic meetings of directors of studies, and that some faculties hold meetings of all teaching staff to discuss draft examination requirements and ensure that such staff are aware what is required of students.

51   The reviews of the Tripos System and graduate education both identified variations; both reviews are currently under discussion, and the audit team encourages the University to strive for greater consistency in structure and progression within and between triposes and with respect to the pass and distinction marks for the MPhil.

52   The University's Board of Examinations is responsible for overseeing the conduct of all aspects of examinations. The composition of boards of examiners and the procedures for the formal approval and return of marks are specified in Statutes and Ordinances. Detailed guidance on examinations data and scripts is provided in the Guide, and faculty boards are responsible for developing and managing local policies consistent with it. Faculty boards hold examination data, including minutes of meetings, in accordance with their data retention policies, any changes to which are identified in the annual quality statement.

53   Progression requirements for each tripos are clearly and publicly set out in programme specifications, which also include reference to relevant requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and how recommendations relating to them have been addressed within the University. The audit team saw an example of a specific change having been made as a result of a professional body report which identified a mismatch between assessment requirements and stated learning outcomes.

54   Regulations governing undergraduate examination appeals have been revised as a result of a lengthy (two-year) review involving consultation with the colleges and the Students' Union. The review, which took into account the relevant revised section of the *Code of practice*, has among its goals making the procedures of the University's Applications Committee more transparent. As the changes only took effect shortly before the audit, however, it was not possible to evaluate their impact.

55   Requests for examination allowances may be made to the Applications Committee on behalf of undergraduates who, through illness or other such reason, have not taken an examination, or whose performance has been adversely affected. Requests are made by college

tutors, and must be accompanied by medical or equivalent third party evidence and an academic report. The University, which makes detailed guidance available to both tutors and students, considers its procedure in this area well established, though not all students who met the audit team were wholly familiar with it, a perception also conveyed in the student written submission.

56   Although the Board of Graduate Studies is currently responsible for dealing with a range of requests from graduate students, the recent review of graduate education recommended a pilot project to examine the feasibility of devolving examination approvals to schools or faculties, and establishing an Academic Integrity Office to deal with complaints and appeals at both undergraduate and graduate levels, so unifying two separate systems. The audit team supports the latter idea, which seems likely also to facilitate the production of University-wide statistical information; and, in the context of the proposed devolution of applications, the team assumes the University will take such steps as it considers most likely to ensure consistent decision-making.

57   The audit team learned that there is currently no University-wide policy on penalties for late submission of assessed work, and that faculties apply their own policies. In the interests of consistency and equity of treatment of all students, not least those who borrow papers from other triposes, the team believes it would be desirable for consideration to be given to the introduction of a University-wide approach to penalties for late-submitted assessed work.

58   Overall, information about assessment regulations is readily available to students from a variety of sources. The General Board's Education Committee oversees the marking and classing guidelines through its review of the annual quality statements (see paragraph 85) and there is University-level consideration of special circumstances and appeals. While the audit team agrees with the University that some variability exists in both assessment regulations and the level of detail provided to students, it notes that discussions are currently taking place with a view to ensuring greater consistency across faculties. It encourages the University to pursue these discussions with vigour.

59   Overall, the audit team considers the University's arrangements for the assessment of students rigorous and effective in maintaining its academic standards.

Management information - statistics

60   The University acknowledged in its briefing paper that the new Cambridge Student Information System, introduced in 2004, has presented implementation difficulties. The reporting systems are not yet fully developed, resource constraints have meant that efforts to date have concentrated on statutory returns and financial planning, and, overall, the University has yet to attain its goal of having a single system capable of handling student administration from initial enquiries to graduation. A number of the difficulties encountered (including the locally certificated provision of the Institute of Continuing Education) featured in learning and teaching reviews. The audit team was, however, encouraged to learn that functionality is improving and the number of users increasing.

61   While the General Board's Education Committee does not routinely analyse student data as a whole, it does review some data on an annual basis, including those relating to admissions and examinations as well as such data as are deployed in ad hoc reviews commissioned by the Board. The Committee is currently reviewing the types and format of data available to all levels of the University with a view to making them more useful, and it is encouraged to progress this review in a timely manner. Such data, in that they contribute to colleges' position in the Baxter Tables (the internal intercollege academic league table) are also vigorously scrutinised at college level, though the detail and utility of that process fall outside the scope of the present audit. Graduate admissions data are published and reviewed by the Board of Graduate Studies: completion rates are monitored by the Board and low completion rates discussed with the faculties concerned.

62   While the student written submission pointed out that the 2007 Examination Statistics showed a disparity of achievement between male and female students in some disciplines, an issue also identified by Education Committee, the audit team noted that, overall, completion rates are very high and that the completion rate for mature students in particular is well above the national average.

63   At faculty level, the annual quality statement (see paragraph 85) does not necessarily involve consideration of a full range of statistical data, although internal reviews of learning and teaching include such datasets as are available and deemed relevant. According to the Guide, the use of data should be included in annual monitoring, although the audit team learned that this does not always happen.

64   At present, the University's use of management information is limited by the constraints described in this section. Whilst appreciating that the structure of the University presents challenges for the collection and analysis of management data, the audit team believes it would be desirable for the University to use student-related data regularly to inform the development and implementation of strategy and policy relating to the management of academic standards.

Section 3: Institutional management of learning opportunities

65   The University emphasises that it takes full responsibility for the quality and standards of its own educational provision, giving due consideration to the expectations of external bodies, including QAA, but ensuring, first and foremost, that its quality procedures are appropriate to its particular teaching, learning and assessment activities. While the audit team was informed that previous audits have successfully encouraged the University to introduce effective new procedures, there can be little doubt that for such procedures to be embraced by the University they must be perceived by the academic community as a whole to be positive and relevant - a negotiated and not invariably expeditious process. It should not, however, be inferred from this that the University is impervious to, or detached from, the broader higher education environment; on the contrary, it will be clear from this report that the University engages actively with that environment.

Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

66   The Guide to Quality Assurance and Enhancement makes frequent reference to external reference points including the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, new sections of the *Code* being incorporated as they are produced. It is the responsibility of faculty quality contacts to be familiar with the Guide, support its practical implementation and provide the Education Section with information relevant to quality assurance and institutional review. The audit team was assured that the Education Section provides quality contacts with appropriate support and training, and members of staff who met the team spoke positively of the system.

67   Faculties and departments are required to produce quality statements describing their quality assurance procedures and indicating how they are responding to recommendations in the Guide; these are updated annually, in consultation with the Education Section, and are normally informed by the *Code of practice*. Quality statements form part of the submission documentation for periodic learning and teaching reviews, and, as such, are prepared on a template mirroring the review format.

68   The Board of Graduate Studies is charged with monitoring external developments in graduate education and coordinating responses; faculty and departmental degree committees are required to develop appropriate means of keeping abreast of relevant external developments.

69   The University stated in its briefing paper that some 18 faculties or departments are subject to some form of accreditation by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies. The General Board's Education Committee receives all reports from such bodies together with the responses,

treating any issues relating to academic standards or the quality of teaching arising from them with the utmost seriousness. The audit team saw a number of examples of such documentation and confirms that all issues raised were indeed dealt with as stated.

