Coventry University

APRIL 2004

Institutional audit

Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the Agency) exists to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education (HE) qualifications and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of HE.

To do this the Agency carries out reviews of individual HE institutions (universities and colleges of HE). In England and Northern Ireland this process is known as institutional audit. The Agency operates similar but separate processes in Scotland and Wales.

The purpose of institutional audit

The aims of institutional audit are to meet the public interest in knowing that universities and colleges are:

- providing HE, awards and qualifications of an acceptable quality and an appropriate academic standard; and
- exercising their legal powers to award degrees in a proper manner.

Judgements

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

- the **confidence** that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards;
- the **reliance** that can reasonably be placed on the accuracy, integrity, completeness and frankness of the information that the institution publishes, and about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards.

These judgements are expressed as either **broad confidence**, **limited confidence** or **no confidence** and are accompanied by examples of good practice and recommendations for improvement.

Nationally agreed standards

Institutional audit uses a set of nationally agreed reference points, known as the 'academic infrastructure', to consider an institution's standards and quality. These are published by the Agency and consist of:

- *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (*FHEQ*), which include descriptions of different HE qualifications;
- The *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*;
- subject benchmark statements, which describe the characteristics of degrees in different subjects;
- guidelines for preparing programme specifications, which are descriptions of the what is on offer to students in individual programmes of study. They outline the intended knowledge, skills, understanding and attributes of a student completing that programme. They also give details of teaching and assessment methods and link the programme to the FHEQ.

The audit process

Institutional audits are carried out by teams of academics who review the way in which institutions oversee their academic quality and standards. Because they are evaluating their equals, the process is called 'peer review'.

The main elements of institutional audit are:

- a preliminary visit by the Agency to the institution nine months before the audit visit;
- a self-evaluation document submitted by the institution four months before the audit visit;
- a written submission by the student representative body, if they have chosen to do so, four months before the audit visit;
- a detailed briefing visit to the institution by the audit team five weeks before the audit visit;
- the audit visit, which lasts five days;
- the publication of a report on the audit team's judgements and findings 20 weeks after the audit visit.

The evidence for the audit

In order to obtain the evidence for its judgement, the audit team carries out a number of activities, including:

- reviewing the institution's own internal procedures and documents, such as regulations, policy statements, codes of practice, recruitment publications and minutes of relevant meetings, as well as the self-evaluation document itself;
- reviewing the written submission from students;
- asking questions of relevant staff;
- talking to students about their experiences;
- exploring how the institution uses the academic infrastructure.

The audit team also gathers evidence by focusing on examples of the institution's internal quality assurance processes at work using 'audit trails'. These trails may focus on a particular programme or programmes offered at that institution, when they are known as a 'discipline audit trail'. In addition, the audit team may focus on a particular theme that runs throughout the institution's management of its standards and quality. This is known as a 'thematic enquiry'.

From 2004, institutions will be required to publish information about the quality and standards of their programmes and awards in a format recommended in document 02/15 *Information on quality and standards in higher education* published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The audit team reviews progress towards meeting this requirement.

All the Agency's publications are available on our web site www.qaa.ac.uk

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Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the Agency) visited Coventry University (the University) from 26 to 30 April 2004 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's programmes of study and on the academic standards of its awards.

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

The words 'academic standards' are used to describe the level of achievement that a student has to reach to gain an academic award (for example, a degree). It should be at a similar level across the UK.

'Academic quality' is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate teaching, support, assessment and learning resources are provided for them.

In institutional audit, both academic standards and academic quality are reviewed.

Outcome of the audit

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

- broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes and the academic standards of its awards.

Features of good practice

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

- the flexible approach to the integration of provision offered through the Centre for Lifelong Learning into the formal approval, monitoring and review processes;
- the effective engagement with Students' Union representatives that extends beyond their active participation in formal and informal meetings to their involvement in project work and related activities;
- the continuing development of a range of local and central student support services, notably the

expansion of dedicated arrangements for assisting students to improve their mathematical and academic writing skills; and
- the considered approach to the management of collaborative provision, which incorporates mechanisms for relating the degree of direct involvement by the University to the level of confidence built up in the partnership arrangement.

Recommendations for action

The audit team also recommends that the University should consider further action in a number of areas to ensure that the academic quality and standards of the awards it offers are maintained.

Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- to improve the consistency and comprehensiveness of annual reports from school boards, ensuring that, in addition to referring matters upwards for resolution, these allow for effective institutional oversight of issues identified for action at school level; and
- to review the arrangements for securing appropriate input from external examiners to decisions relating to the standards achieved by students over their entire course.

Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- to develop further and implement its plans for streamlining quality assurance processes to achieve a better balance between the value added by each of the various steps in these processes and the level of staff time involved;
- to give greater priority to putting into operation the recommendations of committees or their working groups, according to clearly defined timescales;
- to ensure that reports of professional and statutory review bodies are routinely and adequately considered centrally, while clarifying for schools the rationale for institutional oversight; and
- to review its stated commitment to the principle of free-choice modules since, in practice, there appears to be limited opportunity or encouragement given to students for selecting options outside their subject area.

Discipline audit trails

The audit team also looked in some detail at several individual programmes in the four discipline areas of biological and sport and exercise sciences; computing; engineering; and graphic design and visual arts to find out how well the University's

systems and procedures were working at programme level. The University provided the team with documents, including student work, and members of the team spoke to staff and students from each discipline area. As well as its findings supporting the overall confidence statements given above, the team was able to state that the standard of student achievement in the programmes was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their place within The *framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (*FHEQ*)*, published by the Agency. The team was also able to state that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for the programmes of study leading to the awards.

National reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings, the audit team also investigated the use made by the University of the academic infrastructure which the Agency has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The academic infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that help to define both good practice and academic standards. The findings of the audit suggest that the University has responded appropriately to the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, published by the Agency, the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements and programme specifications.

From 2004, the audit process will include a check on the reliability of information about academic standards and quality published by institutions in a standard format, in line with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) requirements for *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance* (HEFCE's document 03/51). At the time of the audit, the University was making progress towards fulfilling its responsibilities in this area. The information it was publishing about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards was found to be reliable.

Main report

Main report

1   An institutional audit of Coventry University (the University) was undertaken from 26 to 30 April 2004. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's programmes of study and on the academic standards of its awards.

2   The audit was carried out using a process developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the Agency) in partnership with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) and Universities UK (UUK), and has been endorsed by the Department for Education and Skills. For institutions in England, it replaces the previous processes of continuation audit, undertaken by the Agency at the request of UUK and SCOP, and universal subject review, undertaken by the Agency on behalf of HEFCE, as part of the latter's statutory responsibility for assessing the quality of education that it funds.

3   The audit checked the effectiveness of the University's procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of its academic awards; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of the programmes of study leading to those awards; and for publishing reliable information. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with HEFCE, SCOP and UUK, the audit included consideration of an example of institutional processes at work at the level of the programme, through four discipline audit trails (DATs), together with examples of those processes operating at the level of the institution as a whole. The scope of the audit encompassed all of the University's provision and collaborative arrangements leading to its awards.

Section 1: Introduction: Coventry University

The institution and its mission

4   The University's origins can be found in the Coventry College of Design, established in 1843, and its lineage traced through the antecedent colleges: Coventry College of Art; Lanchester College of Technology; and Rugby Technology College, which amalgamated in 1970 to form the Lanchester Polytechnic. In 1992, the Polytechnic was granted university title and became Coventry University.

5   The University is primarily located within a purpose-built city centre campus. However, it also occupies buildings on the Coventry University

Technology Park, housing the TechnoCentre, the Enterprise Centre and, most recently, the New Technology Institute (NTI). The NTI is a partnership involving the University, local further education colleges (FECs), the regional Learning and Skills Council, Business Link, the University of Warwick and Newman College of Higher Education. Its aim is to develop short programmes for part-time students in response to the needs of business, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises.

6   Statistics for 2002-03 show that there were 16,796 students on campus-based courses and 403 students on courses governed by the University's regulations within partner FECs. UK students numbered 14,396, with over 40 per cent coming from the sub-region of Coventry and Warwickshire; 1,261 students came from inside the European Union (EU), other than the UK, and 1,542 from outside the EU. In addition, there were over 900 students studying under international partnership arrangements.

7   The University comprises six schools: Art and Design; Business; Engineering; Health and Social Sciences; Mathematical and Information Sciences (MIS); and Science and the Environment. These are further divided into 30 subject groups and there are 12 support departments. In addition, the University has a number of academic centres and units, which give focus to areas of academic interest and bring together academic staff from across the six schools; most centres are designated research centres. The Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED) has the remit of promoting innovation in teaching, learning and assessment and in the use of educational technology, which it has previously pursued through the Teaching and Learning Task Force (task force) and, more recently, through a team of teaching fellows. The Centre for Lifelong Learning (CLL) has as its prime aim that of increasing participation in higher education (HE) among the local adult population by developing progression routes to the University's courses; it also coordinates the NTI initiative.

8   The University has 2,022 staff, including 752 academic staff. The present Vice-Chancellor will be retiring at the end of this academic year and his successor has been appointed.

