

# INSTITUTIONAL AUDIT 2007/8

## Briefing Paper

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# 1. Introduction and background

## The institution and mission

1. Bath Spa University's mission is 'to be an outstanding and distinctive university institution that provides degree courses of the highest quality, informed by a culture of scholarship, expertise and teaching excellence'. BSU gained taught degree awarding powers in 1992, and is able to provide awards in its own name up to the level of taught master's. We have an arrangement with the University of the West of England (UWE) for the provision of programmes of supervised study leading to research degrees of the University.

2. Total student FTE for 2007/8 is 5510. Appendix A is an updated version of the spreadsheet produced in January 2003 for our QAA institutional audit, showing student numbers by JACS code and BSU unit of internal periodic review. The numbers are derived from our HESES return for 2006/7. Since 2003 we have increased in size by about 550 students. The great majority of our students are full time. A large but diminishing proportion (about 60%) comes from the South West region; about 35% are 'mature'; about 15% are postgraduate, most of them taking one-year PGCE courses. There is a research student body of about 70, of whom 56 are part-time. There is a majority of female over male students: more than 2:1. We lay stress on widening participation, but our ethnic mix is more uniform than we would wish.

3. BSU has about 270 academic and 270 support staff (FTE). Most academic staff are full-time and permanent, though there is a significant number of part time and hourly paid staff, who teach particularly on the 'creative' courses. Typically, the latter practice as artists, musicians and writers, and the part-time teaching they undertake for us is supplementary to their professional work.

4. Bath Spa University is a teaching led institution. We make this statement explicitly in the Strategic Plan<sup>1</sup> and it is amplified more fully below. Relative to all post-1992 HEIs, we did well in the 2001 RAE, and newspaper league tables typically put us in the top third of post-92 universities for research.<sup>2</sup> This is not to say research is minimised: by our own assessment we meet the numerical criteria for research degree awarding powers (RDAP), confirmed by our RDAP assessors.

5. BSU is a 'generalist' institution, and maintains a diverse subject base. However our greatest numbers reflect our historic origins in creative and performing arts, and in teacher training. Since the 1980s we have developed successful and distinctive humanities and social sciences programmes. Our science offerings are biology, food studies and geography. We have had considerable success in bids for HEFCE funds to encourage collaboration with industry, particularly at the interface of creative arts and technology, for instance in the music and media industries.

6. The University has seven schools, each with a focussed subject base

- Bath School of Art & Design (BSAD)

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<sup>1</sup> BSU [Strategic Plan 2006/07–2008/09](#).

<sup>2</sup> For example, [Sunday Times University Guide](#), 10 September 2006, pp. 4-5, which ranked BSU 10=/66 (with Plymouth) of the new universities. See also Section 6, paragraph 143 below.

- Education (EDU)
- English and Creative Studies (ECS)
- Historical and Cultural Studies (HCS)
- Music and Performing Arts (MPA)
- Science and the Environment (S&E)
- Social Sciences (SS)

7. There is also a Graduate School, which is primarily an administrative centre for the management of research degree programmes and associated activities, and a School for Development and Participation (SDP), which is the administrative centre for our partnership work, both with further education colleges (FECs) and business.

8. Of our undergraduate students, about three-quarters work within a modular scheme of fifteen years' standing: only art and design specialised degrees operate outside it. There is a Taught Postgraduate Framework,<sup>3</sup> analogous to the modular scheme, at master's level.

9. We have long-standing relationships with a defined set of FECs: the 'Wessex partnership'. Until 2003 students in the partnership studied for full-time BSU-designed honours degree programmes, where the first year was taught in the FEC. Since provision in the partnership has grown, largely by the addition of more foundation degrees (FD). Some are still 1+1; but after some years running this model, and on the basis of the establishment of the School of Development and Participation and the consequent increased opportunities for quality assurance and improvement made possible by the expanded facilities, the University considered that we were well placed to offer some more autonomy to FECs, and there are now a number of FDs with both years taught in the FECs. The University sees collaboration of this kind as very significant for the future.

### **Developments since the last audit (including post-follow up report)**

10. For responses to the recommendations in the 2003 audit report itself, the mid-cycle follow up, produced in January 2005, is a brief guide.<sup>4</sup> Since January 2005, the library at Newton Park has been further extended and improved, and major changes have been made to improve the resilience of the University computer network. The latter has facilitated a number of improvements to academic practice, for instance much more extensive use of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and on-line registration.

11. The staffing and systems capacity of Registry has increased, which has improved the capacity of the Registrar to provide management information to support quality and standards. In the year of the last audit a new post was instituted, 'Dean of Academic Development,' responsible for linking quality assurance with strategic planning and for 'enhancement'. Another new post is due to be filled in January 2008, when a new 'Head of Quality Management' will take day-to-day responsibility for the operation of quality assurance procedures.

12. Major new facilities have been added to the University's learning resources since 2003. A new theatre has been built on the Newton Park site. In addition, the

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<sup>3</sup> See [Taught Postgraduate Framework](#).

<sup>4</sup> [Mid-cycle follow up](#), January 2005.

University was successful in its bid for a 'Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning' (CETL) in creative arts subjects ('Artswork'), and awarded the maximum funding, totalling some £5m to date. Relative to size, this was perhaps the largest award to any university under this initiative. The CETL has enabled major purchase of equipment and related facilities in digital technologies for the arts.

13. The University has had quality assurance 'engagements' with both QAA and Ofsted. Two of our foundation degrees were reviewed in 2005: Fashion Design Skills and Design for Digital Technologies.<sup>5</sup> Both were successful. The report of the QAA 'Special Review' of research degree programmes in 2006 was positive, the only recommendation being to 'continue' to provide opportunities for students to present their work publicly.<sup>6</sup> The University has also had a series of engagements with Ofsted, failing an inspection of Secondary in 2004/5, and then passing in the re-inspection (or 'Recovery') in 2005/6.<sup>7</sup> The 2004/5 failure shook the University, which had been used to success when tested against national quality assurance regimes: the Ofsted table of BSU results at the end of 2003/4 showed every grade in the profile in the two highest categories; in the table of QAA 'Subject Review' scores also, no score was below 3 (one of only 10 HEIs in the country to be able to make this claim).<sup>8</sup> The Ofsted failure of 2004/5 was the first significant failure since CNAAs days. Changes of management and procedure followed, and the outstanding success of the Primary inspection in 2006/7, resulting in the highest possible score, and an extraordinarily positive report from a body that does not give praise lightly.<sup>9</sup> The internal papers analysing the failure and developing the recovery are an object lesson on the University's readiness to learn.<sup>10</sup>

14. The Higher Education Academy has now elected five members of the University's staff to national teaching fellowships, three times more than might be predicted from staff size.

15. There have been two major constitutional developments since the last audit. Bath Spa applied for University title in 2005 and was successful. An application for Research Degree Awarding Powers is ongoing. The outcome is not known at the time of writing, though the University has seen and commented on the draft report, which states that the criteria are met individually.

### Framework for managing quality and standards

16. The University is governed by an Instrument and Articles of Government, which it takes seriously and literally, and which define three sources of authority. The Board of Governors is responsible for financial solvency and 'the determination of the educational character and mission of the University.' The Vice Chancellor is

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<sup>5</sup> For QAA reports, see [Fashion Design Skills](#) and [Design for Digital Technologies](#)

<sup>6</sup> This was not published by QAA, but BSU has published the report on its website: See [Special Review Report July 2006](#).

<sup>7</sup> See Ofsted reports: [Secondary 2004/5](#), [Secondary 2005/6](#).

<sup>8</sup> See David Watson, 'A Whitehall Turf War', review of Roger Brown, *Quality Assurance in Higher Education: the UK experience since 1992*, in Higher Education Review, 37:2 (Spring 2005), p. 72.

<sup>9</sup> See Ofsted report, [Primary 2006/7](#).

<sup>10</sup> See also for example Ofsted report (Primary Mathematics) AQSC 8 December 2005 ([Paper Q557](#)).

responsible for 'making proposals to the Board of Governors about the educational character and mission of the University', for the management and organisation of the staff, and for 'the determination, after consultation with the Academic Board, of the University's academic activities'. The Academic Board is responsible for 'general issues relating to the research, scholarship, teaching and courses at the University, including criteria for the admission of students; the appointment and removal of internal and external examiners; policies and procedures for assessment and examination of the academic performance of students; the content of the curriculum; academic standards and the validation and review of courses; the procedures for the award of qualifications and honorary academic titles; and the procedures for the expulsion of students for academic reasons.' The Academic Board also considers the development of the academic activities of the University and the resources needed to support them, and advises the Vice Chancellor and the Board of Governors on these matters.<sup>11</sup>

17. Quality and standards in programmes are the primary business of Academic Board. At this University the role of Academic Board itself is primarily strategic, and it discharges most procedural matters through subcommittees,<sup>12</sup> to which it delegates authority. This is for reasons of efficiency, and to ensure that decisions that require specialist knowledge are taken as far as possible by people with this knowledge. For formal purposes committees are defined at the two levels of institution and school.

18. Membership of institutional committees is representative of the schools. The key committees are as follows. Membership and terms of reference are described on the website.<sup>13</sup>

- Academic Quality and Standards (AQSC)
- Learning and Teaching (L&T)
- Research, Consultancy and Scholarship (RCS)
- Modular Scheme Committee (MSC)
- Higher Degrees (Taught) (HDT)
- Higher Degrees (Research) (HDR)
- School Boards.

19. Special arrangements exist for dealing with collaborative work: AQSC has a standing Subcommittee for Collaborative Provision. There is also a set of subcommittees that relate to assessment boards, in particular for Mitigating Circumstances and Unfair Practice.

20. Institution-level committees determine procedures for quality and standards and maintain oversight of their currency and effectiveness. The second-tier bodies with which the institution-level committees formally interact are the school boards: their membership is defined; it is for individual school boards to determine any substructure, according to need.

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<sup>11</sup> See [Instrument and Articles of Government](#).

<sup>12</sup> See structure diagram for [Subcommittees of Academic Board](#), which also appears as an Appendix to this Briefing Paper.

<sup>13</sup> See Academic Board - Quality Assurance Committees: [Subcommittees of Academic Board](#).

21. The current committee structure has existed in basic outline since 1992, but has had periodic updating, the latest reconsideration agreed by Academic Board in 2002<sup>14</sup> according to the following principles, which still apply:

- Terms of reference and membership are all subject to the provisions of the Articles of Government, to the overall responsibility of the Board of Governors, and to the responsibilities of the Vice Chancellor.
- There should be the minimum number of subcommittees, and each subcommittee should have the minimum number of members, consistent with the effective fulfilment of the responsibilities of Academic Board.
- There should be student representation on all committees where it is relevant.
- Membership should be established in such a way as to make use of the specific expertise of academic staff.

22. It is typical of Academic Board and its subcommittees at Bath Spa to work on the basis of recommendations expressed in formal papers, and the University takes the view that the quality of committee decision-making is dependent on the quality of papers. A random selection should confirm the quality of papers, but as good examples we would draw attention to any of the papers mentioned in this Briefing Paper, or, for instance, the annual paper that covers the budget consultation.

23. Academic Board committees have unusually extensive external membership.<sup>15</sup>

24. University management is broadly hierarchical. The Vice-Chancellor has three designated deputies, with portfolios for academic work, estates, and planning. The two other members of the Executive or 'Vice Chancellor's Group' (VCG) are the Director of Finance and Resources, who has overall responsibility for many administrative functions including Registry and HR, and the Dean of Academic Development, who manages academic improvement projects. Heads of school are appointed (not rotational or elected), as are heads of the various services. This group is called the 'Senior Management Team'. (SMT) An outline of the management structure appears on the web.<sup>16</sup>

25. In this paper (and in the University) 'committee' is used to describe bodies with a formal constitution and membership whose authority derives from the Board of Governors or from Academic Board. There are other consultative bodies, some long-standing, whose function is to advise managers, usually on matters of a more day-to-day kind where decisions need to be taken that do not fit easily into the timescales required for committees. The prime example of such a group is VCG; another, at a different level, is the group of 'Academic IT Co-coordinators' used by the Head of Network Services for advice on such matters as when would be the best time to take student email out of commission in order to increase mail-box sizes. The principles that govern the operation of these groups are however the same: they are advisory, decisions that emerge from them carry the authority of the

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<sup>14</sup> See 'Academic Board Subcommittees', Academic Board, 23 January 2002, Paper D251.

<sup>15</sup> See below, paragraph 63.

<sup>16</sup> An [Outline of management structure](#) appears on the web and is included with this Briefing Paper as an appendix.

Vice-Chancellor, expressed through his managers; it is for the managers to determine how they will best capture advice.

26. Committees are served by officers, who make proposals, and manage and report on the procedures determined by the committees. The three senior officers are the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic), responsible for most matters to do with programmes, who manages the Academic Office, which services most Academic Board committees and processes. The second is the Dean of Academic Development, whose line of report is to the DVC (Academic), and who is responsible for learning and teaching and research activities in the University. The third is the Registrar, responsible for most matters relating to student admission and assessment. These officers often discharge their responsibilities through members of their staffs. Chairs of committees, appointed by the Vice Chancellor, are responsible for overseeing initiatives. The Chair of Learning & Teaching and Research Scholarship and Consultancy is the Dean of Academic Development; the chair of Higher Degrees (Taught) and Higher Degrees (Research) is the Head of the Graduate School. In the case of AQSC, the role of the Chair is deliberately separated from the role of chief officer for quality and standards (i.e. the DVC Academic).

27. Basic procedures for quality and standards are relatively conventional, and resemble what could be expected from any university acting in cognizance of the QAA Code of Practice: amongst other mechanisms, there are programme approval, annual monitoring, external examining, and periodic review processes which all meet the precepts of the Code. All procedures and the policy framework are described in detail in the relevant section of the University's website.<sup>17</sup> It is important to see the system as just that: a system. Each procedure has some overlap with others, but is designed to do a different job and has a different focus. Annual monitoring is not a mini-version of periodic review at one-year intervals: it is primarily intended as a tool to assist forward planning and is improvement-led; periodic review is reflective and retrospective, and is primarily accountability-led—though this is not to say that the University does not expect periodic review also to result in improvement. In short, it is invalid to expect any one element to capture what the system is intended to capture overall. Moreover, the system works over time and is driven by paper reports received by peer review groups, whether committees or groups set up ad hoc, like review panels. It cannot deal with matters that demand immediate or short-term action: this is for management.

28. As far as practicable quality assurance procedures are based on the 21 subject units: see for instance the schedule for periodic review.<sup>18</sup> The latest comprehensive review of systems was in April 2002 in response to internal restructuring and changes in national quality assurance arrangements.<sup>19</sup> The outcomes of this review were brought into effect for the session 2003/4. The basic procedural framework was explained in the 'Self-Evaluation Document' for the 2003 institutional audit.<sup>20</sup> At that time AQSC discussed the wisdom or otherwise of

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<sup>17</sup> See [Internal Arrangements and Procedures for Quality and Standards](#).

<sup>18</sup> [Schedule for periodic review 2002/3–2006/7](#).

<sup>19</sup> See BSUC quality assurance system (In the context of new schools and new national arrangements for quality assurance), AQSC 10 April 2002 ([Paper Q382](#)).