70   The finding that, in relation to academic standards, the University is, for the most part, engaging fully with all aspects of the Academic Infrastructure, applies also in respect of its management of the quality of student learning opportunities.

Approval, monitoring and review of programmes

71   The local quality assurance framework required of faculties and departments includes the annual quality statement, an examinations data retention policy and a programme specification for each course. The annual quality statement describes the local structures for managing teaching and quality assurance and the documentation (such as programme specifications and student feedback and consultation arrangements) designed to achieve transparency. Although the audit team found procedural variations, it considers that, between them, the use of a standardised template and the interaction with the Education Section ensure that, in the large majority of cases, quality statements address all issues asked of them, so helping the University refine procedures and ensure that all faculties and departments meet minimum threshold requirements.

72   Procedures for approving new programmes and modifications to existing ones are set out clearly in the Guide. New undergraduate programmes, regulatory changes and discontinuance must be approved by the General Board's Education Committee, having first been approved by the faculty board concerned. The University operates on the basis of a principle of proportionate scrutiny: minor changes may be approved by officers and simply reported; more significant changes receive a more detailed analysis and assessment; major new developments require a report to, and discussion in, Regent House, a process which can be quite lengthy.

73   When considering proposals, the Education Committee seeks detailed information as to the academic level of the award as defined in the FHEQ, normally with a new (or revised) programme specification. This information includes aims and learning outcomes; how the course will be taught and assessed; evidence that due consideration has been given to likely take-up; the method and timescale for evaluation and review (including the use of external examiners' reports and student feedback); assurance that the council of the school concerned has addressed any resource issues; and, for undergraduate courses, confirmation that the Senior Tutors' Committee has stated that colleges can make appropriate supervisory arrangements. The audit team notes that external involvement in approvals is not mandatory, but frequently occurs.

74   For master's level provision, the approval process involves completion of a template for submission to the Board of Graduate Studies. The involvement of officers of the Education Section or the Board itself, together with cross-representation on committees, is designed to ensure that the Education Committee is informed of any wider issues relating to particular proposals. So far as the audit team is able to judge, this procedure is fit for purpose.

75   The University explained in its briefing paper that each school, faculty and department has the equivalent of a teaching committee (the nomenclature varies), to oversee undergraduate teaching and learning. Teaching committees are charged with reviewing, normally annually, activities and facilities, in particular teaching, learning and assessment (including curricular content and design) and learning resources. In doing so, they are encouraged to take account of staff and student feedback, as well as the views of librarians, computer officers, technicians and others involved in teaching and learning support. This culminates in the production of a new, or the revision of an existing, annual quality statement.

76   The audit team studied the minutes of several teaching committees. While they all showed evidence of consideration of student feedback, examination performance, resources and staff availability, the team was unable to find evidence of formal annual monitoring. Further investigation

revealed considerable variation in the interpretation of the requirements for routine annual monitoring. Most teaching committees undertake reviews at the level of individual courses, aided by data collated by teaching teams on a termly basis; elsewhere course reviews are collated annually; elsewhere again, monitoring is regarded as a continuing process rather than a specific event.

77   Responsibility for the annual oversight of quality statements lies with the Education Section, which reports a summary of modifications to the General Board's Education Committee. The audit team noted that, while quality statements provide details of quality assurance procedures, they are largely descriptive and do not normally analyse outcomes or effectiveness. No formal system exists for what the briefing paper describes as an annual review of learning, teaching and assessment: it takes place but not at a specified time, and is not reported formally. Since faculty boards do not report to higher committees (although their minutes are reviewed by senior officers), the Education Committee does not formally maintain a central oversight of the outcomes of routine monitoring; hence it appears to have no formal means of ensuring the implementation of requirements deriving from the process other than through the six-yearly oversight of routine monitoring provided by learning and teaching reviews.

78   Nevertheless, oversight of student learning opportunities is also provided by the Senior Tutors' Committee: in acting as a bridge between the colleges and the University this Committee receives, transmits and acts upon reports from directors of studies associated with all faculty boards, tripos reviews, University and college generic reviews and Education Committee directives.

79   The audit team was interested to learn of the existence of internal visiting committees, intended to provide an external perspective on the activity of an individual or group of faculties, and to note that the General Board is gathering information on these committees with a view to considering whether they should form part of a more formal system of advisory bodies.

80   The management of learning opportunities is evaluated through periodic (six-yearly) learning and teaching reviews of faculties. The Education Committee sets up the timetable in negotiation with councils of the schools, syndicates[1] or other comparable bodies; the Education Section establishes and supports review committees, which, depending on the size and complexity of the subject of review, comprise between three and five members, at least one of whom must be external to the University (as a matter of policy, other than in exceptional cases such members are academic peers, not employer representatives). The Committee reviews teaching and assessment methods, learning resources and student support, drawing on student feedback and external examiners' reports for additional evidence. In forming its recommendations and identifying areas of good practice in all aspects of provision, the committee draws on the expectations set out in the Guide.

81   Learning and teaching reviews are distinct from full reviews, which involve an in-depth study of a school, faculty or department's entire activities. Such a review may be an outcome of a learning and teaching review or be requested by a school or the General Board itself. Full reviews take place only in exceptional circumstances. The audit team explored the process of one full review, noting that it had been a thorough and professional exercise, which had had significant and not wholly comfortable ramifications for the faculty concerned.

82   The reports of all reviews are forwarded to the Education Section once their subject has had an informal opportunity to correct errors of fact and consequential misinterpretation; a formal response is then requested. When this has been received, the documentation is sent to the Education Committee (or, as sometimes happens in the case of a controversial learning and teaching review, the General Board). At this point, the actions to be taken are determined and a timetable established.

83   The audit team examined the documentation of a number of learning and teaching reviews as well as the full review already mentioned. All documents were thorough and well-

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[1] A syndicate is the equivalent of a faculty board in a discipline or area where support and collaboration from other faculties or bodies is involved.

prepared, the recommendations detailed and appropriate and the subsequent procedures, including monitoring of actions taken, comprehensive. Accordingly, the approach taken in the periodic learning and teaching review process is considered a feature of good practice.

84   For the colleges, the Senior Tutors' Committee provides an excellent level of oversight between colleges and University bodies and committees. The audit found, however, an absence of any formal reporting mechanism between this Committee and the General Board's Education Committee, the University relying mainly on commonality of membership, the former's receipt of the latter's minutes and senior officer oversight of both sets of minutes.

85   Overall, the University's arrangements for programme approval are appropriate, if somewhat protracted; periodic review arrangements are robust and effective: they involve a thorough review of all aspects of the quality of students' learning opportunities and incorporate institutional oversight. Nevertheless, the frequency of such reviews appears insufficient to provide opportunities for timely intervention to address challenges as they arise. Whereas the monitoring of quality procedures (through quality statements) and external examiners' reports is effective at local and University levels, the lack of University reflection on the outcomes of these procedures is a limitation. Accordingly, the audit team advises the University to develop further the annual quality statements by incorporating within them an analysis of the outcomes of the procedures described therein. This would enable the University to satisfy itself that annual monitoring is conducted effectively at local level, and its outcomes identified and addressed.