9   The University's mission statement is reproduced as follows:

- Coventry University aims to provide educational opportunities to the maximum sustainable extent, through high quality teaching and research.
- It is a national institution with international perspectives, but gives particular attention to

the economic and social well-being of its local and regional environment.

- It encourages enterprise through the application of knowledge, and is founded upon moral values and the principles of equality, justice and academic freedom.

Collaborative provision

10   The University offers awards that are taught wholly or in part at several other institutions in the UK and overseas through degree or sub-degree programmes, now including Foundation degrees. The institutional self-evaluation document (SED) contained a full listing of the University's partner institutions, together with a brief description of the arrangement in each case. The audit team saw documentation relating to all forms of collaborative provision and met with some representatives from regional FECs.

11   Since 1999, there has been a steady decline in the number of the University's UK partnerships. However, it is pursuing new forms of collaboration, as illustrated by the NTI (see paragraph above), while focusing on strengthening its relations with FECs within the immediate sub-region (City College Coventry, Henley College Coventry, North Warwickshire and Hinckley College, The Solihull College, Stratford upon Avon College and Warwickshire College, Royal Lemington Spa and Moreton Morrell) and limiting its partnerships outside the region to subject or pedagogic areas where it can offer particular expertise. During the same period, there has been continual development of its overseas collaborative arrangements, notably in the Far East, where the University has built upon its association with INTI College Malaysia (ICM) to establish partnerships with other INTI-linked colleges (Beijing INTI Management College (2001), INTI International College Penang (2001), St Theresa INTI College Bangkok (2001), INTI College Hong Kong (2003)). Another increasingly significant collaboration is that with Ramaiah School of Advanced Studies (MSRSAS) Bangalore, India and, in addition, the University maintains links with several institutions involving courses 'recognised' as guaranteeing entry to the University's own courses.

Background information

12   The published information available for this audit included:

- the information on the University's website;
- the report of the previous quality audit of the University by the Agency undertaken in November 1999;

- the report of the audit of the University's collaboration with ICM by the Agency undertaken in April 2002;
- the reports of HEFCE and Agency reviews of provision at subject level.

13   The University provided the Agency with the following documents:

- the SED, including as annexes the University's response to the 1999 quality audit (June 2002) and a listing of the University's collaborative provision (October 2003);
- discipline self-evaluation documents (DSEDs) for the four areas selected for DATs;
- the Corporate Plan 2003-04 to 2006-07;
- the Learning and Teaching Strategy, June 2002;
- the Framework and Strategy for Institutional Quality Audit and Quality Enhancement, first issued in October 1993 and most recently revised in September 2003;
- a Statement of Quality Management;
- details of organisational structures and committee structures;
- the terms of reference, constitution and statement of membership for key committees and quality assurance panels;
- information on modular course structures;
- the Assessment Strategy, October 2003;
- Academic Regulations: Principles, Regulations and Procedures for Programmes of Study and Courses leading to the University's Academic Awards and other Distinctions;
- the publication 'Essential information for students';
- prospectuses for 2003-04 entry: Full-time Undergraduate Courses; Professional, Postgraduate and Research Opportunities; Part-time Opportunities.

14   During the briefing and audit visits, the audit team was given ready access to the University's internal documents in hardcopy or on the University's web site or intranet and to a range of documentation relating to the selected DATs, the latter including examples of student work.

The audit process

15   Following the preliminary meeting at the University in September 2003, the Agency confirmed that four DATs would be conducted during the audit visit. The Agency received the SED in December 2003 and the DSEDs in March 2004 The audit team's selection of DATs was biological and sport and exercise sciences, computing, postgraduate engineering programmes (PEPs),

and graphic design and visual arts. The DSEDs were specifically written for the audit.

16 The audit team visited the University on 24 and 25 March 2004 for the purpose of exploring with the Vice-Chancellor, senior members of staff and student representatives matters relating to the management of quality and standards raised by the SED or other documentation provided for the team. During this briefing visit, the team signalled a number of themes for the audit visit and developed a programme of meetings, which was agreed with the University.

17 At the preliminary meeting, the students of the University were invited, through the Students' Union (CUSU), to submit a separate document expressing views on the student experience at the University, and identifying any matters of concern or commendation with respect to the quality of programmes and the standards of awards. They were also invited to give their views on the level of representation afforded to them and on the extent to which their views were taken into account.