<sup>20</sup> See [The Institution's Framework for Managing Quality and Standards, Including Collaborative Provision](#). BSU SED for QAA Institutional Audit 2003, Section 4.

introducing new systems so soon before an institutional audit, and decided that the benefits outweighed the risks. Though there has been no major review in the past four years, there have been changes in detail. One example is the way we have dealt with annual monitoring. Under the arrangements agreed in 2002 AQSC saw annual reports aggregated at school level. The 2003 auditors felt that the reports they saw under this arrangement provided insufficient information to AQSC. We therefore amended reporting requirements so that AQSC took the monitoring reports of the 21 'subject' units without mediation. We have found that this suffers from a practical problem: at what point does enough detail to be informative become too much detail to handle? When annual monitoring was discussed routinely in April 2006, in preparation for issue of instructions on reports for 2005/6, AQSC considered that we should find a way to deal with the problem by returning to a system in which the schools digested subject level reports, but supplied access to detail by requiring the heads of school to present overview reports for their schools in person. The Committee also believed that there remained some confusion about coverage and timing, and that despite the provision of templates, the quality of reports was still too variable. Paper Q644, 'Revision to the Annual Reporting Process' tried to correct these weaknesses.<sup>21</sup> The 2008 auditors will see for themselves whether the revision is successful: this case study shows that we have remained continuously self-critical.

29. One of the first responsibilities of the new Head of Quality Management will be to consider our systems with the objectivity of newness, and to make proposals for change, in the light, among other things, of the increased capacity of the Academic Office itself, and the outcomes of the 2008 audit.

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<sup>21</sup> See 'Revision to the Annual Reporting Process', AQSC 7 June 2006 ([Paper Q644](#)).

## 2. The University's management of Academic Standards

### Framework for managing academic standards

30. Within the framework described above Academic Board discharges its responsibility for the definition of academic standards primarily through the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC); and for the maintenance of academic standards through examination boards at University and subject levels.

31. The various undergraduate and postgraduate degree schemes have examination boards at the scheme (University) level to determine classification and progression; these 'Award Boards' have sub-boards at the level of the subject. Both kinds of boards have defined memberships and terms of reference.<sup>22</sup> In the case of research degrees decisions on the outcomes of examinations are made by UWE.

### Approval, monitoring and review of award standards

32. The University's systems for management of curricula and assessment are the primary means by which it assures the academic standards of its awards. There is a set of general Academic Regulations which apply across the board, dealing with such universal matters as minimum standards for admission, aegrotat degrees, etc.<sup>23</sup> All programmes work within one of five schemes, which define requirements for credit, progression and classification: all University awards must follow one or other set of regulations. For most undergraduates (including all in partner FECs) there is an undergraduate modular scheme, and a separate scheme for the undergraduate art and design awards. For postgraduate taught awards there are schemes for non-teacher training awards; and separate schemes for PGCE and for the teaching-related professional development awards based in the School of Education. The regulations for our research degrees are determined by the University of the West of England, the validating body for these awards. These schemes are periodically revised, and a major review of the undergraduate awards (the latest was 2001) is currently under discussion.

33. A comprehensive guide to the undergraduate modular scheme defines such matters as permitted duration of programmes, requirements for progression and completion, and the characteristics of passes at different levels.<sup>24</sup> An equivalent scheme document for taught postgraduate courses similarly defines levels explicitly, with specific reference to the QAA FHEQ.<sup>25</sup> Student Handbooks must be produced in the process of approval, and minimum requirements for the contents of handbooks are specified in a Course Planning and Approval Handbook,<sup>26</sup> including admissions requirements; an outline of the curriculum which must include reference to external guidance (for instance, subject benchmark statements); assessment methods, timing, sequence and weighting; and information about marking practices.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See [Examination Board Procedures](#), based on the provisions agreed by Academic Board, 23 January 2002, paper D251.

<sup>23</sup> See [Academic Regulations](#).

<sup>24</sup> See [Modular Scheme - A Guide for Students 2007-2008](#), especially section 6.

<sup>25</sup> See [Taught Postgraduate Framework](#), especially sections 2.8 and 3.

<sup>26</sup> See [Course Planning and Approval Handbook](#).

<sup>27</sup> See web pages on [course planning and approval](#); particularly the outline of [minimum contents of handbooks](#).

Handbooks must also include programme specifications, which are an important summary means of defining standards. Programme specifications are checked at approval by AQSC and collected periodically by the Academic Office, to monitor changes over time. The University via AQSC determined that a rigid template for programme specifications was not appropriate since different subjects demanded different approaches, therefore minimum requirements only are specified: main and subsidiary aims; learning outcomes (knowledge and understanding, practical skills, cognitive, transferable/key skills); general intellectual, practical, personal and social/interpersonal attributes fostered by the programme; and criteria for assessment & relationship with learning outcomes. Programme planners are referred also to QAA's guidance. The downside of not being prescriptive is that not all are programme specifications are models of clarity or good practice, but all pass a minimum threshold, and some are excellent.<sup>28</sup>

34. Other procedures, including programme approval generally, annual monitoring of provision, and periodic departmental reviews all contribute to the definition and maintenance of standards: they are covered under the heading of the management of learning opportunities.

### External examiners

35. 111 external examiners are currently in post, at least one for each discrete programme or programme element used for the classification of an award. In some cases, there are several external examiners for the same programme, typically where a mix of professional and academic expertise is sought, or where the programme is complex. In such cases there is a chief external examiner, with separately defined responsibilities. Beyond the requirement that there shall be at least one external examiner for each programme or discrete programme element there is no algorithm to determine the number per programme.

36. The University *External Examiners' Handbook* explains that they are appointed, inter alia,

- To assure the Academic Board that the standards demonstrated by students meet national norms, as indicated by their experience in other higher education institutions and by reference to such national standards as benchmark statements.
- To check that assessment tasks are appropriate to the level claimed.
- To assure the Academic Board that the assessment process is carried out fairly and as intended.<sup>29</sup>

37. External examiners' roles are in relation to cohorts rather than individuals. They have access to a specified sample of student work: wherever the nature of the work permits, they see a minimum of 20 percent assessed 'scripts', including all firsts and fails, and the range in between.

38. Appointment is approved by AQSC on the basis of a proposal from a school. The proposal is made on a form designed to give AQSC information on the expertise of the examiner, and on any potential disqualification for the role deriving from such matters as personal relationships, past employment, number of concurrent external examiner appointments, etc. Where a proposed external examiner has no previous

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<sup>28</sup> See for instance the programme specification in the [Music Handbook](#).

<sup>29</sup> See [External Examiners' Handbook](#) (latest edition November 2007)

external examining experience, appointment is permitted when there is another experienced external on the same examining board. The only exceptions to this rule have been in the occasional small and recondite programme, when subject expertise is unusually hard to come by. On occasions we have extended the appointment of an outgoing external examiner to permit overlap of term of office with an inexperienced incoming external.<sup>30</sup>

39. Appointment is typically for four years. At the beginning of their terms of office they are provided with the *External Examiners' Handbook*, which explains their rights and responsibilities, and gives practical advice on the logistics of performing their roles. Programme managers arrange for the provision of the student handbooks (which include programme specifications) to give information at subject level. They are also provided with network accounts to enable them to access teaching materials on the VLE. The induction process for new examiners is mainly subject based: programme managers are requested to contact their external examiners early and to arrange visits to the institution. We have also begun to advertise and to minute a previously informal annual meeting for external examiners, to which all external examiners are invited, which is likely to be of particular use to new externals. The effectiveness of this is compromised by the difficulties of finding a date when a significant number can attend, and in fact no meeting took place in 2007, but it has been found helpful in particular by the chief examiner of the undergraduate modular scheme. No external examiner has commented that he or she was poorly prepared for the role.

40. External examiners are required to produce an annual report, sent to the DVC (Academic) with the option of sending it to the Vice Chancellor direct. They are asked explicitly to confirm that standards are equivalent to those in similar programmes elsewhere; and that the programme is coherent with subject benchmarks. External examiners are also invited to comment on the quality of the programme specifications. We have tried various formats for reports: the latest version of the Handbook specifies a template.<sup>31</sup>

41. Reports are all read by the DVC Academic, and passed to programme leaders for action, usually with comment. All reports go as a batch to AQSC, with an overview report from the DVC, who flags matters for particular attention because they are serious, or of particular importance to the institution, or because they seem to form a pattern in the context of other reports. The overview report looks back at action proposed in the equivalent report for the previous year, and proposes actions for the forthcoming year. Students have opportunities to raise questions about external examiners' reports at the various committees on which they are represented, including AQSC. Programme leaders respond direct to the external examiners; responses are tracked by the Academic Office and prompts are issued if the response is slow. The DVC's overview report is sent to external examiners.

42. External examiners overwhelmingly state that the standards achieved by our students match those of students in similar programmes elsewhere in UK HE. Looking at trends in the reports over a period of years, it appears that the quality of feedback given to students is consistently improving, and we have been getting better year on year in the use of marking criteria and the relationship of assessment to stated learning outcomes. On these grounds we can say that our external examiners give the Academic Board the assurance of standards that it needs.

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<sup>30</sup> See [Nomination process](#) and [Nomination form](#).

<sup>31</sup> See [template for external examiners reports](#).

43. The external examiner's report is part of the standard information set used by subject teams when they draw up their annual monitoring reports for the forthcoming year.

44. Arrangements for external examiners have remained relatively stable for some time. We have regularly revised the Handbook where there has been any sign of confusion (for example, in relation to external examiners' powers over individual marks); we have revised practices in order to improve operational efficiency (such as providing a convenient cover sheet for them to sign to signify their acceptance of the marks); we have improved their ability to do the job by routinely providing statistical data like standard deviations; we have provided guidance to make the conduct of subject boards as consistent with each other as feasible.

### **Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points**

45. Standards are defined in the approval process by reference to subject benchmarks and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), and a specific check is made by the Academic Office on these matters for the reassurance of AQSC when it considers approval papers. Internal review panels are also asked to consider the relationship of the provision they are reviewing to the subject benchmark statement and the FHEQ.<sup>32</sup> When QAA notifies the University of revisions to subject benchmarks, papers are passed from the Academic Office to heads of schools.

46. External examiners are also asked explicitly to comment on the quality of the programme specification and on the relationship of the programme to the subject benchmark statement. While the FHEQ is not named explicitly on the template provided to external examiners, they are requested to comment on 'Appropriateness for qualifications at this level in this subject.'

### **Assessment policies and regulations**

47. All students and programmes are bound by a set of overarching Regulations that govern such general matters as award titles, and general admissions requirements, and establish parameters for all awards (such as the requirement for an external examiner, for instance).<sup>33</sup> Assessment policies and procedures for the separate schemes are defined in the handbooks for the schemes; where there are specific assessment requirements that relate to particular subjects or awards they are detailed in the student handbook. All regulatory material at University, scheme or subject levels are available on the web, either in the public area of the website, or in Minerva<sup>34</sup> or Sharepoint.<sup>35</sup> For external examiners the External Examiner Handbook provides a digest, but they also have access to the relevant sections of Minerva, to enable them to see and comment on learning and guidance materials. Assessment tasks are related to learning outcomes in handbooks, and external

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<sup>32</sup> See [The Internal Review Process](#), approved by AQSC in 2002, especially paragraph 21.

<sup>33</sup> See [Academic Regulations](#).

<sup>34</sup> The University's implementation of the Blackboard VLE. See [Minerva](#).

<sup>35</sup> The University's secure Collaboration server 'or internal document store, where, for instance, most AQSC papers are made available. See [Sharepoint](#). For Academic Office papers (including an electronic version of this Briefing Paper), see [Academic Office Sharepoint pages](#).

examiners are asked specifically to comment on the suitability of examinations/assessed coursework in relation to module unit/programme aims, objectives and intended outcomes. There are some examples of particularly good practice, such as the way in which assessment in Historical and Cultural Studies is specifically related to employability.<sup>36</sup>

48. General policies for assessment are clearly defined, and cover matters such as anonymity, second marking arrangements, conduct of examination boards, and so on. The most important example is the comprehensive Guide to the Conduct of Modular Scheme Assessment and Examination Boards, which covers everything to do with the management of assessment, including matters such as systems for verifying that marks are recorded accurately.<sup>37</sup>

49. The constitutions and remits of assessment panels and examination boards are clearly specified at University level by the Academic Board, in regulations made public on the website.<sup>38</sup> More detail is provided in handbooks for individual schemes. At University level each scheme has a dedicated assessment board, chaired by a senior member of staff, and serviced by Registry. Marks must be passed to Registry in a specified format. External examiners are asked to report on the conduct of the assessments for which they are responsible, which gives the University information on whether subject level assessment boards are conducted in accordance with the University's expectations. This seems to be effective: AQSC observed in relation to external examiners' reports 2001/2 that some lack of formality in subject boards was reported; the Guide to assessment was developed in response; in the next overview report on external examiners (2002/3) it was reported that 'This year several examiners not only commend the efficiency with which their subject boards were conducted, but comment on the effectiveness of greater formality now introduced as a result of the guidelines.'<sup>39</sup>

50. The University believes that there is appropriate consistency in the treatment of students where regulations reflect different discipline needs and marking conventions. This applies particularly to the relationship between the Art and Design and all other undergraduate awards, which operate within different schemes. An annual report on assessment across the board noticed that achievement in Art and Design was lower overall than in the modular scheme awards, a feature particularly marked in the case of Graphic Design.<sup>40</sup> Steps were taken in the following year to analyse and correct this discrepancy, showing that the University has a mechanism for checking consistency, and also that it can effectively take action where inconsistency is discovered.

51. Apart from QAA the only Professional and Statutory Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) with whom the University deals are Ofsted, who inspect teacher-training courses, and the British Psychological Society (BPS), who have recently 'recognised' our single honours Psychology course. The School of Education monitors the changing requirements of *Qualifying to Teach*, the key expression of Training and Development Agency (TDA) requirements and regularly updates programmes to maintain compliance via the standard course modification procedures. External

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<sup>36</sup> See School of Historical and Cultural Studies [Employability website](#).

<sup>37</sup> See [Conduct of Assessment and Examination Boards Guide 2006-7](#).

<sup>38</sup> See [Examination Board Procedures](#).

<sup>39</sup> See External Examiners' Reports 2002 –03, AQSC 4 December 2003, [Paper Q459](#).

<sup>40</sup> See Report for 2000/01 (hard copy only).

examiners in the teacher training programmes are asked specifically to have regard for statutory requirements, and they are an important item on the agenda for periodic review of the teacher training related degrees. Failure to comply with TDA and Ofsted requirements is a key risk for Education, and so our risk-based annual monitoring system works effectively to ensure that these requirements are kept under frequent review. Since periodic review is six-yearly, and Ofsted/TDA changes requirements more or less annually, it is an effective mechanism for change in this area only when opportunity arises. Ofsted and (now) British Psychological Society reports are taken routinely by AQSC.

52. Revisions to assessment regulations must be within the extant regulations of the various schemes. There is a procedure for minor modifications at subject level, which deals with such matters as changing weighting between assessment elements, etc.<sup>41</sup> Such 'Minor Modifications' may be made at school boards, but must be approved by the Deputy Registrar (Academic) and are ratified by AQSC, a procedure which provides a triple check. Changes to assessment may not be made to any student cohort already taking a module without the consent of all students affected.