Management information - feedback from students

86   The University considers student feedback essential in assuring and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning; it believes such feedback should be collected at the level at which provision is delivered and reported to a body with the capacity to respond. This reflects the prevailing culture of the maximum appropriate level of delegation for quality assurance and enhancement; it also means that the University expects faculties and departments to have student members throughout their deliberative structures and to support junior members of faculty boards in their representational duties. With this in mind, the Head of Education Section meets the Academic Affairs Officer on a regular basis, and supports the Union's training of student representatives on faculty boards. Although the student written submission expressed reservations about the effectiveness of student representation, in the course of the audit students assured the audit team of the value of such support, confirming also that student representatives employ effective methods for obtaining feedback, notably email, and circulate minutes of meetings widely.

87   Students' views are obtained through a variety of means and at a variety of levels, including questionnaires, membership of Council, General Board and local staff-student committees; the audit team also heard that some faculties operate effective focus groups to discuss course-specific issues; and students have many informal opportunities, in faculties, departments, and particularly colleges, to express their views in the reasonable expectation of being heard.

88   The audit team studied a selection of questionnaires, which illustrated a wide variety of approaches to obtaining feedback, and several templates for obtaining such feedback online. Students advised the team that they welcome this variety as a means of combating questionnaire fatigue; that termly questionnaires exist for most modules; that the process of analysis and responding is participatory and transparent; and that course directors often show students previous feedback to help them choose their paper.

Role of students in quality assurance

89   Annual quality statements provide the University with an oversight of feedback procedures, though, as indicated above (see paragraph 85) not a ready means of effectiveness monitoring. Reflecting this view, the student written submission confirmed the absence of any central collation of the large quantities of data deriving from feedback procedures at college or faculty level.

90   The University does not conduct general satisfaction surveys other than for a specific purpose or with a particular target audience in mind. The student written submission indicated that students would value more extensive University-wide survey data, expressing the view that the existing data are insufficiently robust to reflect collective views on issues of wide applicability.

91   Within colleges, undergraduate students' feedback on supervision is gathered by directors of studies, and communicated to supervisors if concerns are expressed; where concerns exist but are not addressed it is for the college concerned to decide how to proceed. Students advised the audit team that their feedback on college issues is usually provided informally, an approach they consider effective.

92   So far as research students are concerned, the University recognises that the character of doctoral research is such that particular care needs to be taken in gathering feedback, and that the brevity of the timespan for MPhils, combined with the wide variety of MPhil students' backgrounds, requires a timely approach. Graduate students who met the team confirmed that feedback mechanisms consist of questionnaires and use of the representative system, but that the most effective feedback is through personal contact with members of academic staff.

93   The University explained in its briefing paper that the Students' Union has campaigned against the National Student Survey, and that participation has been below the threshold required for publication in most subjects. In the knowledge that other independent measures of student satisfaction have been extremely encouraging, the University and the Union have been involved in negotiations to explore whether a way can be found to facilitate future participation in the National Student Survey or an equivalent activity.

94   Different procedures exist for obtaining feedback from students attending locally certificated courses at the Institute of Continuing Education. These, though simpler in structure, appear fit for purpose and to be supported by committed and approachable staff. The audit team noted the lack of formal representation for students of the Institute, however, and assumes this will be addressed when, as it intends, the University has mainstreamed its locally certificated provision.

95   The audit team considers the University's arrangements for gathering and dealing with student feedback thorough and effective, and accepts that informal college-based mechanisms for obtaining feedback, overseen by the Senior Tutors' Committee, are highly valued. It was less convinced, however, of the effectiveness of the central oversight of student feedback arrangements, or of the University's current capacity to identify and address generic issues arising across faculties and departments. Once again therefore, the University is advised to develop further the annual quality statements by incorporating within them an analysis of the outcomes of the procedures described therein.

Links between research or scholarly activity and students' learning opportunities

96   The University described in its briefing paper the fundamental nature of the relationship between teaching and research, explaining that it is committed to providing courses only in subjects underpinned by a critical mass of research-active academic staff; that strength in research influences the range of subjects taught; that students come into contact with academics at the forefront of their field, who introduce the latest developments in their area into their teaching; and that the third-year curriculum especially is taught at the 'cutting edge'.

97   In her address to Regent House at the start of the 2006-07 academic year, the Vice-Chancellor argued strongly for maintaining undergraduate education at the heart of a research-intensive university, stressing that the University aspires to educate its undergraduates up to and beyond the frontiers of knowledge. This commitment, though not explicitly formalised or evaluated, is consistent with the University's two strategic aims for learning and teaching: to maintain and enhance the excellence of student learning opportunities at both undergraduate and graduate levels, and to provide a stimulating environment in which teaching is recognised and rewarded, for all those who teach and support student learning.

98   The Cambridge tradition appears to be based more on a general expectation of research and scholarship underpinning the curricula than on an explicit requirement for this to be done. Documentation studied by the audit team (notably the Learning and Teaching Strategy) on occasion gave the impression that, because students are taught by leading researchers, and because reflection on course content takes place continually, integration ipso facto occurs. Similarly, the terms of reference of learning and teaching reviews contain no explicit reference to the linkage between teaching and research. On the other hand, undergraduate and graduate programme specifications make frequent reference to educational aims of taught programmes in which students work closely alongside teachers whose instruction is informed by their research; and newly appointed academic staff are required to participate in a programme likely to include discussion of the relationship between teaching and research. There can be no doubt that the integration of teaching and research is culturally embedded throughout the University (and structurally so in the college system) even if the widespread commitment to such integration is not necessarily matched by an equivalent procedure for formalising, monitoring or evaluating it.

99   Overall, the audit team has no doubt that the breadth and depth of research and scholarship underpinning the University's teaching make a genuine and positive contribution to the quality of student learning opportunities; indeed these attributes are fundamental to the Cambridge experience. Nevertheless, the team is also of the view that the undoubted excitement of exploratory teaching, which it acknowledges as an indissoluble aspect of this experience, would in no way be diminished were the University to consider developing further a range of culturally consonant means of defining, supporting, evaluating and enhancing the nature of the relationship between teaching and research that it wishes to achieve.

Other modes of study

100   The University requires all full-time students to spend a residential period in Cambridge and part-time graduates to attend supervisions and other specified training events on a regular basis; it does not, therefore, deliver programmes wholly by distance learning. Its pedagogy does, however, permit a range of technological innovations, and the audit team found ample evidence of engagement in activities designed to enhance the profile of teaching and ensure that the University, while remaining true to its tradition of face-to-face college-based individual and small group teaching, also remains abreast of sector-wide pedagogic developments.

101   The University provides a range of supports for teaching, learning and research through the Centre for Applied Research in Educational Technologies. Of these, the most significant is the bespoke virtual learning environment*, the gateway to a range of online facilities for staff and students, designed to support teaching, learning and research. The system is, however, currently used by slightly less than half of triposes, and students stated that the provision of online learning resources and lecture notes varies among faculties, some taking innovative and pioneering approaches but others making little or no use of the technology. In similar vein, the student written submission suggested that, in the interests of equity among students, faculties should at least communicate all necessary information electronically.