18 In December 2003, CUSU submitted to the Agency a students' written submission (SWS) prepared by a working group on the basis of an analysis of the University's formal records of students' opinions and feedback across the University over a four-year period. CUSU indicated that the document had been shared with appropriate University staff, through a group formed to take the lead in the University's preparations for institutional audit, which included student representatives. There were no matters that the audit team was required to treat with any level of confidentiality greater than that normally applying to the audit process. The team is grateful to the students for preparing this document to support the audit.

19 The audit visit took place from 26 to 30 April 2004 and involved further meetings with staff and students of the University, both at institutional level and in relation to the selected DATs. The audit team comprised, Dr M Atlay, Dr I Giles, Mr JM Anderson, Professor K Hurst, Professor D Meehan, auditors, and Ms E Turner, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for the Agency by Ms J Holt, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Developments since the previous academic quality audit

20 The previous academic quality audit was undertaken by the Agency in November 1999 The report (published in June 2000) commended several aspects of the University's practice: its course approval and review mechanisms; the Quality

Appraisal Panel (QAP) system for reviewing its support services; the dynamic range of initiatives coordinated by the task force; the clarity of arrangements for overseeing the quality and standards of programmes offered through the University's UK collaborative partnerships; the manner in which the Annual Quality Monitoring (AQM) exercise had been designed to facilitate a full exchange of information; its systematic use of the team briefing as a means of corporate communication; and the range and innovative nature of its efforts to canvass student opinion.

21 The report also set out a number of recommendations for the University to consider: ensuring that the range of initiatives overseen by the task force was thoroughly integrated within the University's organisational and committee structures; also ensuring that reports of professional or statutory review bodies (PSRBs) were considered centrally; achieving greater consistency in the AQM reports submitted by deans; reviewing its guidelines to subject and programme boards for dealing with borderline cases and those with mitigating circumstances; and developing its work on performance indicators and benchmarking so that it was better able to monitor and make comparative judgements relating to its performance over time.

22 The SED for the present institutional audit provided as an annex the University's formal response to the recommendations made by the previous audit, and also indicated that the audit report had been 'carefully scrutinised for any comments that might assist the University to improve its quality assurance policies, arrangements and systems'. Actions taken in response to issues raised in the previous audit included:

- amending the management arrangements for the task force so that its work is now coordinated through CHED and reported to the Teaching, Assessment and Learning Committee (TALC);

- strengthening the procedures for dealing with PSRB reports so that they are all considered by the Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor (PVC) who reports outcomes to the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), drawing attention to any issues or points for commendation or dissemination;

- modifying the requirements for AQM to promote greater consistency of school reporting through the use of a template for reports;

- revising guidance and procedures for dealing with mitigating circumstances affecting students' assessment performance and introducing revised academic regulations that removed some elements of discretion;

- utilising the new student record system to provide data for courses and modules in a standard format and agreeing a template for use by schools to report summary course statistics in a consistent format.

23   The present audit team considered that the University had generally taken effective and timely action in response to issues raised in the previous audit report, although certain areas continued, in the team's view, to require further attention, such as reporting from school boards within the AQM process (see paragraph 59 below); ensuring that PSRB reports are considered centrally (see paragraph 84 below); and reviewing arrangements for input to assessment boards from external examiners (see paragraphs 71 and 72 below). The team also noted the further development of the University's management of its collaborative provision (see paragraph 145 below) which was recognised as a strength both in the previous audit report and in that of the audit of the University's overseas collaboration with ICM (published in April 2003). The team was able to confirm that the course approval and review process, which is broadly the same process as was commended by the previous audit, was both well established and rigorous. However, the team considered that the University had so far made limited progress with its efforts to streamline the process (see paragraphs 49 and 50 below).

24   Since the 1999 audit, the University has participated in nine Agency subject reviews and two developmental engagements and its performance in reviews at the subject level has been generally strong. The University identified assessment policy and practices, and student progression as institutional themes, arising from subject review, for further action (see paragraphs 81 and 82 below). The SED additionally highlighted a number of developments since the submission of its formal response to the previous audit and the audit team explored aspects of these in the course of the current audit:

- rationalising the academic structure through the formation of the School of Science and the Environment, following merger of the Schools of the Built Environment and Environmental Sciences, and the enlargement of the Business School to include the School of International Studies and Law;
- developing and implementing guidance on the production of programme specifications (see paragraph 39 below);
- revising the process for reviewing support areas (see paragraph 45 below);

- revising assessment policies to address recognised gaps in institutional strategy and variability in local practice (see paragraph 74 below);
- refining internal performance measures (see paragraph 98 below);
- establishing a central Recruitment and Admissions Office to coordinate the recruitment of full-time UK undergraduate students (see paragraph 99 below);
- continuing to expand the use and implementation of on-line learning through a proprietary virtual learning environment (VLE) (see paragraph 113 below);
- upgrading teaching and learning resource provision through the completion of a new library and other improvements to the estate (see paragraph 115 below).
- establishing standing advisory groups for both UK and overseas collaborative provision (Standing Advisory Group on Collaborative Provision (SAGUK) and Standing Advisory Group on Overseas Collaborative Provision (SAGOP) respectively) to enable closer monitoring of the University's collaborative provision (see paragraph 136 below);
- expanding the number of students studying through the CLL, while also establishing an FEC Collaboration and Partnership Group to give emphasis to working more strategically with local FECs (see paragraph 142 below).

Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes

The institution's view as expressed in the SED

25   The University stated that it aimed 'to achieve higher education of excellent quality through a synthesis of management by executive action and collegial processes' and that it was committed to 'continuous quality improvement through regular cycles of formal and informal processes of quality assurance and control plus ongoing programmes of quality enhancement'. Since the inception of this 'quality spiral' in 1993, the University's underlying policy on quality assurance and enhancement has remained fundamentally unchanged, although there have been some amendments to processes. The current statement 'Institutional Quality Audit and Quality Enhancement: A Framework and Strategy' (the Framework and Strategy) was most recently revised in September 2003

26   The University also expressed the view that the involvement and commitment of staff was central to

its approach, the effectiveness of which was tested periodically by internal audits of its quality assurance and control processes against the broad criteria that these should be responsive to the needs of its students, the community of which it is part and the employers of its graduates and diplomates, and also to national external requirements. Central administrative support for the University's quality assurance system, which is described in the Framework and Strategy as a 'total quality system', is provided primarily through the Programmes and Quality Support section (PaQS) of the Academic Registry.

The institution's framework for managing quality and standards, including collaborative provision

27 Appended to the Framework and Strategy is a chart showing the executive and committee structures as these relate to quality management. In the SED, the University elaborated that the formal structure was based on a system of delegated responsibility and upward accountability for quality management, with those chairing key committees at each level also having executive responsibilities. The Vice-Chancellor, as chief executive, is assisted by three PVCs, although only two are presently in post, and they, together with the Group Finance Director, comprise the Vice-Chancellor's Group, while this Group, plus the deans, form the Academic Executive.

28 As the principal academic committee, Academic Board, which is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, has ultimate responsibility for the development and oversight of the University's academic work. It delegates responsibility for the quality assurance of taught programmes to QAC and the equivalent responsibility for research programmes to the Research Degrees Committee (RDC). QAC is chaired by the PVC (Academic Development and Quality) - the parentheses denoting the executive function of this role - and its membership comprises staff with responsibilities for quality matters in schools, as well as representatives from a partner institution and the CUSU executive.

29 School boards are responsible to Academic Board for the planning, development, coordination and quality assurance of the academic work of their respective schools. They have a primary responsibility for the quality and standards of the courses within their remit, which they discharge through subject quality groups (SQGs) and programme boards (PBs). SQGs, having a subject or professional focus, assume full responsibility for assuring the quality of modules, while PBs, covering a set of related courses, carry collective responsibility for the effective delivery, evaluation and revision of courses and students' programmes of study.

30 TALC, also chaired by the PVC (Academic Development and Quality), has responsibility for advising Academic Board on the development of strategy and policy for the enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment and for fostering continuous improvement in the quality of academic work. The University has recently established a Board for Widening Participation, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, which has a specific responsibility to develop and oversee the University's strategy in this area, including its interrelationship with teaching and assessment processes. It has additionally created a Student Achievement and Completion Committee (SACC), reporting to Academic Board, to develop and oversee the implementation of a University strategy to support student achievement and to improve course completion rates.

31 The University publishes regulations for the approval and review of courses within its Academic Regulations, which apply generally to all aspects of the university-wide modular frameworks. These are available in both printed copy and on the website, which additionally provides 'Notes of guidance, procedures and policies'. Currently, the University does not bring together all its regulatory, procedural and policy information pertaining to quality assurance and enhancement in a separate quality handbook, but, as the SED indicated, this was under review and at minimum a 'virtual' handbook would be developed.

32 Also supplementing the Academic Regulations is the University Assessment Strategy for taught programmes. This has been recently approved for full implementation in 2004-05, and draws together and harmonises existing policies, partly, as the SED acknowledged, in response to concerns raised by external examiners that not all staff were utilising the full range of marks. Hence the Strategy has emphasised the use of intended learning outcomes (ILOs) linked to assessment criteria, and provided guidelines on the generic criteria for different mark ranges applicable at undergraduate level. Within the bounds of the Academic Regulations, subject assessment boards (SABs) have primary responsibility for securing academic standards. Their delegated authority extends to considering students' results module by module and confirming that assignments and examinations have been set and marked at an appropriate standard. Programme assessment boards (PABs) take decisions about individual students' progression or awards, based on their overall performance across a range of modules.