53. Our collaborative arrangements operate under exactly the same assessment regulations as for 'home' students: the award boards are held at the University; the same external examiners are used. We have no overseas collaborations and therefore no teaching or assessment in languages other than English.

54. The final assessment of research students is the responsibility of the University of the West of England. Assessment of proposals to register, and progression examination is delegated to Bath Spa. The arrangements are documented in the Research Degrees Handbook,<sup>42</sup> a document which was commended in the QAA Special Review.<sup>43</sup> The University is accountable to the validating body, UWE, but the annual report on the operation of research degrees in the Graduate School is taken by the BSU Academic Board before it goes to UWE.

### **Management information (including progression and completion statistics)**

55. In the Self Evaluation Document for the 2003 audit the University indicated that one of its objectives was to make better use of management data in the quality assurance of programmes, and we have made some significant advances in this direction. In 2003 we had a long-standing implementation of the SITS student records management system, but it was frustrating that we did not at that stage have the capacity to exploit the data we collected. In addition to the improvements in IT infrastructure mentioned above, we now have an 'Information Systems' unit in the University and better tools for reporting. Data can be provided centrally for such procedures as annual reporting that have a direct bearing on the ability of staff to gauge the impact of such standards-related matters as qualifications of intakes etc. Auditors may sample some of these data from the website.<sup>44</sup> Similar data are made available for periodic review.

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<sup>41</sup> See [Minor Modifications](#).

<sup>42</sup> See [Research Degrees Handbook](#).

<sup>43</sup> See [Research Degrees Handbook](#).

<sup>44</sup> See [Quality Assurance Processes: Data](#) (for annual monitoring)

56. In terms of standards across the board, data from the previous year's assessment round is analysed in an annual report from Registry, which goes to both AQSC and the Academic Board. This facilitates comparisons between subjects, modules, and schools, and also contains comparative data to enable the University to see how its levels of classification compare with HESA data gathered from HE at large. These data have been used effectively, for instance to assure us that students who transferred from FECs after one year were not disadvantaged terms of final degree results.<sup>45</sup> The report also allows any obvious discrepancies between subjects to be followed up. This report has been amended and made more sophisticated almost every year. In 2006/7 for instance an external member of AQSC suggested that the data be further analysed to see if any matter not visible in the data as presented (such as gender, disability, etc) might explain the regularly observed differences between classifications of students with BSc awards as opposed to BA: this was followed up in paper Q646.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> There is a comment on this matter in all these annual assessment reports. See for example 'Undergraduate Assessment 2005/6'. AQSC 7 December 2006 ([Paper Q607](#))

<sup>46</sup> 'Degree Classification and Student Characteristics 2005/6'. AQSC 7 June 2007, [Paper Q646](#).

### 3. Institutional management of learning opportunities

#### The University's framework for managing the quality of learning opportunities

57. The Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) is the key University-level committee for the management of standards; the Learning and Teaching Committee is the key committee for the development of learning opportunities. Improvements come through the procedures for accountability (approval, monitoring and review), and matters are passed from AQSC to LTC for action; but improvement of learning opportunities is at the head of LTC's agenda. Matters are passed between the committees as necessary: for instance, employability was a key focus in one of the reviews conducted in 2006/7; the matter was taken forward by LTC and is one of the most important elements of its current work. As it turns out, poor results in employability depressed our ratings in the latest *Sunday Times* league tables (we have consistently done well in the past): we were ahead of the game, but not by enough, unfortunately. It is LTC that takes forward such matters as peer observation, discretionary rewards for teaching excellence, proposals for national teaching fellowships and other improvement activities described in more detail below.

58. The Research, Consultancy and Scholarship Committee (RCSC) also plays an important role in the development of learning opportunities. The role of RCSC is not just to facilitate the activities of those engaged in work likely to be submitted to the RAE (though this is one of its concerns); rather, the University has very consciously focussed the work of RCSC on the scholarship activities necessary to improve learning opportunities for ALL students. The initiative for our on-line 'staff profiles' came through RCSC, and a template defined for staff entries that covered research and teaching activities. RCSC audits research and scholarship activities annually in an exercise that relates these activities directly to the curriculum. The bulk of the resulting documents means that it is difficult to supply them electronically: however the outcomes for three years are now available. This exercise and its results were explicitly praised by our university title assessors.<sup>47</sup>

59. Management obviously has a much more important role in the management of learning opportunities than in the management of standards. The Vice Chancellor is responsible for all matters related to staff contracts, and such activities as appraisal are carried out under his authority. He is also responsible for resources, though he delegates responsibility for specific matters to his various managers. Most of these managers are able to consult staff and student opinion either through the medium of extant Academic Board committees (the Head of Student Support is in attendance at LTC, for example), or establish advisory groups. The Library for instance has a Library User Group.

#### Academic Infrastructure and other external reference points

60. The Code of Practice is used as a reference point against which to check our practices. Different sections of the Code are operationally the responsibility of different officers or managers, but AQSC takes an oversight of the Code as a whole. As each section of the Code is updated, the manager/officer concerned is notified by the Academic Office. A response is compiled and returned to AQSC to be

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<sup>47</sup> See 'Application for University Title: Bath Spa University College. Institutional Assessors' Final Report.' QAA, January 2005, paragraph 37.

considered.<sup>48</sup> Checking is done against a template, and the results posted on the website.<sup>49</sup> All sections of the Code so far updated have been considered, except for the section on placement learning, which is due to be considered in the new year. Sections have been differentially useful, but the most important sections for us in terms of determining practice have probably been the sections on collaboration and postgraduate research programmes. These are referred to further in the relevant sections of this Briefing Paper.

61. External reference points are also used in relation to service or subject specialisms. There is a statement of expectations compiled by SCONUL, for instance, which we use in considering library resources in FEC partners. Other external reference points include the learning resources implications of the TDA standards on teacher training (for instance with regard to placements in schools); professional accreditation requirements in relation to a small number of our courses (Psychology and Counselling, for instance); standards set by the Sector Skills Councils for Foundation Degrees: these are all checked at approval and in review.

### **Framework for approval, monitoring and review of programmes**

62. Approval monitoring and review procedures are communicated clearly to all those involved with them, via the comprehensive information published and maintained by the Academic Office on the University's website.<sup>50</sup> Some specific documents are produced in hard copy, especially for those external to the University: perhaps the most obvious examples are the *External Examiners' Handbook* and the briefing notes for members of periodic internal review teams.

63. The University's quality assurance processes make very extensive use of external views, in a way that goes well beyond the conventional use in approval and periodic review. This starts with Academic Board committees themselves. AQSC has two members from other universities; HDR has three; all school boards have external membership; the subcommittee for Collaborative Provision has one member from another university, in addition to members from the partner institutions themselves. These external members are all involved in decision making by the committees of which they are members, and are highly influential. Periodic review is based on subject groups, and at least two external specialists are on every review team, three where the scale of the subject indicates it (as in, say, Art & Design in 2005).<sup>51</sup> Our use of external views in approval is more complex. The approval procedure includes approval by school board (which include a subject external) and also by AQSC (which includes two non-subject externals). However the key external contribution is in programme design. All programme development teams must consult at least one external specialist, who must be approved in advance, on the basis of a CV, by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) on behalf of AQSC. Programme approval documents must include a record of that consultation, and also proof that the external consulted is satisfied with the

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<sup>48</sup> See for example Revisions to the QAA Code of Practice (Sections 7, 8 & 10) AQSC 4 October 2007 ([Paper Q657](#) and annexes for Sections [7](#), [8](#), [10](#)).

<sup>49</sup> See [Code of Practice pages](#) on BSU website.

<sup>50</sup> See the Academic Office ['Quality and Standards A to Z'](#).

<sup>51</sup> See [report of Art & Design review](#), 2005.

development teams' response to his or her comments. This procedure is in general highly effective, and the contribution of some externals is outstanding.<sup>52</sup>

### Programme approval

64. Programme approval arrangements at Bath Spa since 2002/3 meet the precepts of the Code of Practice on approval. Prior to that, our processes took little formal notice of planning and development, except in so far as they were described in the documents considered at validation 'events'. We did not for instance require an external influence on the development process, including it only at the point of validation. However, in considering these arrangements we came to the view that planning and development together were what made the most difference to students, and therefore the most comprehensive range of academic advice should inform them. It is particularly important that external views should be sought early, to ensure that design is coherent with national expectations and not subject to the quirks of individual preference, whereas the 'validation event' required external input only at the end, when it was least useful. We determined therefore to strengthen the design stage, and in particular to ensure that the external voice influences design.

65. The outcome of the design process is not a 'validation document' but a student handbook, which constitutes a complete description of the programme. Unlike the situation that applied for 'validation', the regulatory framework dictating such matters as number of credits, size of modules, progression and classification rules and so on already exist: the procedure therefore includes a check by officers that no such rules are breached before a programme is presented for approval. AQSC also checks that a good design process was followed, leading to a valid set of regulations for the award, by requiring evidence to enable it to answer the following questions:

- Is there a clear 'programme specification'?
- Has the proposal followed due internal process (including the process for securing resources)?
- Does it conform to internal regulatory structures?
- Does it have a secure basis in research/scholarship and staff preparation?
- Is it cognisant of national benchmarks/qualifications framework, etc.?
- Has it directly benefited from external expert views?

66. AQSC therefore sees the programme specification itself; pro forma statements from relevant officers covering process issues; and a statement from the head of school which covers staff preparation. The external perspective is covered by a document analogous to an external examiner's report describing the contribution of the external and endorsing the development. These documents together form the proposal for approval.

67. The requirement for officers to sign off regulatory matters in advance means that conditions about regulations cannot arise. The increased attention given to the development phase, and the increased time generally made available for design,

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<sup>52</sup> See for instance the contributions by four external consultants to the development of the Foundation Degree in Heritage Management approved by AQSC in September 2007.

means that 'conditions' are dealt with prior to approval, and 'recommendations' are routinely addressed in the natural course of design. It is of course still open to AQSC to refuse approval if it is not satisfied that any aspect of the development phase has been inadequately completed.

68. Minor modifications of programmes, such as the addition of single new modules or units, are dealt with at school board level, provided always that the support of relevant guardians of regulations are obtained. These include the Deputy Registrar (Academic) for undergraduate programmes, the Head of the Graduate School for master's programmes, and the Registrar for any matters relating to admission and graduation. Where there are resource implications of an otherwise minor modification, or the cumulative effects of minor modifications create a resource implication, and the resource requirements lie outside the discretion of the head of school, the standard process for approval takes over.

69. The University assessed its system of course approval after it had been operating for about a year. At the first meeting of AQSC in 2002/03, a paper was presented evaluating progress so far. The downside was that some course proposers treated the approval process as validation by correspondence, and not as a wholly new process. In line with this perception, they waited until the course handbook was completed, and only at that point sought external input. We introduced a couple of amendments designed to help. The process is now explicitly called 'course planning and approval' and referred to as such in all the formal paperwork, including a discrete handbook detailing the requirements. In addition, the Academic Office has produced a checklist covering all stages of the process, indicating clearly when and in what order actions must be taken.<sup>53</sup>

70. On the positive side, there were excellent examples of the way in which the new process could work. The papers for PGCE Primary showed detail of how external advisors and internal officers were consulted at an early stage, and how their input affected the shape of the programme during development. Some papers show not only the final response of the external advisor, but documented the way in which the external advisor's comments were taken on board and changed the programme. The availability of the programme specifications to AQSC enabled some excellent examples to gain a much wider currency among academic staff in all schools than would have been the case under the old process.<sup>54</sup> AQSC was satisfied that even under the unusual circumstances, and even taking into account the less good examples of the new process at work, it had sufficient information to be able to be confident about the quality and standards of the new programmes, and to believe that the new process would work better than the old.

71. Colleagues have complained that the whole process seems much more protracted than the validation process. The problem was raised again at the beginning of 2007/8, when papers for 4 foundation degrees came before AQSC, having been formally approved by Chair's action during the summer. The Committee read the papers and considered that the approval granted was appropriate, but asked the DVC Academic to investigate the background and to report back on the reasons for the delay. The problem was in part due to HEFCE

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<sup>53</sup> See the [Course Planning and Approval](#) web pages, and particularly [Course Planning and Approval Handbook](#) and the [Approval Checklist](#).

<sup>54</sup> Programme specifications are included in handbooks. See the programme specifications included in student handbooks for [History](#) and [Music](#): links appear on the [Course Planning and Approval](#) web pages.

timetables. All but one of these programmes were designed in response to an invitation to bid for additional student numbers (ASN); the timing of the invitation left only six months from first inception to completion. In all cases but one, the extent and iteration of external consultation (in one case of four highly qualified professionals, all of whom had written reports which had influenced development) had resulted in demonstrably better programmes. One only was, it were, a 'threshold' approval: here too the external had had a demonstrable impact on course design, and had both commented on the draft handbook and 'signed off' the final version. In this case the original course designer had passed on the responsibility for the development half-way through due to maternity leave. In short the benefits of extended and iterated consultation with externals still seemed to the Committee to outweigh the cost in time.

72. Decisions about approval are by AQSC, i.e. external to the department or school in which the programme is developed. AQSC also determines continuation of approval on the basis of recommendation following review. Fulfilment of conditions on re-approval are monitored by the Academic Office on behalf of AQSC, and are also reported in a progress review to AQSC, which also reports on progress against recommendations.

### Annual monitoring

73. Annual monitoring is primarily focussed on the future. Such reflective elements as it contains are there to provide a rationale for forward planning. Monitoring is reliant on data, and the data are intended to enable comparisons between subjects and institutions. Monitoring data closely inform school strategic planning. The data set identified was influenced by the Cooke report. We are able to generate much of this data readily from our student records system, though some must be gathered by the subjects. It includes the following:

- Student profile: numbers; qualifications; gender balance; etc. etc.
- Student applications/acceptances and comparative figures
- Student satisfaction survey results
- Student performance as indicated by assessment results (progression, retention, classification, failure rates)
- Module evaluations
- External examiners' and other external inspection reports
- Employment destinations
- Staff profiles including: staff numbers; external examinerships; membership of national bodies; published research; details of scholarship undertaken; internal engagement in quality assurance processes; consultancy; contribution to the external impact of the department (e.g. used as expert witnesses, broadcasts, etc); external research funding; turnover of staff; etc. etc.
- Provision of research/scholarship/training opportunities
- Common lessons derived from appraisals and peer observations within schools
- Course profile: modules added/deleted; relationship to national trends.

74. All these data form a background to a 'risk assessment' at subject level, dealing with opportunities (such as new programme opportunities) as well as

threats, which yields an action plan for the forthcoming year. These are presented to the school board, covered by a short narrative rationale, and provide information for strategic planning at school level. Until this year's set of reports, ASQC saw the monitoring reports for all 21 subjects. The present set of reports follow a slightly different route, and are summarised at school boards. The summaries are taken at AQSC, and presented by heads of school, who chair school boards as well as manage the school, and are therefore in the best position to be accountable for the contents of the reports.

75. Subject data give the raw material for school reports. The risk assessment yields an action plan covered by a short rationale. The rationale and the action plan are key to the school strategic plan.