102   The audit team concludes that the University's arrangements for addressing the pedagogical aspects of e-learning are effective. Noting, however, that less than half of triposes currently use CamTools, it concurs with the student view that greater use of online facilities would be beneficial for students, and takes the view that the University could helpfully specify the minimum sufficient learning support material to be provided by electronic means.

Resources for learning

103   In its briefing document the University explained that it has overall responsibility for providing, overseeing and reviewing the learning infrastructure, including the University Library (a legal deposit library), departmental libraries, laboratories and lecture theatres; these are complemented by college facilities. The Pedagogic Support Providers' Co-ordinating Group is

* (CamTools)

charged with exploring ways to enhance coordination of all central support providers; and at the time of the audit the University had recently commissioned a review of teaching and learning resources, focusing particularly on the University Library, the Computing Service, the Language Centre and the Centre for Applied Research in Educational Technologies.

104   Following a lengthy period of consultation, responsibility for information technology strategy and regulation was consolidated in the present academic year, and the newly created Information Strategy and Services Syndicate became operational shortly before the audit visit. The Library Syndicate oversees the management of the University Library and four dependent libraries, the Agency for the Legal Deposit Libraries and the University Archives. The annual reports of these bodies enable the University to monitor and review the operation of internal providers of learning resources; the University also expects learning resources to feature in the annual reviews conducted by faculty teaching committees.

105   The student written submission confirms the wealth of learning resources available at Cambridge, stating also, however, that students would value an expansion of electronic journal subscriptions. Students who met the audit team were overwhelmingly positive about information technology support, and, while acknowledging undoubted variations in college library resources, stressed that unavailable books are obtained and that they can see stock availability at other libraries in the online catalogue. They were content with the informal feedback procedures, commenting positively on the responsiveness of staff when issues or concerns are raised.

106   Overall, the audit team considers the University's arrangements for the provision, allocation and management of the outstanding learning resources at its disposal are effective and appreciated by students.

Admissions policy

107   While responsibility for admitting undergraduates lies with colleges, the Cambridge Admissions Office coordinates a process in which colleges' autonomy engages with both government and University policies. In particular, the University's admissions policy is closely linked to its Widening Participation Strategy, which includes a Special Access Scheme and is supported by projects coordinated by the Outreach Steering Group, as well as by valuable contributions, including school visits, from the Students' Union. In studying admissions policies and procedures, the audit team noted that a joint review in 2004 had led to improved cooperation between the University and the colleges, facilitated in particular by the creation of the Undergraduate Admissions Committee as the main forum for discussion of all strategic issues in this area. The University recognises, based on past experience, that some of these developments may take time to achieve their potential. The team considers this range of initiatives, especially those promoting the widening participation agenda, and their improved coordination, a feature of good practice.

108   The admissions policy involves all home applicants with a realistic chance of success being interviewed (appropriate alternative arrangements are made where this is infeasible, as well as for overseas applicants). Offers are said to be made to students of the highest intellectual potential, irrespective of social, financial or other considerations. In furtherance of this objective a Code of Practice drawing on the relevant section of the *Code of practice*, published by QAA, and an Undergraduate Admissions Handbook have been introduced, as has training for college fellows involved in admissions.

109   The Board of Graduate Studies has formal responsibility for admission to MPhil and research degree courses, though primary decisions are taken at faculty level on the basis of academic merit and, as the case may be, the availability of space on a course and of appropriate supervisors. The Board expects all candidates with a prospect of success to be interviewed, virtually if necessary; it also coordinates the process of ensuring that all admitted applicants are offered a college place.

110   The audit team noted the recommendation of the recent review of graduate education for both an annual planning meeting at which colleges would declare their graduate admissions targets for the forthcoming year and for the creation of a Postgraduate Admissions Committee to monitor admissions targets and act as an interface between the University and colleges. The team, while appreciating that this proposal is still under discussion, can certainly understand, given the significant and consistent growth in graduate numbers at the University and the strain resulting from current procedures, the potential benefits likely to accrue from such an initiative.

Student support

111   The University Learning and Teaching website provides details of students' entitlement to academic support. Each undergraduate has a college director of studies responsible, in negotiation with faculties, for identifying and allocating supervisors; graduate students are provided with a graduate tutor (or equivalent) to provide support; all such tutors new to the task at Cambridge receive appropriate preparation. At an individual level, the principal source of personal support for students is the college, and participation in the academic and extracurricular aspects of college life offers significant opportunities for personal development. When students encounter difficulties it is the college that provides pastoral, financial or medical help, ensuring also that all necessary interactions with the University take place. There can be little doubt that these supportive activities contribute significantly to the University's extremely low wastage rate.

112   The University is committed to equality of opportunity, and its approach supports and encourages underrepresented groups, promotes an inclusive culture and values diversity. For example, aided by charitable funding it offers support for students admitted from non-traditional backgrounds in the shape of a seemingly successful PREP course, the pilot year of which was being reviewed at the time of the audit. More generally, the University's social values are codified in an Equal Opportunities Policy supported by specific sub-policies with action plans. In addition, the Senior Tutors' Committee has developed a Dignity at Work and Study Policy for students, which mirrors the University's own Dignity at Work Policy, setting out procedures for dealing with inappropriate behaviour. The University also provides a women's personal development programme, and at the time of the audit was piloting a counterpart programme for men.

113   The Joint Committee on Disability considers all issues relevant to its terms of reference, including overseeing the development and application of relevant policies for both students and staff. The Disability Resource Centre provides practical advice and support to staff and students with disabilities, training on disability issues, an access guide to the University, preliminary diagnostic assessments for students with specific learning difficulties and specialist study skills tuition. The Counselling Service offers support to students individually and through a variety of workshops; and the University has a system for making special allowances during examinations for candidates with disabilities or temporary health problems.

114   The Senior Tutors' Committee, which is responsible for assuring the quality of teaching and learning in colleges and for overseeing college support systems, undertakes a periodic quality visit to each college, submitting a report for formal consideration. The audit team, having read a number of quality visit reports, notes that they appear to be comprehensive and reflective. The same Committee produces a range of publicly available guidance documents, explaining, for example, the roles and duties of tutors, directors of studies and supervisors.

115   Among the Senior Tutors' Committee's standing committees is the Welfare and Finance Committee, which considers all matters falling within its ambit, liaising as necessary with the Bursars' Committee and the Graduate Tutors' Committee. The Students' Union is represented on this Committee, as is the Graduate Union on the Graduate Tutors' Committee. These arrangements appear satisfactory.

116   The University provides guidance and help to students for personal development planning through a website and associated index of transferable skills. Take-up has been slow, however, and at the time of the audit the Senior Tutors' Committee was discussing how to encourage wider engagement. Student induction at undergraduate level is primarily a college responsibility, though faculties and departments also provide introductory sessions to prepare new students for the educational experience ahead. Students who met the audit team spoke generally positively of their induction experience.

117   The University has established a centrally coordinated but largely locally delivered transferable skills training programme for research students and postdoctoral researchers. While the transferable skills identified by the research councils lie at the core of the programme, they are supplemented by a wide range of other materials. Research students are encouraged to record their activities in a skills log and to maintain a personal development plan as aids to assessing training needs and clarifying their own personal objectives.