33 SAGUK and SAGOP provide advice to QAC on the University's partnership activities and have a specific remit for monitoring the quality assurance processes relating to collaborative provision,

including those for approval and review. Membership of these committees is drawn from QAC and from staff with experience of operating the relevant partnership arrangements.

34   From its study of terms of reference and papers of committees at institutional and school level and its discussions with staff across the University, the audit team considered that there was an extensive and robust framework in place for managing quality and standards that extended to collaborative provision at home and overseas. The team also considered that quality assurance procedures were generally consistent with the relevant precepts and guidance of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by the Agency, that staff were familiar with the University's quality assurance systems and associated institutional policies. It was evident from discussions with staff that there had been extensive consultation over the formulation of the Assessment Strategy. The team, while able to confirm that assessment boards were functioning in line with University policy, nevertheless had certain reservations about the University's arrangements for external examiner input to assessment boards (see paragraph 72 below).

The institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards

35   Also appended to the Framework and Strategy is a diagram representing the quality spiral and how it facilitates continuous improvement. Improvement may be either corrective or lead to enhancement; enhancement may be either routine or driven through initiatives. The quality spiral provides the University with its basic approach to quality enhancement. It recognises that, at a given point in the cycle, only one or two major aspects of the University's work are likely to be active on its central agenda, indicating the long-term horizon of its strategy for quality enhancement.

36   The SED identified four specific ways in which the University was seeking to achieve quality enhancement: regular quality assurance activities, such as staff development and AQM; special initiatives recommended by working parties or senior staff; the six-year review cycle for modules and courses and the five-yearly institutional quality audit (IQA); and the quality assurance of its collaborative provision. The audit team particularly focused on widening participation and blended learning, which currently feature on the central quality enhancement agenda, given that its audit investigations would, in any case, involve a thorough examination of quality assurance processes.

37   With respect to widening participation, the audit team noted planned developments in student support through, for example, the creation of a centre for academic writing (see paragraph 122 below) and, at a local level, the provision of extra support in mathematics for engineering students. In the context of blended learning, the team followed the ongoing internal debate through TALC, QAC and various working groups about achieving the optimal balance between distance-learning and face-to-face teaching (these being the essential ingredients of blended learning). While the SED recognised the University's inexperience compared with some other institutions in the delivery of flexible and distance courses, the team noted that structures were in place for addressing the pedagogical as well as the technological issues (see paragraph 114 below).

38   The linkage between quality assurance, continuous improvement and enhancement is not disputed by the audit team, which fully endorses the sentiment repeatedly expressed by staff that enhancement was the obvious outcome of monitoring activities. Nevertheless, the team was aware of the need for a balance between the different stages within the cycle, which the University had also recognised in its Learning and Teaching Strategy in the context of building capacity for change (see paragraph 49 below). In some cases, the team questioned the value added by certain steps in quality assurance processes (see paragraph 50 below) and it also identified instances where initiatives recommended by working groups either did not come with clearly defined timescales for implementation, or were not implemented in a timely fashion (see paragraphs 62 and 82 below).

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

Programme approval and periodic review

39   The University's courses are designed to fit within four separate modular frameworks: Foundation degree, HND/C, undergraduate, and taught postgraduate courses. Its procedures for approving new courses and modifying existing courses are fully documented, with information for staff most readily accessible on-line from the relevant section of the Administrators' Handbook, maintained by PaQS, pending publication of a 'virtual' quality handbook. Also available are guidance notes on preparing the associated documentation, covering such topics as the use of subject benchmark statements, *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and*

Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and the Northern Ireland Credit and Accumulation Transfer System (NICATS) level descriptors. There is also a template for programme specifications, which are a requirement for all courses, and notes of guidance for members of course and module approval and review panels.

40   The formal approval process commences with approval in principle, initially by the relevant dean(s), as academic leader(s) and budget holder(s) of the school(s) involved, and then by the PVC (Academic Development and Quality), following a recommendation from the Academic Registrar. This recommendation is based on a check of the proposal against the Academic Regulations and a view on likely student demand from the Marketing Manager. Once approval in principle has been granted, discussions occur with other areas of the University, such as the library and the Computing Services Department (CSV).