76. External examiners are invited to comment on any aspect of the assessed work they see that enables them to draw any conclusions on teaching styles, or any other aspect of learning opportunities available to students. Those whose mode of assessment brings them into direct contact with students—by such means as observing performances, or visiting art shows—often do so.

77. Monitoring of services is perhaps best illustrated by example of the library. The Library and Information Services (LIS) annual operating objectives are monitored at a local level with individuals and teams to ensure that progress is reported and targets are met. At institutional level, progress is reported to a Deputy vice Chancellor (line-manager of the Head of LIS) as part of the annual review of the strategic plan. In addition, annual reports from academic schools and external examiners are routinely scrutinised for issues relating to learning resources. In previous years, for example, a number of external examiners have criticised poor use of referencing by students. LIS was charged, through the Learning and Teaching Committee, with providing on the website clear guidelines on referencing for the benefit of both staff and students. An examiner commenting on student performance in Study of Religions in 2007 was able to write, 'The teaching team are to be commended in ensuring that students in this programme are assured in their use of referencing and...provide good bibliographies'. A similar procedure (with local variations due to the needs and functions of the service) is followed for, say, Student Support Services.

### **Periodic review of programmes**

78. The University's version of periodic review plays a central part in the assurance of standards. It is broadly based on the method used in the now superseded HEFCE/QAA 'Subject Review'. The unit of review here is also the subject, and the method makes use of external specialists and internal non-specialists to assess quality and standards in all aspects of the taught courses. The material supplied to review teams includes a self-evaluation document, accompanied by a programme specification and a full student handbook. Reviewers hold a series of meetings with staff and students, examine learning resources, and look at students' work. The Academic Office provides an officer for the review who manages the logistics and drafts a report of the event, which is not signed off until the whole panel have agreed it. The report includes recommendations to AQSC about conditions which should sometimes be fulfilled before a further period of approval is granted, and recommendations, about matters less significant. Conditions are time-limited, and responsibility for determining that conditions are satisfied is usually delegated to the Chair, who signals his satisfaction or otherwise to the officers in the Academic Office, who in turn report back to AQSC. AQSC also requires an interim report to ensure that both conditions and recommendations are

followed through into action: see for an example the report on progress by the team for the Education-based 'Professional Masters Programme' from the February 2007 AQSC.<sup>55</sup>

79. Reviews are major events for the University, and often result in significant change. Perhaps most dramatically, the outcome can be programme closure, which has happened once, following the internal periodic review of Design & Technology in 2004.<sup>56</sup> A series of concerns were voiced by the review team, who recommended a repeat review in one year. The team had no difficulty with the standards, but the student intake in the context of maintaining standards, and the quality of equipment were questioned. Review reports are always sent to the Vice Chancellor, who considered that the report cast the future of the subject in doubt, and commissioned supplementary reports from senior managers on its future in the light of the University's portfolio and intended development: in short, was the investment necessary to protect the subject into the future sensible in the light of the scale and quality of student intake? The outcome was a decision to close the subject. Of course the opportunities for progression of extant students were carefully protected, and a two-year plan starting with no intake in 2005 was put in place. The last graduates from this course completed in July 2007.

80. The strategic plan addresses itself to improvement of areas where performance is less than optimum, as revealed by the data, and also to developments where there are new opportunities. Academic Board can assure itself that these data are properly addressed via the strategic plans presented to it. The annual operating statements and associated reports on progress against the previous year's annual operating statements provide the documentary evidence needed by Academic Board to show that reflection on the data yields action plans, and action plans are followed by action.

81. School plans go to AQSC before their final incorporation into the institutional strategic plan. This enables AQSC still to perform its function of taking an overview of the whole set of plans, and also identifying and prioritising those things arising from the monitoring cycle that should affect budget setting.

### **Management information (student feedback and NSS)**

82. The University has comprehensive and well established systems for obtaining student feedback. Aside from the system of student representation described below, all programmes and modules are subjected to annual student evaluation through both formal and informal means. These usually take the form of questionnaires and/or staff student meetings. Information gathered through these mechanisms is processed through subject meetings, course committees and school boards and incorporated into annual monitoring. In general we believe these mechanisms work well, and responsiveness to feedback from students is explicitly commended in many internal periodic review reports—a feature of both QAA subject review reports still available on the QAA website.<sup>57</sup> One of the Foundation Degree Review reports<sup>58</sup> was more critical but acknowledged that the lack of formal means to gather

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<sup>55</sup> See [Appendix to for Paper Q636](#).

<sup>56</sup> See [Paper Q449, Annex](#).

<sup>57</sup> [Theology and Religious Studies](#) paragraph 46; [Education Studies](#) paragraphs 48-50; 54f.

<sup>58</sup> [Design for Digital Technologies](#) paragraph 51.

student feedback in the programme was balanced by close staff-student relationships and very small

83. The National Students' Survey (NSS) is considered both by management and Academic Board agencies. A comprehensive analysis goes to the Learning and Teaching Committee, the latest in December 2007.<sup>59</sup> The University's results remain generally good (the mean average score for overall satisfaction was 4.3), and results for 2007 are slightly improved on those for 2006, including in the area of 'General Satisfaction'. The Committee was glad to see that already high scores for quality of teaching improved further (4.4), and that there were improvements in areas where we have made deliberate efforts, such as learning resources (up 0.4 to 3.6). On the downside, Art and Design had a significant decrease for the second consecutive year, and is the only reporting unit of the ten whose overall satisfaction score dropped below 4.0. The Head of the School of Art & Design has made immediate efforts to investigate and act on these findings.

84. Student feedback is used extensively to help improve services. Once again this may be illustrated by reference to LIS, which has an ongoing means of obtaining feedback from students in the form of feedback sheets and complaints forms. These are used on a regular basis to modify services, and have led, for instance, to an increase in library opening hours and a reduction in the price of photocopies. LIS provides both library services and open access computers for student use across both campuses. The nature of this provision is explicitly linked to BSU's strategic objectives and particularly to the university's commitment to teaching quality and its student-centred approach. For example, a 2005 survey undertaken by LIS showed that the greatest areas of dissatisfaction related to the availability of books and, specifically, course books and essential texts.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, an unpublished survey of library enquiries conducted between March and May 2006 showed that some students were unable to find material that was actually available on the shelves. Therefore, various strategies have been adopted to improve both the provision of books and journals and students' ability to access them, including additional spending on electronic journals and books, and implementation of an on-line information skills programme. Student Services and the Office for International Activities also regularly seek and use student feedback in similar ways.<sup>61</sup>

### **Role of students in quality assurance**

85. The President of the Students Union is a member of the Board of Governors and of the Academic Board, and he nominates members for all other key Academic Board Committees with the exception of Research Consultancy and Scholarship. There are student members of school boards, and also of various other consultative committees at school and subject levels. However until two years ago representation outside Academic Board committees was somewhat ad hoc. With the encouragement of the University (including financial encouragement at the time the arrangements was first mooted), the Students Union has been developing and formalising arrangements for student representation at all levels of the University. This has included encouraging students to act as representatives and training them

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<sup>59</sup> National Student Survey, [Learning and Teaching Committee 11 December 2007](#), Paper L112 and annexes.

<sup>60</sup> See [LIS pages for library and open access computer surveys](#).

<sup>61</sup> See [Student Services pages for student satisfaction surveys](#).

in their roles. There are now almost 250 students acting as representatives of various kinds. The development work has been greatly facilitated by the SU's instituting a post, Student Academic Representatives Coordinator, to manage representation. AQSC has recently established a group of student representatives to act as a means of informing our quality assurance operation. Students on school boards see handbooks for new programmes when they are taken by the boards in the process of approval. Though students are not used in periodic review as team members, review teams always meet groups of students in the course of the review, and information learned from them is important in the compilation of the report.

86. Though we believe that our record in student consultation is good, AQSC recently discussed whether it could be better formalised and channels of communication made more explicit, especially between student consultative groups at school and course level and at University level. There is now a 'Student Representatives Steering Committee' of AQSC, consisting of the seven representatives on the 'academic' school boards, the Student Academic Representatives Coordinator, and the President of the SU, who is chair. The Academic Office services the committee. As at the time of writing, the group has only met informally, and has been used as consultation group for the development of the present Briefing Paper.

### **Links between research or scholarly activity and learning opportunities**

87. The link between research and scholarly activity and learning opportunities is key to the University's attempts to define itself as a 'teaching led' University. When we applied for University title, we felt that it was important to try to show that Bath Spa University was not 'teaching-only' or 'research-lite', but that (to quote the Application): "Bath Spa University', if the title is granted, wishes to be at the forefront of making 'university' signify a richer variety of academic qualities; we also wish to be at the forefront in expressing those qualities at the highest standard.' To judge by outcomes, the University title assessors found this a plausible aspiration, and we proceeded to try to put flesh on the bones by drawing up the 'Ten Characteristics of a Teaching Led University', which are explained more thoroughly in the section of this paper on enhancement below. One of these 'characteristics' was 'Teaching led research, not research led teaching'. Regrettably, our research degree awarding powers assessors were unconvinced by this notion, though the University did its best to try to explain exactly what it meant, and why it considered that there were signs that it was succeeding in its intentions. The argument was encapsulated in an Academic Board paper subsequent to conclusion of the scrutiny, which reviews how the University goes about trying explicitly to link research and scholarly activity and teaching, and what sign of success were evident, amongst other things.<sup>62</sup>

88. Responsibility for advising on strategy and Academic Board accountability for research is vested in the University's Research, Consultancy and Scholarship Committee (RCSC), chaired by the Dean of Academic Development. RCSC takes a broad view of advanced scholarship, and one of the committee's primary responsibilities is to ensure that research and scholarly activity support and improve teaching at all levels, including PhD supervision. RCSC annually audits scholarly activity within each academic school, explicitly requiring schools to relate such

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<sup>62</sup> See '[Teaching Led Research](#)', Academic Board, 6 November 2007.

activity to teaching provision. This procedure was explicitly commended by our university title assessors, who scrutinized the 2004/5 returns for all schools: 'All the reports scrutinised by the institutional assessors were impressively thorough in their account of the relationship between scholarship and teaching and depicted a body of staff who knew what was expected of them in terms of advanced pedagogic practice, research for publication, and engagement with peer professional networks.'<sup>63</sup>

89. The audit shows in particular how research and scholarship relate to teaching at all levels including research student supervision. Evidence of research and scholarly activity is also contained within online 'academic profiles' maintained by each staff member.<sup>64</sup>

### Other modes of study

90. The University has no programmes delivered wholly or mainly by flexible and distributed learning. Elements of all programmes are delivered through the University's virtual leaning environment, 'Minerva', which is a tailored version of the Blackboard system. The system is used to varying degrees of sophistication, at one end operating simply as a store for documents, the distribution of lecture notes and a 'drop-box' for assignments; at the other used extremely extensively as a major medium of communication, and a means to deliver material to students that would be difficult or impossible by conventional means. A particularly good example of the latter is in the various music technology courses, where multimedia material is routinely delivered and used for learning both in-house and remotely. However in all cases the technology is a supplement to a learning environment, which is never wholly reliant on it.

### Resources for learning

91. The Vice Chancellor is responsible under the Articles of Government for resource matters, and so 'Outline' planning data are presented to him at an early stage in the approval process. In practice he seeks the advice of the resource managers to whom he delegates responsibility in particular areas, and signs off resource requirements on the basis of that advice. Approval of the Outline Plan by the Vice Chancellor means that a course may be advertised 'subject to approval' (by the Academic Board). Approval also requires consultation with key resource managers, especially the Head of Network Services and the head of Library and Information Services.

92. The baseline for learning resources provision is determined by a number of factors. In relation to subjects, it is self-evident that the equipment needs of a subject like Ceramics demand a greater level of spending per capita than an essentially classroom- and library-based subject like English. This produces a historical level of spend that gives a baseline for year-on-year budgeting. This baseline is varied according to changes in student numbers, which is the second major consideration in determination of needs. New departures typically depend on strategic development by the University, supported by success in bid applications. Typical recent examples include the development of performing arts following a

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<sup>63</sup> *Advisory Committee on Degree-Awarding Powers: Application for university title – Bath Spa University College*. Report of QAA appointed institutional assessors (January 2005). Para 28.

<sup>64</sup> See [Staff and Student Profiles](#).

successful bid for capital funds and additional student numbers from HEFCE which enabled the building of the University theatre; or the extensive subject developments in the application of digital design to creative arts subjects in three of our schools as a result of winning funds for a Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning, which has enabled very significant building and equipment spend in the areas concerned.<sup>65</sup>

93. Funding for library, information technology and space are also in part determined by historical need, but also by such matters as technological development (particularly in the case of IT), changes in the curriculum, and changes in student numbers. Changes in spend are partly driven by reference to external benchmarks. For instance, a paper to the Learning and Teaching Committee on 20 March 2007 from the Head of LIS used statistics published by the Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) to draw comparisons with other university libraries. In the category of library books per FTE student BSU came out fourth highest among a total of seven comparator institutions. However, against the same institutions, it came out lowest in terms of total library spend per FTE student. These comparisons have strengthened the case for an increase in library budget and the institution has allocated an additional 13% for 2007-8.

94. We also use information gleaned from less formal sources like league tables. These comparisons are always treated with caution, as they ultimately depend on raw figures whose context is needed for them to make real sense: very large spend on a new building in one year will distort the figures for the year in which it appears in the accounts, for instance. Nonetheless the University is strongly aware of the external impact of these data, has largely benefited from being included in league tables, and cannot afford to ignore them.

95. Year on year changes are also affected by the outcomes of the annual subject monitoring exercise. AQSC on the basis of the reports as a whole makes a report to the Academic Board in which it prioritises areas in which increased spend seems indicated. This paper influences the annual budget, and when Academic Board is consulted about the budget prior to submission to the Board of Governors, the AQSC paper is considered alongside it.

96. LIS assesses the level of satisfaction with library and open access computer facilities through a number of methods. LIS staff participate in meetings ranging from Academic Board and its sub-committees to School Boards and advisory groups including Academic IT Co-ordinators and Library User Group. Each provides a forum for LIS to communicate with staff and students and, as appropriate, to receive feedback on performance. Any specific resource implications arising from annual reports are fed back via the Head of LIS. In these ways, LIS is able to reflect on, and consider how to improve, the quality of the learning experience. In addition, LIS conducts surveys of library users and the findings are used to guide development of the service. For example, the 2007 survey confirmed the success of the Student Open Access Computer Support initiative. Such confirmation demonstrates the need for continued funding in this area and indicates the direction in which the SOAC service should continue. Less happily, provision of books and journals were identified as matters of concern. Steps have been taken to improve this situation by appointing a new member of staff to focus on the development of electronic resources and by directing funds towards increasing the provision of electronic journals and books. This solution has the added advantage that wider

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<sup>65</sup> See 'ArtsWork: Learning Labs' on the [HEFCE website](#) and the [Artswork website](#).

access to a greater range of material can be made available without increased pressure on physical space.