118   The audit team heard strong student endorsement of the support provided for the part-time students taking locally certificated courses at Madingley Hall. This confirms the findings of the very thorough learning and teaching review of the Institute of Continuing Education.

119   The colleges and the University provide quite exceptional levels of student support. Of particular note is the individual support provided by college tutors and directors of studies, and that deriving from the supervision system. Because the colleges form the main basis of student support it is appropriate for the Senior Tutors' Committee to be responsible for its central oversight. While aware that in 2003 its predecessors were concerned about the level of variability among colleges in this area, and acknowledging that such variation continues to exist, the present audit team accepts that a degree of variation is intrinsic to the system, which works extremely well in practice. It is satisfied that in all cases minimum threshold levels are both achieved and assured; indeed it was advised by students that such variation as exists is between 'very good' and 'excellent'. Both the role and the activities of the Senior Tutors' Committee are critical to the University's ability to assure itself of the quality of student support, and the exemplary manner in which the Senior Tutors' Committee discharges its responsibilities is a feature of good practice.

Staff support and development

120   Since the 2003 institutional audit, the University has re-launched its professional development programme. Attending core elements of this programme (notably a two and a half day seminar on major aspects of academic practice) is now mandatory for probationer university teaching officers and encouraged for new college teaching officers. Compliance is almost complete, and in addition some 60 per cent of eligible staff attend the optional seminars and workshops, many members also taking advantage of an individual confidential meeting with a member of the small team of advisers with personal experience of teaching at Cambridge. The audit team notes the recent introduction of a four-week period of 'starting-up time' for probationary lecturers, but also that full implementation depends on schools and faculties identifying funds to meet the additional salary costs.

121   New members of staff receive a starter pack providing details of probationary arrangements and mentoring. Probationary staff are allocated a mentor by the head of school or faculty; detailed guidelines on mentoring are provided on the Personnel Division website. The audit team confirms that some steps have been taken to address critical comments in the last audit report concerning the overload of probationary lecturers, and that teaching loads and committee duties are discussed and negotiated with the Head of Department or Chairman of the Faculty Board.

122   The University, recognising the potential for conflict between research and teaching in the allocation of staff time, is striving to increase the recognition given to the latter: contributions to

teaching and administration play an integral part in promotion, around ten Pilkington prizes are awarded annually to individuals nominated by their school for teaching excellence, and the nomination process itself is regarded as a vehicle for identifying good practice within faculties.

123   The University's Staff Review and Development Scheme, introduced in 2004, sets out the framework for appraisal, which is adapted by faculties to suit their own circumstances; details of the scheme and training are available. The 2003 institutional audit found implementation of staff appraisal patchy; the present audit found this is still so, although members of staff told the audit team that uptake has increased considerably over the last four years. This perception is confirmed in Personnel Committee minutes, which record that the rate of return for appraisal information forms now stands at 66 per cent.

124   Each school and faculty has a staff development coordinator charged with reviewing, planning and promoting staff development, and with acting as a conduit between the school or faculty concerned and central Staff Development. The University has developed an extensive programme of staff development courses in response to identified needs, a variety of specialist opportunities in a range of academic and non-academic areas, and a support system for staff assuming such major college roles as director of studies and tutor. The audit team learned that peer review operates in some faculties and departments, but with implementation varying widely.

125   Learning and teaching reviews include reference to the use of appraisal, mentoring and arrangements for the induction of new staff and their development; Staff Development maintains a record of attendance at courses; Personnel Division invites feedback on the process and procedures through staff development coordinators.

126   Most colleges make use of graduate students for undergraduate supervisions, and provide some training, though the audit team was told by graduate students and senior staff that such training is not mandatory in all colleges. For graduate students with teaching responsibilities the Graduate Development Programme offers a range of workshops, delivered either centrally or in faculties and departments.

127   From its scrutiny of documents and discussions with members of staff, the audit team formed the opinion that between them the University and the colleges provide a high level of staff support and appropriate development opportunities for academic staff, and that issues which have yet to be resolved are progressing in a generally encouraging manner. Nevertheless, the team also noted that the central and college-based training and support provided for research students with teaching duties in the form of the Graduate Development Programme are, though strongly recommended, not mandatory. In view of the significance of graduate students, particularly, but not exclusively, in the college supervisory system, the team advises the University to ensure that all graduate students with supervisory or teaching responsibilities are appropriately trained.

Section 4: The University's approach to quality enhancement

128   Although the University does not define quality enhancement in its briefing paper, its commitment to excellence in teaching and research is unquestionable, and ample evidence was found in the course of this audit to demonstrate that, through the widespread engagement of its academic staff in learning and scholarship, its achievements are considerable. The University is working in a number of areas to improve the quality of student learning opportunities, to promote innovation, and to continue to seek to mitigate the acknowledged disparity of provision and consequent variability in the student experience.

129   The structure of the University, comprising as it does 31 self-governing, autonomous colleges, means that almost all policy development follows a devolved model and is achieved more by negotiation and agreement than by direction. Accordingly, progress can be very slow: for example, the steering group to implement the recommendations of the Review of Graduate Education met for the first time six months after agreement to its establishment and over two years

after the Review began. Nevertheless, the University is developing its capacity to take a strategic overview, and since the last institutional audit the Vice-Chancellor and her senior colleagues, working through the General Board and its committees, have launched a series of initiatives with the objective of improving the management and consistent quality of learning provision.

130   The Guide describes the four main pillars for managing and enhancing student learning opportunities as General Board reviews, consideration of responses to the reports of external examiners, reviews of new course proposals and major modifications, and consideration of annual quality statements. In its briefing paper the University identified the General Board's Education Committee, which has a fairly small membership and meets monthly in term time, as a key driver in supporting quality enhancement (though its terms of reference do not mention enhancement or any synonym thereof). The Committee is charged with keeping the quality of teaching under review and advising on educational strategy, a duty it most obviously discharges through its monitoring of learning and teaching reviews, annual quality statements, the Learning and Teaching Support Initiative (see paragraph 137) and ad hoc reviews. Of such reviews the most significant since 2003 have been those of graduate education and of the Tripos System, which together constitute the entire degree portfolio. The Committee also exercises operational responsibility for the oversight and evaluation of progress in achieving the objectives for improvement identified in the action plan accompanying the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy. Here the University has identified two key indicators against which it will be evaluated: whether the student experience remains excellent and whether teaching is recognised and rewarded.

Good practice

131   Other enhancement tools also exist. In particular, the audit team endorses the view of its predecessors in considering that one of the most noteworthy of these is the Senior Tutors' Committee, which, with its standing committees, plays a crucial role in coordinating educational policy across colleges, faculties and central bodies, and in defining, agreeing and applying minimum expectations for undergraduate and graduate student learning and support. In addition, the close working relationship between the two Education Committees is pivotal in coordinating the enhancement of the quality of student learning opportunities.