41   The course is then planned in detail, typically by a subgroup of an existing PB. New modules are referred for comment on the content and design to the 'responsible' SQG(s), which then submit(s) them for approval by a module approval and review panel (MARP). MARPs are organised locally within schools by school registrars. They are established by school boards and there is the requirement for their membership to include an external representative, for the approval of modules at level 2 and above. MARPs have responsibility for assessing the quality of modules, with reference to the relevant modular framework, in terms of aims, ILOs, size and level, and also for evaluating the proposed teaching, learning and assessment methods. For modules offered by the CLL, most of which are at level 1, a flexible approach is adopted, often entailing approval via correspondence. Staff within schools lend appropriate subject expertise although, according to the SED, external input is also sought by the CLL, even though this is not a general requirement for the approval of level 1 modules.

42   Once constituent modules have been approved, new course proposals are scrutinised initially by either two senior staff from within the school or a school course approval and review panel (SCARP) before submission for consideration at institutional level. QAC has responsibility for approval of all University courses and those offered under validation arrangements, but delegates this to course approval and review panels (CARPs). A variant operates for new courses to be offered under franchise arrangements, whereby there is provision for a combined CARP and partnership approval and review panel (PARP) to deal

simultaneously with the approval of the course and the management arrangements for the franchise (see paragraph 139 below). CARPs are organised centrally by PaQS. Their membership is approved by the Chair or deputy chair of QAC and will normally include one member representing QAC, a Chair who is independent of the school(s) involved and two external representatives. A senior officer from PaQS supports and advises the panel. CARPs have responsibility for ensuring that courses take account of relevant subject benchmark statements, make appropriate use of other external reference points and satisfy institutional requirements.

43   CARPs may approve courses unconditionally, or with conditions and/or recommendations, or refer a course for resubmission. Courses are normally approved to run for six years, unless the CARP stipulates a shorter period. Where accreditation by a PSRB is involved, the University seeks to include the PSRB by allowing it representation on the CARP or observer status at its meetings, or by considering the course conjointly with the PSRB accreditation panel. In endorsing the standards of courses, CARPs are also confirming the standards of their constituent modules, previously approved by MARPs. There is scope for discretion in the case of changes to the content of courses, details of which are initially presented to school boards and the Academic Registrar. A decision is then made about whether chair's action by the dean, on behalf of the school board, and Chair of QAC, often with external advice, is sufficient to approve the proposed changes or whether a CARP is required. Minor changes to a module are approved by the dean as chair of the school board or, if more substantive, referred to a MARP.

44   Periodic review is effectively the reapproval of a course on the expiry of its approval period and is also undertaken by a CARP. Therefore, the processes are essentially the same as those for the 'in detail' stage of course approval, except that they entail, in addition to the normal documentation submitted to the CARP, the inclusion of a critical appraisal of the operation of the course, informed by the views of students, external examiners, employers (where appropriate) and academic staff. There is also the expectation that CARPs will arrange a meeting with students on the course. The review process requires that the modules comprising the course will likewise have been subject to review, or, in the case of any new or substantively changed modules, approval, by a MARP, so that they are in an approved state by the time the course is considered by the CARP. The respective roles of PBs and SQGs in relation to the review of the curriculum are exactly parallel to the roles they perform in the design of a new course proposal.

45   The periodic review of support functions, previously based on review by QAPs, is being replaced by a new system of Review of Service provision. This, the SED explained, was intended to preserve the elements of externality and customer feedback from the QAP process and introduce the Forum for Excellence model derived from the European Framework for Quality Management.

46   In the SED, the University described the arrangements for the design of new courses within its modular frameworks as 'deliberately flexible'. The multiple use of modules by different courses facilitated responsiveness to changes in demand from students, employers or broader national trends and was also the basis for separate consideration of modules and courses in the University's approval and review processes. The SED emphasised that there was considerable evidence for the comprehensiveness and thorough application of these processes from external audit and review reports, the annual monitoring report from PaQS to QAC, and the recent themed audit of the MARP process, as part of the 2003 IQA. The latter confirmed the effectiveness of the process, although it suggested a number of improvements, notably in the recording of the proceedings of MARPs and in the explicit use of NICATS level descriptors.

47   However, the SED also acknowledged that the approval and review processes were the focus of 'continual internal debate' about streamlining procedures to reduce the amount of staff time involved. Examples of strain in the system, taken from the PaQS annual report, included the bunching of panel events late in the academic year, delays in submitting CARP documentation, and instances of failure to confirm completion of all pre-CARP processes.