### Admissions policy

97. Arrangements for Admissions are listed in the University's mapping of its provision against the QAA Code of Practice Section 10.<sup>66</sup> Entry requirements are clearly stated in the University's various regulatory documents and in the general information that derives from them, especially the Prospectus.<sup>67</sup> Admission is administered centrally by Registry. Registry's input to decisions varies with the programme: for those courses whose entry requirements can be expressed relatively simply (including most of those in the undergraduate modular scheme), it is almost exclusively managed by Registry on the basis of general advice provided by departments; for those where individual qualities must be taken into account (including most of those programmes with a skill or performance element, most obviously Art & Design and Music) academics take a more prominent role in individual decisions. For entry to teacher training programmes there is a statutory requirement for interview. Registry staff are trained internally for their roles, and a clear specification of requirements and a hierarchical decision-making procedure ensures that decisions are not eccentric. Decision making in the other areas is always a group activity, where less experienced staff are always paired with experienced.

98. University oversight of the operation of admissions procedures is distributed, in the sense that minimum general standards for admission are set by the Academic Board and expressed in the University's regulations; and specific standards beyond the minimum by departments in response to demand. The operation of the administration of admissions is the responsibility of the Registrar, who is answerable to a member of the Vice Chancellor's group. Operation of the recruitment process is the responsibility of the Head of Marketing, who is responsible to the same member of VCG. The University is diligent in keeping the success of its recruitment and admissions activities under review. They are assessed every year by a survey, and we benchmark ourselves against our 'competitors' (i.e. that set of institutions that students who turn Bath Spa down go to).

### Student support

99. The general needs of students with regard to finances (including bursaries and scholarships as well as fees and payments), arrangements for student loans, and the provision of support services are all explained in the various documents provided to students at admission, and also made available through the recently instituted 'student portal'. Student handbooks in relation to specific schemes and programmes also explain academic and other kinds of support available at subject and University levels.

100. Arrangements for Careers Education Advice and Guidance are explained in the University's mapping of its provision against the QAA Code of Practice Section 8.<sup>68</sup> As indicated elsewhere in this document, we believe that career education

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<sup>66</sup> See 'map' of QAA Code of Practice, Section 10, [Admissions to Higher Education](#).

<sup>67</sup> Printed Prospectuses can be ordered, but all the material is available on-line: see '[Our Courses](#)'.

<sup>68</sup> See 'map' of QAA Code of Practice, Section 8, [Career Education, Advice and Guidance](#).

advice and guidance in the University is sound, but we are disturbed by the poor showing in graduate salaries revealed by NSS. It appears that our students get jobs, but many of them six months after graduation are not in jobs with graduate level salaries. There may be many reasons for this, which have been discussed both in Academic Board committees and management groups. They include the possibility that graduates in creative arts careers tend to have low earnings at the outset; that we have students who take low paid but undemanding work to leave themselves free to pursue their creative interests; even that the proportionately large number of women graduates from BSU is significant, when graduate salaries for women remain lower than those for men despite long-standing legislation. This is a matter that we are actively investigating, with a view to making changes in our arrangements.

101. The specific needs of students with disabilities are explained in the University's mapping of its arrangements against the QAA Code of Practice Section 3,<sup>69</sup> which should also be read in the general context of the University's policy for disability and equality.<sup>70</sup>

102. The specific needs of international students are handled by International Activities, who produce a comprehensive range of advice<sup>71</sup> including a dedicated student handbook, and also provide comprehensive human support including intensive English language support. There are only some 200 international students at Bath Spa, but they are very fully supported by dedicated specialist staff.

103. The University's Complaints and Appeals procedures are made widely available.<sup>72</sup> The Deputy Vice Chancellor responsible makes a regular report to the Board of Governors on complaints. As it happens, the same DVC is Chair of the appeals panel: he reports regularly to AQSC on the outcomes of appeals. Neither report has given the University cause for concern that some aspect of academic or other support is regularly found wanting.

104. Student Support is closely integrated with academic support at the University. Lines of communication are short in a university of this size, and Student Support Services regularly make information available to staff to help them point students in the right direction if they need help.<sup>73</sup> In formal terms they are maintained by the attendance of the Head of Student Support Services at the University's Learning and Teaching Committee in relation to Academic Board matters, and her membership of the Senior Management Team in relation to management matters.

### Staff support

105. Human resources procedures are clearly described and communicated to relevant staff via the HR website, which contains an enormous range of material

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<sup>69</sup> See 'map' of QAA Code of Practice, Section 3, [Students with Disabilities](#).

<sup>70</sup> See [Disability Equality Scheme and Update](#).

<sup>71</sup> See the [International Activities website](#).

<sup>72</sup> See [Complaints Procedure](#) and [Appeals Procedure](#).

<sup>73</sup> See for instance Student Support [guidance for staff](#) on the [Student Support website](#).

relating to staff contracts, terms and conditions, pay, etc.<sup>74</sup> The University's Equal Opportunities Policy<sup>75</sup> makes it clear that the University is committed to equal treatment for all categories of staff (and indeed students and visitors).

106. The scale of the University means that HR is able to manage centrally (for example) all recruitment, and can monitor such universal procedures as appraisal. It is still possible for all academic appointment panels to be chaired by a member of the VCG. This gives a considerable degree of consistency to the operation of these matters.

107. Policy on staff development is set by AQSC and the Learning and Teaching Committee in respect of minimum requirements and enhancement respectively, and is monitored in the course of the standard procedures of approval, monitoring and review for AQSC, and through the Learning and Teaching Strategy by LTC.

108. Central provision for staff development is made by more than one agency. The School for Development and Participation manages a newly instituted Academic Staff Development Centre, managed by an Academic Staff Development Co-ordinator.<sup>76</sup> The School also provides an in-house qualification for new and inexperienced university teachers (a requirement for such staff). The Graduate School manages staff development for supervisors of research students. LIS has IT Training and Support staffing, who provide individual support, classes for common needs (some 30 classes between October and December 2007), and maintains an IT help A-Z on the University website.<sup>77</sup>

109. However, many particular procedures are managed locally, and in specific relation to schools are managed by heads of schools. Heads of schools organise annual appraisal for academic staff, for instance, and are responsible for the meetings required by the probationary procedure for new members of staff. Heads of school appoint mentors. Many staff support activities are managed within schools as a normal course of academic activity. All schools for instance have research seminar series (which students often attend); all schools have internally organised peer-observation schemes.

110. In relation to collaborative activities, continuing oversight is maintained by the School for Development and Participation, which has a programme of staff development managed via visits from its own staff, but the School also oversees and monitors programmes of visits by academic staff of the various schools in relation to 'their' programmes.

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<sup>74</sup> See BSU the '[Information for current staff](#)' section of the [HR website](#) which lists and provides links to all policies and arrangements.

<sup>75</sup> See BSU [Equal Opportunities Policy](#).

<sup>76</sup> See [Academic Staff Development Centre web-pages](#).

<sup>77</sup> The range of services offered is advertised on the [IT help web pages](#).

## 4. Institutional approach to quality enhancement

### Framework for quality enhancement

111. Bath Spa is committed to systematic improvement, and this is evident in the way we have operated key individual elements of our quality assurance processes (like approvals, and our use of external examiners and external advisers of all kinds): these processes are developmental, as well as formal and systematic: and are designed to provide us with a range of management information. With respect to external examiners' reports, for instance, all are seen by AQSC, and they are covered by an overview report which draws out good practice as well as matters that need correction. There are examples of changes in whole degree schemes that have come about following comments by external examiners in individual subjects (over condonement rules, for example). Our Appeals process has been amended in the light of emerging case law, and committees have been introduced or deleted in the light of changing circumstance and need. Each of the university's subject groups can point to regular changes within programmes and additions to programmes based on their evaluation of student needs, and the recommendations and conditions placed upon them by internal review.

112. Improvements are also introduced as a result of the regular evaluation of process, as with the dissatisfaction with the retrospective nature of annual course reporting. That dissatisfaction had been voiced for some time in annual reports made by faculties, and so the university sought ways of making its annual reporting process more forward-looking. At the time of the QAA institutional audit in 2003, changes had recently been introduced to facilitate continuous improvement. Those changes were designed to align quality assurance more closely with strategic planning. We believe both processes have benefited from this alignment: strategic planning has benefited from a better basis in management information and data derived from quality assurance processes; quality assurance has become a more effective machinery for translating evaluation into action by grounding itself in data-based risk assessment. Although some academic staff have felt uncomfortable with the language of risk assessment, which they regard as derived from business rather than academic discourse, most now recognise that it has helped them to produce reports which are briefer and more useful than their predecessors in the way they identify specific actions and measurable improvements. Staff now spend less time and effort producing retrospective and defensive narratives, and more time thinking strategically about their subjects. In effect, the emphasis has shifted from accounting for the past to defining how we might improve in the future.

113. Our approach to enhancement is planned and strategic, working within parameters established by the Board of Governors in 2006 when it adopted a paper from the Vice Chancellor describing the 'ten characteristics of the teaching-led university', with associated performance indicators.<sup>78</sup> In the context of our gaining university title, this paper defined explicitly the kind of university we wish to be, including our approach to teaching quality, academic staff development, student-centred learning across the whole teaching spectrum, employability and the curriculum, delivery through partnership with FECs, working with business, and the way we manage the relationship between teaching and research. All the elements of our strategic planning process (such the learning and teaching strategy, the research strategy, and the school strategic plans) must be seen in the context of that document in the way they address those key features. Of course, the paper

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<sup>78</sup> See [Strategic Plan 2006/7—2008/9](#), pp 4-6.

was not meant to represent a new departure but to mark a new self-consciousness in the manner we go about our business.

114. The key Academic Board committee for quality enhancement is the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC).<sup>79</sup> LTC has developed considerably since the last audit and is now the principal forum through which the university initiates, monitors and evaluates a range of enhancement activities based on reflective practice, with a view to encouraging the dissemination of good practice in learning and teaching across the institution. It monitors progress each year against the learning and teaching sections of each school plan, taking updates towards the end of the academic year which in turn identify key objectives for the year ahead. The LTC mission speaks to its central role in quality enhancement: 'to determine an appropriate blend of activities to promote the learning and teaching of the institution, specifically with regard to BSU's positioning as a teaching-led university.' The committee's learning and teaching strategy is designed to meet the needs of BSU as a teaching-led university, with a particular emphasis on student-centred learning and on developing the skills, experiences and qualities in students that are integral to their future employability (key features identified in the 'ten characteristics of the teaching-led university').

### Good Practice

115. The Learning and Teaching Committee approved an enhancement strategy in October 2006 to cover the period 2006-09.<sup>80</sup> It needs to be read with regard to the institutional strategic plan and, in particular, the university learning and teaching strategy. In addition it makes reference, implicitly, to school operational plans and other key university strategic documents. It identifies salient features in each and plans for continuous and systematic improvement over its three year span: identifying lead persons and processes. Progress against its objectives will be reviewed by LTC midway through its life-cycle. In effect, it tabulates, formulates and makes explicit the university's diverse aspirations to continuous improvement. Because quality enhancement is evident in the defining culture of the university, the strategy places ownership of it across the institution: with both central committees and those involved directly with learners.

116. Some examples of LTC initiatives will clarify its role. Its learning and teaching strategy identified the need to develop a university-wide VLE in order to help students become independent and autonomous learners. The committee established in October 2005 a working group composed of VLE 'champions' from each of the academic schools to identify good practice, to manage day-to-day operation of the system in conjunction with Information Services and to keep the effectiveness of the chosen platform, Blackboard, under constant review. It has also proposed to LTC a development plan for the VLE (Minerva) which will allow for its systematic monitoring, evaluation and improvement. During their first year of activity, the VLE champions were supported by TQEF monies, giving them some relief from teaching. However, institutional priorities began to shift in the light of the university's relatively poor performance with respect to graduate employability. First, LTC sponsored employability improvement projects within each school aimed at raising awareness of the issue among the academic community and at

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<sup>79</sup> See [Membership and terms of reference](#), and [minutes and papers of LTC](#).

<sup>80</sup> See latest version of [Learning & Teaching Strategy](#) and the [annual operating plan 2007/8](#) received by LTC 11 December 2007.

developing good pedagogical practice which could be captured and disseminated across the institution. Then, in October 2006 TQEF monies were redeployed by their budget holder, the chair of the committee, from supporting VLE 'champions' in each school, to supporting the work of employability champions. The chair of the committee was not satisfied, however, that the process for reporting and evaluating these activities was adequate to the task and has now placed responsibility for the identifying and dissemination of the good practice they engender with the Academic Staff Development Co-Coordinator in the School of Development and Participation. The same is true of the university-wide Peer Observation of Teaching Scheme: LTC is committed to continuous improvement of the processes by which its own improvement activities can be systematically mapped and exploited. Further, LTC has developed a set of 'employability outcomes' which, in future, schools will need to demonstrate that their provision is delivering, and has also identified PDP as an area which needs to be addressed in this context. One of its objectives is to provide support for School Personal Academic Record Co-ordinators ('SPARCS') to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to fulfil the responsibilities of their new position.<sup>81</sup>

117. Artswork,<sup>82</sup> the university's CETL, has emerged as central to Bath Spa's strategy for enhancement (one of the objectives of the university learning and teaching strategy is 'to extend Artswork models of embedding employability in the curriculum to other subjects across the institution'). Its basic brief is to develop new methods of arts pedagogies which will address the themes of creativity, technology and employability and help to equip our arts graduates for the world of work. LTC is kept apprised of its progress by means of regular updates from its manager and by receiving its interim self-evaluation prepared for HEFCE, and has commissioned reports from its Senior Teaching Fellows on what they are learning as well as the activities they are engaged in. A principal objective for Artswork is to have a 'ripple effect' across the university, and it is on course to meet its planned milestones in this respect. Three schools (English and Creative Studies, Music and Performing Arts, Art and Design) and six subjects are at the core of Artswork, benefiting from the capital investment it has brought with it and engaging in the innovative learning and teaching it is developing. However, collaboration with Business Studies in the School of Social Sciences is now advancing, and the School of Historical Studies has customised the Artswork Learning in the Arts Student Questionnaire (aimed at building our knowledge about the career aspirations and expectations of students) in order to find out more about its own students. The initial results of that particular longitudinal study have been discussed at LTC (May 2007) and it will be kept informed of its findings as it is repeated. However, Artswork's most significant contribution to the university's enhancement agenda is in the way it has helped us reconceptualise the relationship of the careers service to the mainstream of our academic provision, to develop models for the way we interact with local businesses and business organisations, and to exploit our successful graduates as a resource.

### **Staff Development and Reward**

118. LTC has also played a central role in the university's processes for recognising and rewarding excellent teachers through its teaching fellowship scheme; again, addressing directly one of the key features of the 'ten characteristics

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<sup>81</sup> These initiatives can be tracked through [papers of the Learning & Teaching Committee](#).

<sup>82</sup> See [Artswork](#) website.

of the teaching-led university'. In the first instance, LTC developed and adopted (in May 2003) a set of criteria by which we might recognise excellent teaching.<sup>83</sup> A subgroup considers applications each year from candidates in three categories (experienced staff, rising stars, learning support staff) and makes recommendations to the Vice Chancellor for an award and an honorarium. The scheme has been extended by Artswork which employs Senior Teaching Fellows who have a specific role in leading on learning and teaching in each of its six Learning Labs. At the same time, LTC has recognised that the university has a responsibility to provide staff new to HE with the training and support necessary for them to become excellent teachers in the future. One of the objectives of the learning and teaching strategy is 'to provide new staff that do not possess a teaching qualification, or equivalent HE experience, with protected professional development in meeting the institutional requirement to take its in-house training programme. This protection to take the form of teaching relief equivalent to one module's contact time (45 hours) per year.'