132   The audit team recognises the importance of other collaborative initiatives in enhancing consistency and addressing disparity, in particular the Undergraduate Admissions Committee, (shortly to be joined by a parallel body dealing with graduate admissions) and a number of joint working groups on specific topics, for example college teaching officers and the University-College interface. The team notes that extensive cross-membership of University and intercollegiate committees and the fact that most members can represent both colleges and faculties reinforce the coordinated nature of the approach.

133   A further significant development since the last institutional audit has been the appointment of five Pro-Vice-Chancellors to help drive strategy and policy development. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), who chairs the General Board's Education Committee, has played an important role in initiatives to improve the quality of learning and teaching, including preparing a significant statement on strategic directions for the Council and General Board, which was approved at a joint meeting of the University Council and the General Board in March 2007.

134   The Education Section, which supports the Education Committee and provides liaison with the Senior Tutors' Committee, systematically promotes quality enhancement through its wide-ranging and well-written Guide and website. It also supports the faculty-level quality contacts who are critical to the delivery of quality enhancement initiatives, but whose potential the audit team considers, has yet to be fully realised.

135   The Guide states that dissemination of good practice is essential for the enhancement of the University's learning and teaching provision; the Education Section is responsible for ensuring this takes place and the University has developed a Good Practice Strategy to facilitate it. The audit team, which found evidence of a rich diversity of good practice and networks of

support processes, heard that strong support exists for developing informal means of utilising good practice, in particular by building on close professional relationships between colleagues and between academic staff and students.

136   The audit team also noted a number of other significant initiatives and funded projects supporting good practice in learning and teaching. Firstly, the Plagiarism Awareness Working Group organised a Plagiarism Awareness Day in May 2007; secondly, the University supports the Learning Landscape Project, designed to recognise and describe the special nature of learning and teaching in a research-intensive, collegiate University (this Project maps teaching methods and the ways that students learn across subjects, providing data not currently available to establish a firm base for structured enhancement of teaching methods); thirdly, it supports the Teaching for Learning Network, developed from the pedagogical development activities of the University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The Network has the twin aims of identifying practices and approaches which contribute to the distinctiveness of teaching and learning in both Cambridge and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and identifying the areas of commonality both between them and within higher education as a whole. The Network also supports faculties, departments and other groups undertaking pedagogic and enhancement-oriented research and development projects.

137   Fourthly, the University supports the Learning and Teaching Support Initiative, a useful tool for continual improvement administered by Education Section. The Learning and Teaching Support website describes a range of activities to promote good practice by identifying ideas and examples to share with colleagues, including seminars and discussions held five times a year on a wide variety of learning and teaching topics, such as student feedback, plagiarism and peer review of teaching; indeed some Learning and Teaching Support support activities have already been incorporated into the revised Learning and Teaching Strategy. The website also publishes a valuable digest of all the University's central quality processes. The University stated in its briefing paper that the Learning and Teaching Support Initiative is reviewed annually, although in fact, albeit for good reason, the last such review took place some 20 months prior to the audit visit. Given the Initiative's contribution to quality enhancement, this time lag is bound to be a source of regret.

Monitoring and review

138   The developing practice of officers producing annual analytical overview reports for the General Board, its Education Committee and the Board of Graduate Studies, is a significant driver of systematic enhancement. The General Board itself regularly reviews the effectiveness of quality management: for example, in 2005 the periodic review procedure was revised to focus specifically on the enhancement of learning and teaching. The Board itself, or its Education Committee acting on its behalf, receives and considers every learning and teaching review report and the response. The audit team found this procedure full, frank, robust, and rigorous, and to have a clear objective of improving student learning opportunities by addressing recommendations and identifying good practice.

139   Nevertheless, the University has yet to exploit to the full the potential value of routine monitoring as an aid to enhancement. The Education Committee's review of annual quality statements is almost wholly descriptive and generates few outcomes beyond the necessary, but not sufficient identification and dissemination of examples of good practice. The audit team found the annual quality update exercise report submitted by the Education Section to the Education Committee more a summary of omissions or minor amendments than an opportunity for evaluation. While the fact that, in addition to updating the annual quality statements, faculties are expected to review their own teaching, learning and assessment for both taught and research programmes at least annually which has the potential to inform other enhancement-driven processes, such reviews do not follow a common format, their conclusions are not monitored or evaluated through the central committee system, and their outcomes are not systematically captured at University level.

140   The audit team encourages the University to maintain and develop its use of annual overview reports as a means of ensuring consistency, identifying generic and common issues across faculties, and disseminating good practice. This could be further developed by building on current practice, for instance by the Education Section compiling annual analyses of key themes arising from learning and teaching review reports or from its scrutiny of faculty board minutes for consideration by the Education Committee. Accordingly, the team advises the University to ensure that it is able to benefit from faculties' existing monitoring procedures by incorporating within the annual quality statements an analysis of the outcomes of the procedures described therein.

External examiners

141   While the University does not provide external examiners with a standard reporting template, one of the four areas on which such examiners are asked to comment is practice which could be usefully identified for dissemination. The audit found, however, that compliance with this request is variable, and the emphasis of individual reports remains more on the assurance of standards than on the enhancement of learning opportunities. The University's arrangements for considering, responding to and addressing the contents of external examiners' reports have been described already (see paragraphs 31-33), and the audit team accepts the statement in the University's briefing paper that significant improvements have resulted from the provision of an annual overview report, which is a significant mechanism for enhancing the consistency with which the University manages standards and quality. For example, beneficial amendments to University policies on plagiarism, mitigating circumstances and the role of the Chair of Examiners can be largely attributed to the consideration given to such reports.

Management information

142   The University's developing range of online data, communication, reporting and monitoring systems is improving the quality and consistency of learning and teaching and its management. The range includes CamDATA, which provides course information and student statistics; CamTools, the University's virtual learning environment; the Centre for Applied Research in Educational Technologies, which offers an online student feedback tool; CamCORS and CamGRAD, the online supervision management and reporting systems; and CamSIS, the student information system, which, though intended to supplement separate college, central, and school, faculty and departmental databases, has been somewhat delayed. As indicated previously, however (paragraph 90), the University has as yet no centrally-managed systematic analysis, or University-wide student satisfaction survey, and is encouraged to reflect further on how best to exploit the potential of the data it is now gathering as a means of contributing to the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

Staff development and reward

143   The Learning and Teaching Strategy, Human Resources Strategy, Staff Development Policy and Academic Staff Development Strategic Plan 2005-10 all contribute to enhancing teaching quality by setting objectives, providing opportunities for staff to develop teaching expertise and providing support at different stages of an academic career. The revised Learning and Teaching Strategy, which emphasises the need for improved cooperation and communication, points out that although considerable staff development, appraisal, mentoring and peer review opportunities now exist, inconsistencies and anomalies occasionally occur. To address this, the Pedagogic Support Providers' Coordinating Group has proposed an enhancement structure; but a number of significant funding issues exist, which await further consideration by the General Board.

144   The audit team, which recognises that the University is aware of, and is making progress in addressing, key issues relating to strategies for the enhancement of teaching quality, encourages it in its current efforts to agree the resources necessary to support the pedagogic initiatives identified in the Learning and Teaching Strategy. Overall, the team concludes that the University demonstrates a significant and sustained commitment to the improvement of learning

and teaching at all levels through an impressive network of formal and informal processes, based on an ethos of collegiality, consensus and dialogue.