119. In addition to its teaching fellowships, the university runs a parallel scheme for Promising Researchers: applicants are invited to apply against a set of criteria developed by the Research Consultancy and Scholarship Committee, and must demonstrate how their research – which needs to be of intrinsic merit—will also be instrumental in being of direct benefit to students. The Research Committee audits the University's research and scholarship each year 'through the curriculum'; that is to say, it is in a position to demonstrate systematically and annually that the research and scholarly activities of its staff are managed in order to enhance the curriculum and the student experience.

120. LTC has also played a prominent role in defining and refining the relationship between research and teaching so crucial to a teaching-led university. The 'ten characteristics', identified the need to build Bath Spa's capacity for pedagogical research. In 2006-2007 the university deployed HEFCE's 'research-informed teaching' funding in order to support, on a competitive basis, a range of pedagogical research projects across the institution: examples include the research and development of podcasting, and research into the needs of disabled students. LTC has commissioned an evaluation of the usefulness of those individual projects, as well as the effectiveness of the scheme as a whole and its potential for identifying transferable benefits across the curriculum. In the light of that evaluation (undertaken for the committee by one of the university's National Teaching Fellows who is also Artswork's head of pedagogical research and development) LTC will decide whether to continue with the scheme and to invite further bids from individual and staff teams, and whether or not to provide continuation funding for those projects which have made most progress against their declared objectives and promise maximum benefit for the university as a whole.

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<sup>83</sup> See 'Rewarding and recognising teaching excellence', LTC 30 May 2003, [Paper L30](#).

## 5. Collaborative Provision

### Framework for Collaborative Provision

121. Bath Spa University is committed to ensuring high quality for its teaching and learning provision wherever it may be located. Since the QAA Institutional Audit of 2003 the University has grown its collaborative provision, encouraged by the feedback in the Audit report, which highlighted as a feature of good practice 'the secure and collegial framework for managing collaborative provision'.<sup>84</sup> We have continued to apply high standards and sought improvement. One significant aspect of this is the development of 'University Centres': our first such centre opened at Weston College in this academic year. The funding and national policy context has made significant differences to the awards offered, Foundation Degrees replacing provision previously made by HNCs/HNDs and the first year of Honours Degrees.

122. The University's approach to its collaborative partners has always been to try to establish and encourage a sense of partnership. The University refers to the whole operation as the 'Wessex Partnership',<sup>85</sup> and its commitment to the development of the partnership is clearly stated in the University's strategic plan. There are now nine partner FECs, none more than one and a half hours' drive of the University, and 710 (584 FTE) registered students, almost 10% of the University's provision.

123. Day to day management of the partnership is vested in the University's School of Development and Participation (SDP). The head of the school has equal status with the heads of the other schools and is a member of the senior management team. He has an administrative team to assist him in this work. There are strong relationships with the conventional schools, where subject expertise is located, and where award standards are managed through assessment. The University makes no awards where there is no in-house expertise

124. University oversight of quality in the partnership work is the responsibility of AQSC, as with all other awards, but due to the specialised knowledge and experience needed in dealing with partner colleges, it delegates responsibility to a sub-committee for the direct consideration of quality assurance procedures as they affect awards in partner institutions. The membership is determined by AQSC and includes the Head of SDP (Chair), one member involved in partnership work from each University school, nominated by the Head of School, two quality managers of partnership FECS (on a rolling basis; each serving for 2 year term), and an external member with knowledge of collaborative provision. The current external member is the Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of Gloucestershire. The subcommittee meets twice a year (October and February). It is responsible to AQSC for keeping under review the operation of the Wessex Partnership, considering and making proposals on quality assurance activity in the context of the Wessex Partnership, keeping under review staffing and staff development activity related to BSU programmes in the Wessex partners. It reports regularly to AQSC. These arrangements are detailed in separate handbooks for students and staff involved with the Partnership.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> QAA, Bath Spa University College Institutional Audit. May 2003 (RG009 10/03) [Findings](#), paragraph 179 iv.

<sup>85</sup> See [Wessex Partnership website](#).

<sup>86</sup> See Wessex Partnership [Staff Handbook](#) and [Student Handbook](#).

125. The procedures complement and extend the arrangements made for 'home' provision, and include centre validations, memorandums of cooperation (with specific annexes for each programme at each partner FEC), annual reviews of provision in each partner college, and triennial inter-institutional reviews. This tendency to use essentially the same procedures, but with a rather 'heavier touch', is characteristic of our quality assurance arrangements with the Partnership – see also the comments on external examiners below.

126. The University considers that its arrangements provide clear management, and good administrative and clerical support. The School for Development and Participation constitutes the hub for staff at the University, FECs, and students: a 'one stop shop' for learners and tutors engaged with the partnership. It provides systematic support and management and provides the essential linkage to systems within our Schools, Academic Office, Registry and further education partners.

### **External examiners in collaborative provision**

127. All awards within the Wessex Partnership are governed by the same regulations and procedures as for 'home' provision, and where an award is taught both in the partner FECs and the University, the same external examiner is used. Where the award is provided only in the partner FEC, a discrete external examiner is appointed. All external examiners are appointed by the University in the same way, and the nomination for an external examiner in the second category above would be made by the school in which the analogous subject provision is located. The only significant difference in practice between University based provision and FEC based provision is that external examiners sample first year work in the case of the latter, but not the former.

### **Approval, monitoring and review of collaborative arrangements**

The approval of new partners in collaborative provision is governed by policy and guidance determined by the University's AQSC and requires a centre validation. Prior to this formal stage there will have been high level discussions with the partner and consideration of the strategy of respective institutions. Before the visit of a University validation panel the appropriate University School will have prepared a report which, along with the CVs of proposed tutors, provides the necessary information required by the visiting panel. Recently the validation panels have been supported by a proposer from each University School to inform their visits. The validation panel meets with a team from the partner that will include the Principal/Vice Principal, Quality Manger, Head of Library and Resources, and senior staff and tutors from the appropriate curriculum area.

128. The University conducts a centre validation for each new programme proposed with a partner since we wish to be assured that all partners, including long standing ones, meet the standards and levels of resources required by the University. LIS works closely with the School of Development and Participation to ensure that effective library provision exists in partner colleges. LIS staff from BSU visit all libraries which are part of collaborative arrangements. Responsibility for the quality of learning resources is delegated to the partner institution but LIS staff from BSU use a structured approach to ensure consistency across all libraries concerned.

129. Following the successful validation of a centre to deliver a collaborative programme, a Memorandum of Co-operation, or in the case of current partners, an annex for each new programme, is drawn up for signature by the Head of each institution. The Memorandum of Co-operation is closely informed by the QAA's code

of practice for collaborative provision. Amongst other things, it provides for the responsibility related to student complaints and the University's approval of publicity material. They are updated as necessary and are fully reviewed each three years. They are supported by a Financial Memorandum and an Administrative annex. Included in the Memorandum of Co-operation are identified links with the University school in which the subject expertise is located, and subject- and module links with the further education partners. We require link tutors in the University's schools to make a minimum of one visit per semester to each module provided at a further education partner and for this to include a meeting with students.<sup>87</sup> These meetings are monitored by the School of Development and Participation. To ensure that standards equivalent to those in the University are achieved and maintained, we require that one hundred percent of assessed work is moderated by a University tutor in the first year of collaboration for all new programmes. This can be reduced to the University's 'home' requirement of twenty percent over the subsequent two years, unless there is good reason to extend.

130. Each of the programmes within the Partnership is reviewed annually within a written framework developed from the QAA and HEFCE Codes of Practice. The reviews are conducted at the further education partner and normally last for two to three hours. They are chaired by the Head of the School for Development and Participation or another senior member of the University, with representatives of both institutions, including module coordinator(s) and student representation. The partner college will be represented by a member of their Senior Management Team, the Higher Education Coordinator and Tutor(s). They are a key part of the University's quality assurance and enhancement programme. They are formal events but we do try to conduct them with a rigorous but light touch and encourage all present to participate. Particular attention is given to the voice of the learner and two students are invited to attend the annual review meetings. We genuinely want feedback about the programmes and how they are performing, especially from the student representatives. These reviews are reported in writing to the AQSC Subcommittee for collaborative provision and thence to AQSC.

131. Every three years we conduct an extended review at each partner which looks beyond the subject programmes to the University-FEC relationship. Review teams normally consist of the Head of School for Development & Participation, the Projects Coordinator, and a member from another university with experience of collaborative provision. The role of the external member is to advise the University that arrangements are in place that match national norms and expectations and that standards and quality are being maintained. We also ask them to offer advice on the enhancement of the provision and to submit written comments. They will meet with a partner FEC team that includes a member of the FEC Senior Management Team, the Quality Manager, and the Head of Library and Resources. The date of the triennial review is determined by the date of the first programme validated with the further education partner. The triennial review incorporates the annual programme review in the year in which it occurs. A written report of the meeting is submitted for approval to the Academic Quality and Standards (AQSC) subcommittee for collaborative sub degree provision, and then to AQSC. Following consideration of the report the Memorandum of Cooperation is amended or extended as required.

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<sup>87</sup> See [Guidelines for Tutor Visits](#).

## Staff Development

132. Supporting the Wessex Partnership is a programme of staff development.<sup>88</sup> The School for Development and Participation organises a staff development event each semester for colleagues from the University and the further education partners. These events have more recently embraced areas that include assessment, IT training and support, mentoring, and student support. At least half of each daily event is given to the respective subject teams to conduct their own joint activities, including development of the curriculum. These events are well attended and have received very positive evaluations from participants. In addition, The School has facilitated workshops to meet particular needs as they arise. In July 2007, it organised a successful workshop 'Implementing Integrated Quality & Enhancement Review' for senior managers in the University and the partner colleges.

133. We have been encouraged by the quality of staff in the further education partners. Monitoring and reviews indicate they have good teaching and learning skills and many are qualified to high levels. We have promoted masters and research programmes at the University for tutors from partner further education colleges.

## Curriculum Development

134. Joint curriculum development is encouraged between University and partner FEC tutors. As the portfolio of Foundation Degrees has increased in the Partnership we have given greater importance to this area. We believe this both benefits the student experience and reflects the changing interface between HE and FE. Many of the recent Foundation Degrees in the creative sectors have been developed jointly. In addition, the Foundation Degree Early Years is a good example of an award developed by University tutors with a team drawn from the six partner colleges. These joint developments in the University's Schools are complemented by Wessex Staff Development Days. This has proved invaluable for collaborative curriculum design and development, from the design of new modules to changes to existing modules.

## Student Support

135. Students and staff are provided annually with handbooks that provide essential information about the Partnership, and where further information is available.<sup>89</sup> Students are full members of the University community, entitled to any and all facilities enjoyed by 'home' students. In addition, SDP organizes a number of events to support the students within the Partnership. These events include Induction Days, Module Choice Days, Library Induction and Summer Schools for progressing students. Key to the success of these days is the employment, as Student Ambassadors, of our undergraduates.

136. Staff and students within the Wessex Partnership are increasingly encouraged to use the University's electronic systems, in particular, for on-line registration, submission of course work and the VLE. In order to provide additional training and support in these systems a member of School for Development & Participation organises training visits to the partner colleges, as well as a responsive

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<sup>88</sup> See Wessex Partnership: [Staff Development](#).

<sup>89</sup> See footnote 86 above.

telephone service for problems as they arise. In addition, a Registration Assistant is employed for three months, August to October, to support the colleges and students in the registration systems.

### **Academic Infrastructure**

137. The procedure for approvals of the content and structure of programmes delivered in partnership is the same as for all other approvals, and the way in which such programmes relate to the FHEQ and subject benchmarks is dealt with in the normal course of approval, as detailed above. In addition, the academic infrastructure is a reference point for centre approval, when new partnerships come on board, and for triennial review. SDP is responsible to AQSC for assuring the University that it is meeting the requirements of the 'Collaboration' section of the QAA Code of Practice and its updates.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> See Code of Practice area of the website, [Collaborative Provision](#).

## 6. Postgraduate research students

### Framework for management of postgraduate research student programmes

138. Comprehensive and detailed description of the University's arrangements for research degree provision were outlined in the University's submission to the QAA Special Review of postgraduate research programmes<sup>91</sup> (2005) and in our Research Degree Awarding Powers application<sup>92</sup> (2006), which remain current. Detailed regulations and procedures are within the University's Research Degree Handbook.<sup>93</sup>

139. Responsibility for the quality assurance of postgraduate research programmes lies with the University's Higher Degrees (Research) Committee (HDRC), a sub-committee of the Academic Board chaired by the Head of Graduate School, who, through the Graduate School, is responsible for the overall management of research degree programmes at the University. All academic schools are represented on the committee by designated higher degrees tutors, each of whom is responsible for reporting back to, and from, their own school board. Library and Information Services are also represented on the committee, ensuring that resource issues affecting postgraduate research students are fully considered. Quality assurance is articulated in regulatory form through the University's Research Degree Handbook, formally updated each year by Higher Degrees Committee, and the relevant processes are summarised within an 'Outline of Processes' handbook.<sup>94</sup> As well as being a regulatory framework the 'Research Degree Handbook' is also, in effect, a code of practice, articulating expectations and responsibilities. A student-friendly digest is issued as a 'Welcome to BSU' handbook.<sup>95</sup>

### University of the West of England and Higher Degrees

140. BSU regulations and processes are congruent with the regulations, ordinances and procedures governing research degree students at UWE. A UWE Code of Practice for research degrees has been in force since 2005-6, and applies to BSU registered students. Two UWE representatives sit on the Higher Degrees Committee ensuring continuous dialogue between the two Universities.

141. As is the case for UWE faculties, the University has delegated powers from UWE for the assurance of admission, registration and management procedures with respect to research degree programmes. Admission decisions are the responsibility of the academic schools, with the application and admission processes managed by the Graduate School, but the Higher Degrees Committee retains an overview of both registration and overall progress management. Higher Degrees Committee is responsible for agreeing the registration of each student (including their supervisory

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<sup>91</sup> See [BSU submission to the QAA Special Review of postgraduate research programmes](#).

<sup>92</sup> See [BSU Application for Research Degree Awarding Powers](#).

<sup>93</sup> See [Research Degree Handbook](#).

<sup>94</sup> See [Outline of Processes](#) handbook.

<sup>95</sup> See [Welcome to BSU handbook](#) and similar documents in the [PhD Study Information](#) section of Minerva.

team) through the 'application to register' process, and receives notification of all progression reports. Higher Degrees Committee also receives an overall report on the annual progress monitoring process. Higher Degrees Committee is responsible for formal approval of requests for changes in mode of study, changes of research programme (where these deviate substantially from a formerly agreed application to register), changes within the supervisory team, and extension or suspension of studies. The committee also receives notification of student withdrawals, including, where given by the student, reasons. Each meeting receives a summary of the current status of the general research degree population. The committee also considers and approves examination teams, although final approval is by UWE Registry.

### The research environment

142. Our recent RDAP application (section 3) contained comprehensive detail on: staff qualifications; performance in RAE; external awards and prizes for research and scholarship; staff activity with respect to subject associations, learned societies and professional bodies; research experience with other organisations; and indicators of national and international standing. In addition, it also outlined the academic environment in which research degree supervision is carried out and staff development opportunities with respect to research degree supervision. Also detailed were the mechanisms by which the University monitors aspects of the research environment.

143. The University can point to a range of external confirmations of the ability of its staff to sustain a vibrant research environment. The University performed well in the 1992, 1996 and 2001 RAEs, our results in all three exercises standing good comparison with the best third of universities in the post-92 sector. The 2006 *THES* 'league tables' rated Bath Spa 22/57 of the post-92 universities by average RAE score per member of academic staff.<sup>96</sup> By a more sophisticated measure of 'Research Quality', the *Sunday Times* 2006 league tables rated Bath Spa 10= (with Plymouth) of the 66 new universities listed for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.<sup>97</sup> By these three external, independent and different measures of research quality, Bath Spa is deemed to have a quality of research output situated securely in the top half or third of the post-92 universities.

144. Since our RDAP submission the PGCert in Research Degree Supervision and Research Management has been approved. Twelve staff members are currently undertaking the research degree supervision module in advance of, or concurrent with, their first appointment as a research degree supervisor.

145. With respect to the research environment provided to research students academic schools closely align their teaching (PhD supervision is included in this category) to areas of demonstrable scholarly strength (including gaining external grants) within the schools, and carefully manage developments and growth through strategic planning. 95% of our supervisors are in departments that gained at least national recognition (2 or above) at the last RAE. The remaining 5% are in an area that has developed since RAE2001 (Psychology) but which is entered in RAE2008.

146. All academic schools provide appropriate research seminar (or equivalent) activities open to research students. Some schools (e.g. Art and Design, Music and

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<sup>96</sup> *THES*, 09 June 2006, p. 18.

<sup>97</sup> See [Sunday Times](#) league tables 2006.

Performing Arts, Historical and Cultural Studies, Social Sciences) enhance this by affording opportunities for research students to engage with postgraduate taught students following taught courses in related areas through joint activities or through the 60-credit requirement (see below) for research students. PhD study is also closely aligned to Masters provision in the School of English and Creative Studies (particularly in Creative Writing where we have a substantial cohort of PhD students), where PhD 'master classes' supplement similar activity for postgraduate taught students. Creative Writing has also taken advantage of an AHRC collaborative research training provision award (with the University of Plymouth). The School of Science and the Environment has a mandatory PGCert in Applied Research Skills for all enrolling students, offering dedicated research student workshops. School-specific research degree handbooks, including information on the general research environment of the school, are provided in all schools.

147. Most full-time students are provided with office facilities within their schools, and all those with laboratory needs have lab facilities. All students have access to all routine resources within the school (including photocopying) as well as to specialist resources (laboratories in both Science and Social Science, and studios in Creative Music Technology and Art and Design) required for their studies. We encourage extensive pre-application dialogue with applicants (below) and this ensures that we do not offer places to students for whom we cannot provide necessary specialist resources or an appropriate research environment. Heads of School (who have overall responsibility for resource management) are asked to confirm provision of adequate resources at the admission and application to registration stages.

148. At institutional level the Graduate School facilitates interaction between students via its support workshop and seminar series and has a dedicated (i.e. not otherwise timetabled) room for the purpose. The Graduate School also provides for engagement with the wider research community via a travel conference fund which, in recent years, has provided opportunities for students to give papers at conferences within the UK, South Africa, Greece and Ireland. UWE workshops are also available allowing cross-institutional interaction between students. The Graduate School also maintains the PhD virtual learning area which provides discussion boards, a calendar of events, and general student support materials.

149. The institution also has a policy of appointing external supervisors (from other UK HEIs) where such expertise clearly benefits the overall supervisory team. This also promotes interaction with external research groups and associated activity (as, for example in the case of our Psychology department where there are supervisory links with a related research group at the University of Bristol, and our students attend their group seminars).

150. The University has an extensive suite of open-access computer areas, but research students (particularly part-timers who are not facilitated within the schools) also have use of a dedicated research student computer room in The Graduate School.

151. All research students have the same library access and borrowing rights as staff, allowing them unlimited inter-library loans. They may also use UWE and other University libraries (including with borrowing rights) through the SCONUL Research Extra scheme. As with all students they have access to welfare and careers provision. Academic advice regarding careers is also available to students via support workshops. Research degree students may also attend staff development IT workshops and attend sessions related to our in-house 'new lecturer' qualification. Research students undertaking lecturing duties are inducted and mentored in the same way as any other new hourly-paid part-time lecturer.

152. Further detail on institutional arrangements and research environment can be found in our QAA Special review submission (sections 1 and 2) and in our RDAP submission (sections 2 and 3)

### **Selection, admission, induction and supervision of research students**

153. Our QAA Special review submission (sections 3 and 4) covered these aspects in detail. To summarise, selection and admission are the responsibility of the academic school with the Graduate School coordinating and managing the process and ensuring that minimum entry qualifications and other admission criteria as articulated in the Research Degree Handbook are met. Interviews are always by panel. Full registration for a research degree is a two-stage process. A student is first enrolled as an 'advanced postgraduate student' following successful application and interview. Within 3-6 months of enrolling a comprehensive 'application to register' form, containing the scope, aims, method(s) and timetable of the proposed research project plus details of the proposed supervisory team, is submitted to the Higher Degrees (Research) Committee.

154. Induction also consists of a two-stage process; first a comprehensive induction pack is sent to newly enrolled students by The Graduate School; second induction at school level is done by proposed supervisors. All newly enrolled students are also invited to meet individually the Head of Graduate School who introduces them to the work of the Graduate School and answers any initial queries arising at an early stage. They are also invited to meet with the relevant library tutor to discuss library facilities for research students. A number of workshops provided by the Graduate School are also 'induction' workshops, designed specifically for students in their initial research phase.

155. All students are supervised by supervisory 'teams' of two or three. Members of the team are confirmed in writing to the student on enrolment. One member of the team must have successfully supervised to completion at the appropriate level (MPhil or PhD), the so-called 'qualifying supervisor', and one member of the team is designated as the student's Director of Study, a designation which makes that individual responsible for overall management of the research degree (liaising with Graduate School, ensuring application to register/progression assessment/annual reports are submitted etc). The Director of Study need not necessarily be the lead academic supervisor, although in most teams this is also the case. An external supervisor may be appointed where their expertise is of obvious value to the student project, but an external supervisor may not be designated as a Director of Study. Although the supervisory team details are given to the student at enrolment the formal appointment of the team is at the 'Application to Registration' stage where Higher Degrees (Research) Committee considers the appropriateness of the supervisory team for the proposed project. As outlined above, all 'new' supervisors must take a mandatory credit-bearing staff development module in research degree supervision.

### **Progress and review arrangements**

156. Progress and review arrangements are detailed in our QAA Special Review submission (section 5). There are four principal mechanisms by which progress is formally monitored and reviewed by the University. These are:

- 'The application to register' stage, as detailed above, through which the early stages of research and a comprehensive plan of the research project is required by HD(R)C. If progress and planning are adequate

committee approves full registration; if either is deemed as requiring more work the application is refused and a resubmission required.

- The '60 credit requirement'. The requirement credit-rates part of the PhD and is linked with research skill and development needs of each individual student for the project proposed. A student may, for example, be required to undertake some appropriate taught provision (perhaps a research methodology module and specialist subject module from a taught masters programme), or individually negotiated modules. The submission of work for formal assessment is required in all such cases.
- The 'progression assessment' stage which requires each student to submit a paper on their research for consideration by a panel which must include at least two people independent of the research project. This stage occurs at 12 months for full-time students or at around 24 months part-time. The recommendation of the panel is formally recorded at HD(R)C.
- Annual reporting. Each year, all students and supervisory teams are required to independently report on general progress over the past year to their relevant school higher degrees tutor. The tutor is responsible for producing an overview report for their school and to HD(R)C.

157. Progress is also, of course, monitored by supervisors. Since 2004 the University has issued a student-log book' in which students are advised to record outcomes of supervisory meetings and provide copies to their supervisors. However, review of this has shown that this system has not proved effective, and the Graduate School is currently exploring web-based software (e.g. PebblePad) which may be used to record supervisory meetings formally as well as provide a PDP platform for research students. We hope in this way to address a concern expressed by our research degree awarding powers assessors.

### **Development of research and other skills**

158. These are detailed in our QAA Special Review submission (section 6). To summarise, the range of BSU and UWE workshops has been designed to map closely to the Joint Skills Statement of the Research Councils and students are directed toward this via their 'Welcome' booklet and the student log book. Further information is available for supervisors via the Supervisors Handbook. Although these are not compulsory individual students may be obliged to undertake an appropriate selection (according to their individual needs and the needs of their proposed project) as part of their negotiated 60-credit requirement. UWE also provide a UK-GRAD equivalent residential course to which all BSU students are invited to apply. At school level each school offers a research seminar series (or equivalent) at which students are expected to present papers at appropriate stages of their project.

159. Identification and review of students' development and training needs are on-going throughout registration and formally recorded at the 'application to register' stage and each year through annual reporting. Opportunities for personal reflection on progress and development are provided by the student log-book, although as noted above the replacement of this by a web-based system is currently being explored.

160. Postgraduate research students who are offered teaching duties are treated in the same manner as all other hourly-paid staff.

## Feedback arrangements

161. Feedback arrangements are detailed in our QAA Special Review submission (section 7).<sup>98</sup> In summary, students are represented through formal school committees outlined in paragraph 169. Any issues raised through these means will be formally minuted and, where necessary, action proposed. The annual reporting process provides for general feedback from all students as well as progress reporting, and a summary is presented to Higher Degrees Committee each year by each School. Each academic school has a designated higher degrees tutor and students are aware that they can contact their school tutor, Head of School or the Head of Graduate School, in confidence if wished, at any time. Less formal means are provided through Graduate School seminar and workshop provision and through an anonymous posting system on the University's Minerva area for postgraduate research students.

162. Staff views are represented by designated school higher degrees tutors who are members of their school board and the school research committee (or equivalent). Each tutor also represents the school on the Higher Degrees Committee. General feedback on developments/issues is therefore facilitated via dialogue between schools and the Higher Degrees Committee. The Head of Graduate School receives all school board minutes, and can respond to research degree related matters as necessary. School reports are submitted annually to the Higher Degrees Committee and are important in providing for dialogue between schools.

163. Supervisors may also provide feedback through the annual reporting cycle, a summary of which is reported at the last Higher Degrees Committee meeting of each academic year, and through supervisor workshops run as part of the staff development PGCert. The Head of Graduate School also attends school 'away-day' sessions related to postgraduate research issues as invited. Supervisors have discussion board facilities, including a feedback board, via the VLE PhD Supervisor 'space' which provides for anonymous postings. Staff can freely contact the Head of Graduate School, in confidence if necessary, at any time.

164. Currently, viva examinations are administered by the UWE Research Degree and Registry Office. The final recommendation reports for BSU students are, however, also forwarded to the Head of Graduate School. Naturally, feedback from these is usually restricted to the individual thesis examined, and not on the examination process generally. Examiners are, however, invited to comment upon the general examination process and where this is done it is reported to the UWE Research Degree Examining Board of which the BSU Head of Graduate School is a member. To date no examiner has raised any concern about the examination process.

165. The University does not currently have any students sponsored by a research council other than the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and all of these are in the Creative Writing or History subject areas. Both departments' training provision statements to AHRC were deemed acceptable by the Council. Feedback from graduates is now sought through an 'exit' questionnaire for completed research students.

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<sup>98</sup> See [QAA Special Review submission](#).

## The assessment of research students

166. Detailed explanation of the assessment procedures for research degree students are contained in our QAA Special Review submission (section 8). Examiners are formally proposed by the Director of Study to the Higher Degrees (Research) Committee. Examination teams normally consist of an external and an internal examiner. However, where a candidate has an employment contract of more than 12 months duration with either UWE or BSU a second external examiner is also required. Examining teams are expected to normally have an aggregate experience of four examinations at the level for which they are being proposed as examiners. Proposals are made using a standard document, and each examiner must submit a standard CV, outlining inter alia their affiliation, qualifications, research interests and publications, experience of supervision, and examining of research degrees. All examiners are asked to declare any previous knowledge of the project being examined and/or contact with the student concerned. The internal examiner must not have been involved with the student's previous progression assessment. The examination proposal must also recommend an independent chair drawn from a list of trained staff.

167. If Higher Degrees (Research) Committee approves the examination team the proposal is also sent to UWE Registry for final approval. Both Higher Degrees (Research) Committee and UWE Registry are empowered to reject a proposed examination team if it is deemed as not sufficiently experienced or appropriate for the thesis being examined. There is an emphasis on approving examiners as far in advance of submission as is practicable in order to minimise delays between submission and viva, and a measure of the effectiveness of this is that the average time between submission and viva is about two and a half months.

168. Following approval of examiners, the examination process is entirely managed by the Research Degrees office at UWE, who are responsible for sending official appointment letters to the examiners and sending out the submitted thesis, although theses are always submitted to UWE via the BSU Graduate School. Examiners are provided with a copy of the relevant UWE regulations and a preliminary report form which must be submitted back to the Research Degree Office indicating whether or not, in the view of each examiner, there is a *prima facie* case for the viva to proceed. If there is, examiners are sent a recommendation form which must jointly be completed, following viva, stating the outcome. If amendments are to be made, the examiners must provide the Research Degrees Office with a jointly agreed list of those amendments for onward transmission to the candidate. Copies of all these documents are also lodged with the Graduate School at BSU.

## Representations, complaints and appeals arrangements for research students

169. Membership of the University's Higher Degrees Committee includes provision for a research degree student representative, currently a student from Art and Design. At the beginning of each academic year the research degree student body is asked to nominate (including self-nominate) a representative to attend the non-confidential part of Higher Degrees Committee meetings (confidential parts of the meeting discuss individual students), and to be available for discussion with the Head of Graduate School outside of meetings as/when necessary. In the case of two or more expressions of interest a ballot is held. Student representative contact details are forwarded to all research degree students.

170. When a student representative is present at Higher Degrees Committee the agenda has a standing item: 'student matters'. All seven academic schools also have research degree student representation on an appropriate school committee. Individual students also have an opportunity to express views via the annual reporting process. Where student concerns are of an individual nature, the student would be contacted by the relevant postgraduate tutor. Any 'themes' emerging from the annual reports as a whole are presented to the last meeting of the Higher Degrees Committee in the academic year. Students are also provided with discussion boards (allowing anonymous postings) via Minerva

171. Students are made aware at induction (and through allied literature (e.g. the 'Welcome' handbook) that the school higher degree tutors and/or Head of Graduate School are available for discussion, in confidence, whenever necessary.

172. The definitive version of the University's complaints procedure is freely available online.<sup>99</sup> Research degree students are made aware of the procedure via the Research Degree Handbook. Students are strongly encouraged to refer problems in the first instance to relevant parties (supervisors, Head of School, Head of Graduate School) but may resort to the formal complaints procedure if a resolution is not found. There have been no formal complaints by research degree students in the last 5 years.