Section 5: Collaborative arrangements

145   The University stated in its briefing paper that it has only a small number of collaborative programmes, mostly in the form of locally certificated courses at the Institute of Continuing Education, though a small number of University awards at master of studies-level also exist. The Institute is a constituent body of the University and works in partnership with a number of faculties, but its awards, which follow a different approval, monitoring and review procedure, are not designated University awards, albeit that the phrase 'University of Cambridge' appears on its certificates. The 2003 institutional audit found that in this situation the General Board did not receive the information it needed to assure itself as to the quality and standards of all those programmes, and made a 'high priority' advisable recommendation that the matter should be addressed.

146   The General Board approves all new collaborations, and requires the course and assessment methods of the partner institution to equate to those of a Cambridge award and the memorandum of agreement to align with the *Code of practice*. So far as monitoring and review are concerned, current University policy for collaborative and locally certificated awards is to utilise a four-part typology reflecting the 'level of touch' which the General Board's Education Committee considers appropriate for a particular category of provision. Tier 1 embodies full quality assurance measures for awards made by the University; Tier 2 includes lighter touch procedures for awards certificated locally by faculties and departments, including the Institute of Continuing Education; Tier 3 embodies the lightest touch of all for awards made locally, such as professional education or language learning, but not at higher education level; Tier 4 includes provision by parts of the University, which do not fall under the auspices of the General Board. In such cases the Education Committee does not require minutes of examiners' meetings and external examiners' reports: Tiers 2 and 3 require only a record of deliberation of documentation; in the case of Tier 4 programmes the concern is essentially with branding and marketing.

147   In January 2007, the University undertook an internal audit of two programmes regarded as collaborative provision. This identified a range of issues, which at the time of the audit were still under consideration. In addition, the Learning and Teaching Review of the Institute (dated July 2007) identified a number of severe problems associated with, inter alia, the operation of the external examiner system and the definition of collaborative provision as operated by the Institute. This report made a series of recommendations, including, in particular, that all higher education awards made by the Institute should in future become awards of the University, and that the Institute's definition of collaborative provision should precisely reflect that of the University, which was based on that of QAA. The Institute formally accepted all recommendations, and at the time of the audit a full review of the Institute was being planned.

148   In its meeting with the Director of the Institute, the audit team learned that the mainstreaming of the Institute's awards was likely to be further delayed by at least a year. The team, however, is firmly of the view that a situation whereby a component institute of the University is issuing awards in its own name and on the basis of a different quality regime is unsustainable, and that every attempt should be made to avoid further delay in implementing the Learning and Teaching Review's response to the recommendation of the 2003 audit. In addition, while the team was reassured to note that the Learning and Teaching Review had identified existing problems within the Institute, it was concerned that the General Board's Education Committee might not have become aware of breaches of the External Examiner Code had the review not taken place. The team strongly advises the University to confirm an early date for the General Board to assume full responsibility for the award-bearing programmes offered by the Institute of Continuing Education in order to put the quality assurance of such programmes on a par with that of the University's other awards.

149   The audit team scrutinised the arrangements for other collaborative awards, finding that, in the case of two local partnerships, appropriate scrutiny had been exercised; that the Learning and Teaching Review had commended a number of handbooks as examples of good practice; and that the memoranda of agreement between the University and its partners are satisfactory. The team enquired about courses delivered by the Institute to several universities in Eastern Europe, and, while it was advised these courses are to be discontinued once present obligations have been met, it noted some confusion on the part of University representatives as to when precisely this would be done. The University will no doubt wish to ensure that its plans in this area are both unambiguous and clearly understood by those concerned.

150   The audit team appreciates that collaborative arrangements represent a very small proportion of the University's academic activities, and that historically they may not have received the level of attention accorded to mainstream teaching and research. While the majority of programmes considered by the team appear satisfactory in all respects, and while it is clear that students value the support and expertise of staff of the Institute of Continuing Education, the team believes that, in the context of this audit's focus, the University faces a significant challenge to ensure that the potential threat to the academic standards of its locally certificated awards is not realised. The team hopes the University will respond to this comment in a timely fashion, ensuring that it meets the relevant recommendation of the Learning and Teaching Review in the near future.

Section 6: The University's arrangements for postgraduate research students

151   In this report, for the most part, references to graduate research students are integrated into other sections of the text and only repeated here where specific reasons for doing so exist.

152   The supervision of graduate research students has for many years represented a significant part of the University's educational portfolio, and at present the University offers the awards PhD, EngD (its sole professional doctorate), MSc, MLitt, MPhil and Certificate of Postgraduate Studies. Research students account for approximately one quarter of the student population; they are normally assigned middle common room status within colleges and they play an important role in undergraduate supervision and other pedagogic activities. Part-time study is available on some research degree programmes, although the University acknowledges that numbers are modest, provision located in a small number of faculties and departments, and students unevenly distributed across colleges.

153   In 2006, the University participated in QAA's *review of postgraduate research programmes*, which concluded that its ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of provision was appropriate and satisfactory. The small number of recommendations arising from the review had been satisfactorily addressed by the time of the present audit.

154   Subject to the formal approval of the General Board, the Board of Graduate Studies is the determining authority on graduate awards, overseeing arrangements for graduate education generally and reporting on them to the General Board through its Education Committee. The majority of faculties have degree committees, the responsibilities of which include recommending the admission of graduate students; making arrangements for the supervision of their work; overseeing examinations; recommending the award of degrees, diplomas and certificates; and annually reviewing courses from perspectives which include recruitment, attainment, failure, employment, and appeal and complaint data. Degree committees vary in size, scope and interpretation of responsibilities: some oversee the work of 30 students, others have responsibility for 1000 or more; some take a proactive role in respect of all aspects of graduate education, others simply discharge their formal responsibilities; some delegate operational activities to subordinate bodies, others perform such tasks themselves. At intercollegiate level the Graduate

Tutors' Committee (a standing committee of the Senior Tutors' Committee) has a close working relationship with the Board, coordinates the oversight of college-level provision and takes responsibility for the Good Practice Protocol, which stipulates the common core of provision for graduate students.

155   In academic year 2006-07, after extensive consultation, the Board published a comprehensive Code of Practice: Graduate Research Degrees and Certificates of Postgraduate Studies for Research Degrees, which addresses the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, and the skills training requirements of the research councils, which the University now applies to all research students, part-time as well as full-time. This document, which is annually revised, is widely and appropriately circulated; it is considered a powerful tool in ensuring consistency and good practice; it serves as a graduate research handbook and guide to good practice; and it specifies the expectations of all parties concerned with research degree programmes.

156   In October 2005, the General Board initiated the wide-ranging Review of Graduate Education, which, it was hoped, would make proposals for a structure and procedures designed to meet the University's needs at a time when existing procedures were acknowledged to be no longer fit for purpose. In the event, the recommendations, accompanied by an implementation action plan, were generally welcomed (though with some reservations expressed about the consultation process), presenting what the University described in its briefing paper as a challenging agenda.

157   Most recommendations are relevant to research degree programmes. The report recommended improvements to the coordination of the monitoring and management of graduate numbers, including the introduction of an annual planning meeting of senior or graduate tutors to establish college admissions targets; that MPhil by thesis only should be absorbed into MSc/MLitt degrees (see paragraph 13); that variability across faculties and departments in core areas such as accommodation and pastoral and administrative support should be reduced; that similar variations in levels of provision across colleges should be addressed by the appropriate intercollegiate bodies; that the admissions process should be accelerated; and that the practice in some faculties of appointing research students to teaching assistantships should be centrally managed, with robust quality assurance mechanisms, a standard role profile and agreed job title.

158   The Review also recommended changes to the structure, remit and authority of the Board itself, which it considered insufficiently representative of the schools; working to too large and disparate an agenda; lacking the authority to direct decisions in quality and standards; and preoccupied with operational issues at the expense of strategy. Other recommendations related to degree committees: while it was a predictable concomitant of the Review's wish for the Board to become an increasingly strategic body that operational responsibilities should be formally devolved to such committees, the Review also recommended that such committees should ultimately be school-based, thereby reducing their number from 25 to six.

159   The report was considered and approved by the General Board in July 2007, following which an implementation steering committee was established and several pilot projects compatible with the recommendations launched. Nevertheless, given the widespread recognition within the University of the significance of the recommendations and the fact that a number of objectives in the action plan were scheduled for the present academic year, the audit team was a little surprised to note that the committee did not meet until six months after its establishment, and hopes it will now be able to proceed with greater expedition. The team also noted a degree of consonance between the tone and content of the review report and that of the student written submission, which expressed the view that graduate students often feel less affiliated to their college than to their faculty, and that the graduate tutor system, though designed to provide pastoral support for research students, is variably effective.

160   New research students are admitted on a probationary basis. At the end of the first year (second year for part-time students), a formal assessment of progress is made, normally by examination or such other means as a research proposal, and conducted by at least two assessors, neither of them the supervisor. The assessors report on the outcome, making a recommendation and adding any feedback they wish to provide for student or supervisor. In the wake of this, the supervisor files a registration report with a recommendation on progression; the degree committee then considers all documentation, recommending an outcome to the Board of Graduate Studies.

161   Supervisory teams comprise a minimum of two persons, a principal supervisor and an advisor. The faculty's director of graduate education (or equivalent), who supports individual supervisory teams as well as overseeing all research degree provision in the faculty, assigns the principal (and, where one exists second) supervisor subject to degree committee ratification. The faculty or department is responsible for appointing the advisor, who may, but need not be, from a different faculty. The University's Code of Practice describes the roles and responsibilities of research students and all members of supervisory teams (which have been clarified following a recommendation of the QAA special review), providing guidance on monitoring and reviewing student performance and the action to be taken when unsatisfactory progress is identified or special circumstances arise.

162   The University's Code of Practice addresses the research councils' requirement that studentship holders receive transferable skills training - a requirement the University has now extended to all students, with operational responsibility devolved to faculties and departments. Students are said to spend around 10 days a year developing transferable skills, including participation in a flexible training course operating throughout the academic year. Research students are encouraged (and part-time students required) to use a progress log for personal development planning, self-managing their activities by recording attendance and outcomes of skills training; supervisors are expected to advise on skills development to help students assess their own training needs. The audit team noted progress made in this area, but also heard that training provision is variable and that some lack of certainty exists as to which elements are mandatory and which not.

163   The assessment of research degrees involves an internal examiner (who, though not permitted to be the supervisor, may in certain circumstances be the advisor or assessor of an earlier progress report) and an independent external examiner appointed by the degree committee. Examinations involve scrutiny of the thesis by the two examiners (for which each examiner submits an independent report and recommendation) and a viva voce examination (after which the examiners submit a joint report). The degree committee considers the reports and forwards a recommendation, together with the appropriate documentation, to the Board of Graduate Studies. External examiners' reports are forwarded to both candidate and supervisor and considered by the Board.

164   The University's Code of Practice stipulates that each faculty and department must have a committee consisting of both staff and students (including representatives of both master's and PhD students) at which issues concerning teaching and learning can be raised, and specifies formal conditions that such committees must meet. The graduate students who met the audit team considered that the systems in place generally operate effectively.

165   The University has recently undertaken a review of its complaints and appeals procedures in the light of the revised *Code of practice*. Clear and seemingly comprehensive information is widely available.

166   The audit team confirms the conclusion of the 2006 special review that, overall, the University's ability to secure and enhance the quality and standards of its research degree provision is appropriate and satisfactory. It considers that the University has put in place effective procedures for the management of its research programmes, which meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

Section 7: Published information

167   The main vehicle for potential applicants to gain information about the University and its programmes is the Undergraduate or Postgraduate Prospectus, both of which are available as hard copy and electronically. The University has well-tried procedures for collecting information from colleges, schools, faculties and departments, and employs a Prospectus Editor to check accuracy and sign it off. It also makes use of a biennial publicity and information questionnaire, which is sent to all undergraduate applicants and is considered a considerable strength.

168   The student written submission expressed general satisfaction with published materials, albeit that they were sometimes considered lacking in detail; students who met the audit team were similarly complimentary, and their concern that applicants might be confused by colleges' slightly different entry requirements for the same course appears to have its roots more in the autonomy of the colleges than in the lucidity of the explanation.

169   The prospectuses and websites are informative and well-produced; the reference on the University website to the Cambridge Special Access Scheme seems likely to be attractive to under-represented groups; college websites are similarly appropriate, and the audit team particularly noted the imaginative attempts of some colleges to demystify the interview process. Overall, information for applicants is accurate, comprehensive and inclusive.

170   In its briefing paper the University stated that, while it provides data for the Unistats website, it believes the site has shortcomings and encourages prospective students to review information presented on the CamDATA site. The audit team inspected both sites and noted that both satisfaction ratings and employment levels are very high, but supporting the University's view that the CamDATA site is more informative for undergraduate applicants in particular, including as it does such information as numbers of applications, levels of offers and admissions by subject, breakdown of degree results, details on career destinations and an archive of programme specifications. Data for graduate applicants, which include results from the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, admissions statistics, degrees awarded and career destinations, are similarly helpful.

171   Responsibility for the accuracy and completeness of information on school, faculty, departmental and other local websites rests at local level; University-level action is taken where problems drawn to the attention of the Education Section are substantiated.

172   The Reporter is the official University publication; it is published weekly in term, and covers topics ranging from notice of examination dates to changes to courses, and from public lectures to forthcoming presentations by the Vice-Chancellor; special issues dealing with particular topics are also published from time to time. Students advised the audit team that the University's Reporter is an invaluable source of information about matters of immediate and practical importance, a view shared by the members of academic staff whom the team met.

173   Taken as a whole, the quality of a range of published information was considered very high, a view exemplified by the Code of Practice for Graduate Research Degrees and Certificates of Postgraduate Studies; the Guide to Quality Assurance and Enhancement of Teaching, Learning and Assessment; the post-interview questionnaire for applicants; the material published for applicants on their websites by colleges and the University; and the Reporter's coverage of discussions about proposed changes in University policy and many other matters. The quality of published information is considered a feature of good practice.