173. Appeals can be made against the outcome of the Progression Assessment or termination of registration. In both cases, appeals are under BSU jurisdiction. The definitive version of the institutional appeals procedure is freely available online,<sup>100</sup> and is reproduced in the Research Degree Handbook. Termination of registration by the University is only contemplated after serious, documented, neglect of studies by an individual student and extended dialogue between the academic schools, Graduate School and, wherever possible, the student involved. In such cases, the termination is ratified by the Higher Degrees Committee, which acts as the *de facto* examination board. Any student whose registration was terminated by the University would be informed of their right to appeal, and a copy of the appeals procedure supplied to them.

174. Appeals can also be made against the decision of the examiners. Such appeals are under UWE jurisdiction, and the relevant regulations are provided in full to students in the Research Degree Handbook. There have been no appeals by BSU research degree students in the last 5 years.

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<sup>99</sup> See [Complaints Procedure](#).

<sup>100</sup> See [Appeals Procedure](#).

## 7. Published information

### The institution's approach to ensuring the accuracy and completeness of published information

175. A systematic drafting and approval process for printed and electronic published information ensures that information is accurate and complete. Individual course leaders and service heads provide information on, for example, course or services to students, and submit it to the Marketing Department in the required format. After editing and design work the information is returned to the relevant staff for approval/amendment, and then signed off by the Head of Marketing and Communications. The main University prospectuses (from which the website derives its main outward-facing content) are also given final approval by the Deputy Vice Chancellor responsible.

176. The University has provided all information required to the Unistats website. On the other hand the University has a demonstrable policy of openness with its stakeholders. Many of its self-evaluation documents are published in the public areas of the website: see for instance its [Application for University Title](#) (November 2004)<sup>101</sup> or its [Application for Research Degree Awarding Powers](#) (November 2006).<sup>102</sup> We have also published the outcomes from internal student satisfaction surveys without password protection.<sup>103</sup>

### Accuracy and completeness of published information

177. Completeness of information is ensured through market research/focus groups with current and potential students, which informs the content of the various publications. Accuracy is ensured through the process described above. Publicity and marketing materials are supplied to periodic review teams, who are able to comment on the extent to which they are effective in informing students about programmes. Arrangements for external comment on programme specifications are detailed above.

178. Key statistical data (e.g. NSS results) are included in various publications and students are directed to relevant external sources for further, more detailed information.

### Students' experience of published information and other information available to them

179. Evidence suggests that students find our published material useful. We conduct a 'New Starters Survey' annually. In 2007, students found the communication that made most impact on their decision to come to Bath Spa was the Prospectus (83%), and next the University website (51%).

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<sup>101</sup> See [Application for University Title](#) (November 2004).

<sup>102</sup> See [Application for Research Degree Awarding Powers](#) (November 2006).

<sup>103</sup> See for instance material from the [2004 and 2005 student satisfaction surveys](#).

180. This survey enabled us also to gauge the impact of our other written communications as follows:

	Very poor	Poor	Neither	Good	Very good	Didn't receive it
'What happens next' brochure	0%	1%	9%	52%	27%	12%
'Joining instructions'	0%	1%	9%	49%	32%	9%
'Welcome' booklet	0%	1%	9%	50%	31%	9%

181. We also surveyed those who turned us down. Even of these, 77% were satisfied with the quality of communications received from Bath Spa, and only 6% dissatisfied; 17% felt they had no effect.

182. Regular informal feedback is also gathered from both potential and current students on publications. This year, for example, the Widening Participation Officer write that: 'Three Access learners made a point of speaking to me about the web pages on my annual visit to the Yeovil Access Course. They complimented us on the standard of information in the pages and how easy it was to navigate around the site and find the information that they were seeking. They thought it was one of the best university sites they had visited.'

## Appendix A: Student numbers 2007/8

Unit of internal review	Subjects	FTE 2007-8	Total FTE	% total FTE	JACS code
Art & Design	Art	103.07	886.02	16.26	W
	Art Foundation	0.00			W
	Ceramics	52.68			W
	Contextual Studies	93.52			
	Creative Arts (AR/TD)	21.50			W
	Digital Design	53.20			
	Fine Art	164.36			W
	Graphic Design	208.41			W
	Multimedia	3.20			W
Textile Design Studies	186.08	W			
Business Studies	Business & Management	208.63	208.63	3.83	N
CPD (TTA)	PMP (INSET)	327.34	327.34	6.01	X
CPD (non-TTA)	Lifelong Learning (PCET)	76.42	89.62	1.64	X
	Other (inc Counselling)	13.20			X
Media Communications and Cultural Studies	Cultural Studies	81.84	265.01	4.86	V
	Film & Screen Studies	55.50			
	Media Communication	126.67			P
	Visual Culture	1.00			W
Dance and Drama	Creative Arts (DA/DS)	1.67	406.83	7.47	W
	Dance	98.83			W
	Drama Studies	111.00			W
	Performing Arts	189.33			
	Theatre Production	6.00			
D&T/Food Studies	Design & Technology	5.75	90.25	1.66	W
	Food Studies	84.50			D
Education	Education	571.44	571.44	10.49	X
English	Broadcast Media	22.00	606.18	11.12	
	Creative Arts (CW)	1.17			W
	Creative Studies	304.47			Q
	English	268.87			Q
	Publishing	9.67			
Environmental Biology	Environmental Biology	62.42	62.42	1.15	C
Geography	Geography	161.97	195.97	3.60	F
	Remote Sensing/GIS	34.00			F
Health	Health Studies	62.97	62.97	1.16	L
History	History	201.34	203.34	3.73	V
	Irish Studies	2.00			V
HNC/HND Weston	HNC/D Counselling	19.43	23.45	0.43	N
	HNC/D Environmental Health	4.02			G
Music	Commercial Music	134.80	391.67	7.19	W
	Creative Arts (MU)	1.50			W
	Creative Music Technology	121.20			W
	Music	134.17			W
Primary ITT	Primary PGCE	245.00	245.00	4.50	X
Psychology	Psychology	198.23	198.23	3.64	C
Secondary/Middle ITT	Middle PGCE	75.27	263.27	4.83	X
	Secondary PGCE	188.00			
Sociology	Sociology	116.51	116.51	2.14	L
Study of Religions	Cultural Astronomy	3.40	117.93	2.16	
	Philosophy & Ethics	29.67			
	Study of Religions	84.86			V
	Vocational Skills	117.50	117.50	2.16	
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5449.58</b>	<b>5449.58</b>	<b>100.00</b>	

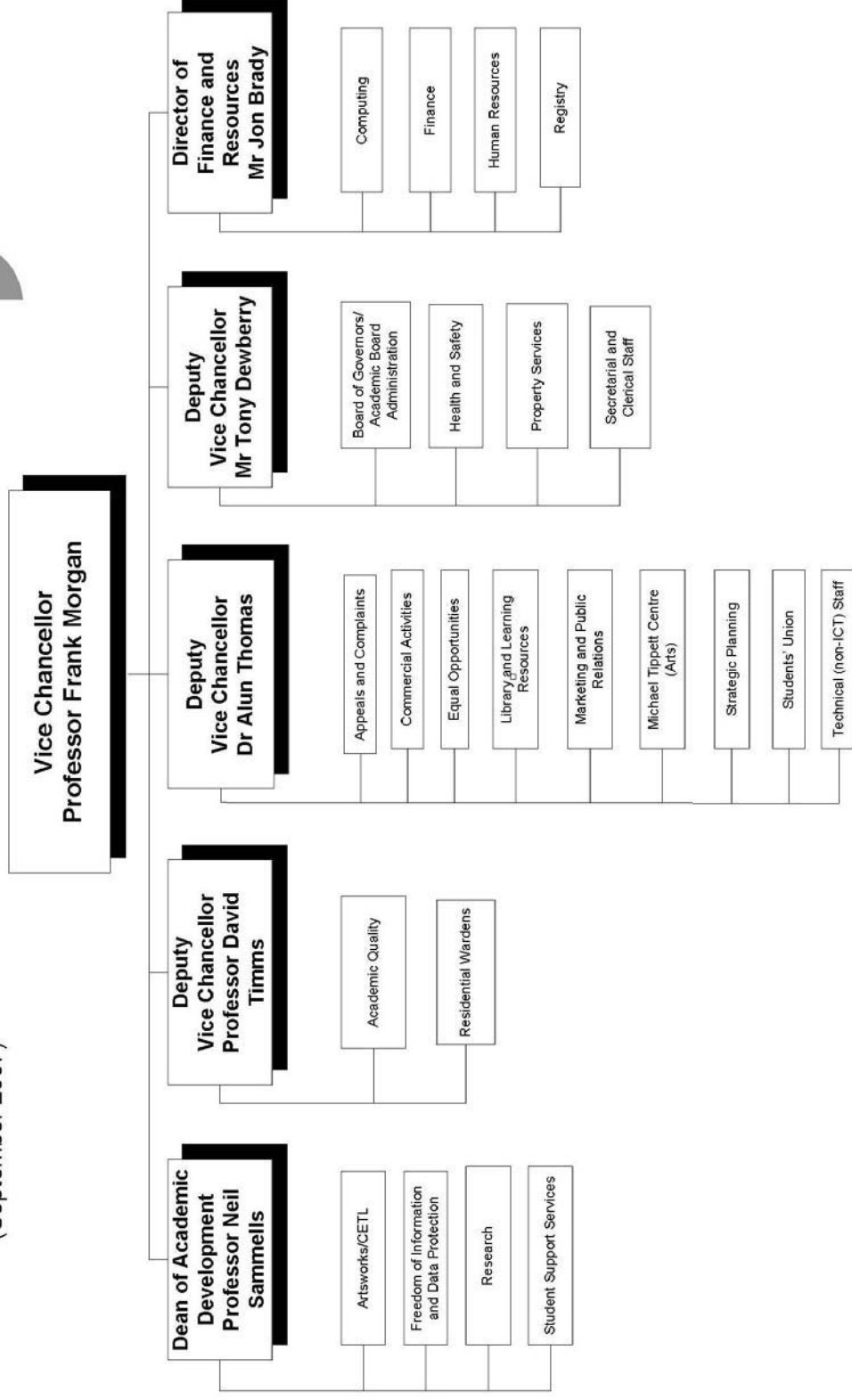
## Appendix B: Student Numbers in Wessex Partnership Colleges

<b>Award</b>		<b>Partner College</b>	<b>Y1</b>	<b>Y2</b>	
<b>Foundation Degrees</b>	Early Years	Bath	19	12	
		Bristol	31	26	
			Cirencester	6	0
			New College Swindon	14	10
			Weston	15	9
		Applied Art and Design	Weston	21	26
		Performing Arts	Weston	28	22
		Tourism Management	Weston	14	10
		Health and Social Care	New College Swindon	5	11
		Digital Technologies/Interactive Design	Bath	31	BSU
	Teacher Assistants	Norton Radstock	20	22	
		Salisbury	5		
	Management Systems	Norton Radstock	10		
	Fashion Design/ Textiles	Bath	15	BSU	
	Broadcast Media	Weston	6	5	
	Graphic Design	Weston	24		
	Music Production	Weston	13		
	Popular Music	Weston	8		
	Counselling	Weston	15		
<b>Combined Awards</b>	English/Sociology/Psychology	New College Swindon	4	BSU	
<b>HNCs/HNDs</b>	Counselling	Weston		17	
	Environmental Health	Weston		4	
<b>FE Teacher Training</b>		Bridgwater	11	12	
		Norton Radstock	0	11	
		Weston	19	14	
		Weymouth	0	13	
		Wiltshire	12	14	

# Appendix C: Line management responsibilities

## Vice Chancellor's Executive Group

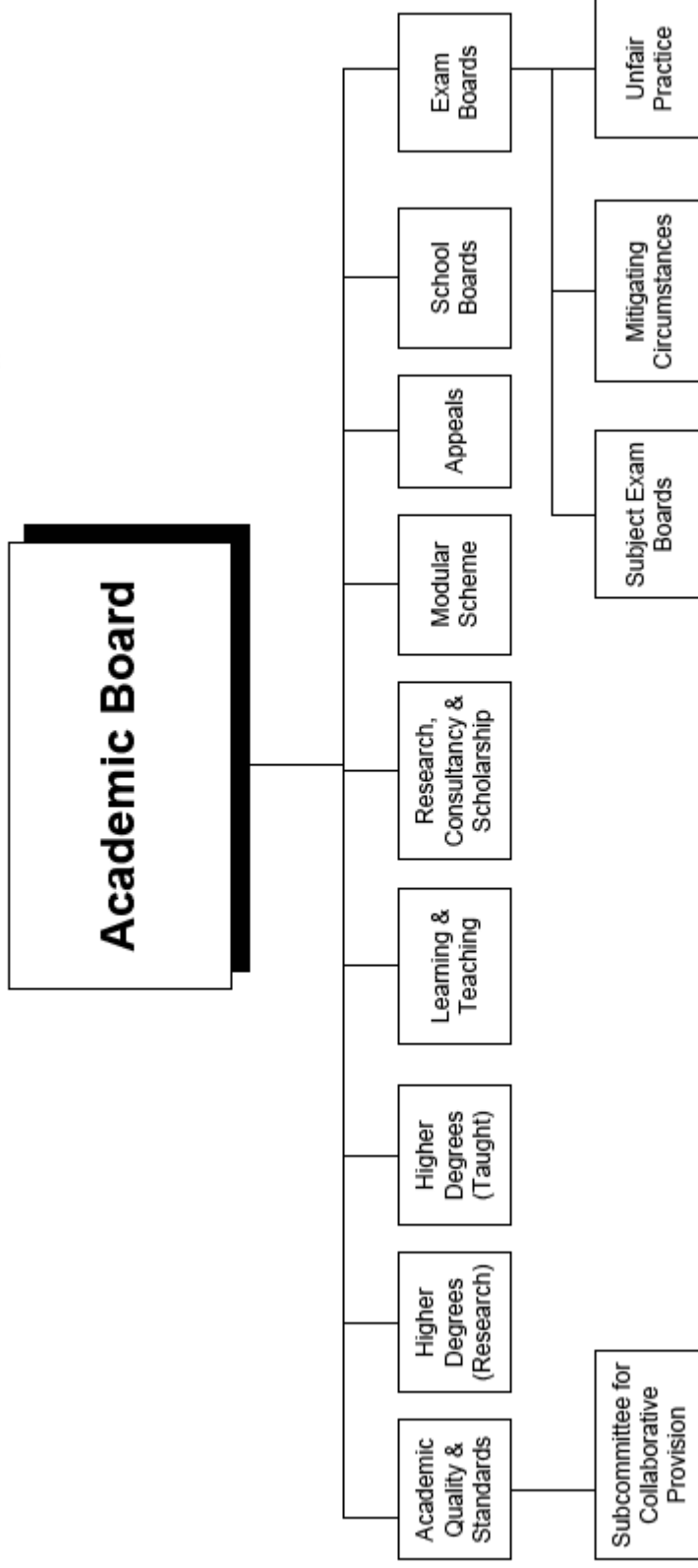
(September 2007)



(See also [narrative version](#))

## Appendix D: Academic Board Committees

### Subcommittees of Academic Board (April 2006)



(See also [narrative version](#))