48   Through its discussions with staff and its review of documentation, the audit team was able to confirm that the course and module approval and review processes, including those for collaborative provision and modules offered by the CLL, were being operated as described in the SED. It was also able to confirm, particularly through the DATs, that appropriate use was being made of the FHEQ, relevant sections of the *Code of practice*, subject benchmark statements and programme specifications. The team concluded that the University had developed an extensive and rigorous system for the approval and review of modules and courses, which was well established and generally well understood by staff. Moreover, there is good practice in the flexible approach to the integration of provision offered through the CLL into the formal approval and review processes.

49   Nevertheless, the audit team took an interest in the debate about the amount of staff time involved in operating the approval and review processes. In its Learning and Teaching Strategy, the University had identified the streamlining of quality assurance processes as a 'means' of achieving its 'purpose to build capacity for change'. However, it appeared to the team that the University had made limited progress in its efforts to scale down its procedures. For example, despite its having discouraged the holding of SCARPs, some schools had preferred to retain this tried and tested practice; moreover, while there had been some success in reducing CARP membership to the minimum required, there was an expressed preference for conducting business by 'live discussions', rather than by correspondence, for all but the most straightforward proposals; similarly there was a degree of ambivalence towards combining CARP events as a means of rationalising workload.

50   The audit team also looked to sources outside the approval and review processes themselves for indicators of their effectiveness. External examiners' comments on features of module and course design, for example, seemed to be fairly typical of those being made on provision throughout the HE sector. This led the team to question whether the University's extensive discussion of modules and courses prior to approval, and the level of staff input this entailed, were being matched by corresponding benefits. By contrast, the team saw clear evidence of an understanding of external reference points and quality assurance processes among staff, noting that where the University had itself identified limitations, such as in the linkage of assessment statements to ILOs and the explicit use of NICATS level descriptors, these issues were being addressed. Moreover, the surveys of staff experience routinely carried out as part of the IQA process confirmed that there was depth and breadth of experience among University staff, as external examiners or reviewers, which would be brought to bear in module and course design. The team therefore considers it desirable for the University to develop further and implement its plans for streamlining quality assurance systems to achieve a better balance between the value added by each of the various steps in these processes and the level of staff time involved.

51   In respect of support areas, the audit team considered that the University had a range of mechanisms for ensuring the quality of service provision. It learned that over the past few years the emphasis had been on departments' achieving Investors in People (IiP) status. It also learned that the Review of Service provision was currently being

piloted in the secretariat and library functions and that the estates function was seeking a chartermark for its operation.

Annual monitoring

52   The AQM exercise commences with SQGs and PBs producing annual reports for consideration by the relevant school board. SQG reports focus on how academic standards and the quality of teaching are being maintained or taken forward for the modules within their remit, including franchised modules, while PB reports have an equivalent function at course level, with reports from partner institutions on franchised courses incorporated into the parent PB report. Both sets of reports are prepared under essentially common headings and involve reference to action being taken in response to feedback from module and course questionnaires, course consultative committees (CCCs), and external examiners' reports, which are attached in summary or in entirety to SQG and PB reports respectively.

53   School boards each produce a report for the attention of QAC, which is a composite summary and action plan, based on the SQG and PB reports they receive and is normally coordinated by the dean or associate dean. The Chair of QAC, in turn, uses these reports to produce the institutional Annual Report on Academic Work, for consideration by both QAC and Academic Board. Similarly, annual reports on validated courses, which are subject to the quality assurance arrangements of partner institutions, are first considered by the associated school board and then fed into the University's central monitoring processes via either SAGUK or SAGOP, which both produce overview reports for QAC. The provision within the CLL lies outside schools and is likewise subject to separate monitoring arrangements, also leading to an annual report to QAC. The creation of a formal Continuing Education Subject Board is under consideration.

54   QAC meets for a full day in December, with deans or their nominees in attendance, to debate issues arising from each school's annual report and the reports from SAGUK, SAGOP and the CLL. The outcomes of this meeting are fed back to schools and through school boards to SQGs and PBs. Direct student input to the process is facilitated by their representation on QAC, school and programme boards. At subsequent meetings in March and June, QAC receives reports from schools SAGUK, SAGOP and the CLL on actions taken in response to issues identified through the AQM exercise, thereby 'closing the loop'.

55   The three stages of the annual reporting process taking place within schools are supported by pro forma and notes of guidance, available from the University website. In addition, a suite of statistical reports for both modules and courses is being progressively developed from the new student record system, UNIVERSE (see paragraph 100 below).

56   The University stated in the SED that the AQM process was well-embedded, having remained basically the same for many years, although with some change in the detail, including greater emphasis on statistical analysis. Its continued effectiveness as the prime mechanism for checking whether teaching and learning activities were working as intended (with the knock on effect of activating quality control or enhancement) had been recently tested through the discipline audits conducted as part of the most recent IQA, the report of which was pending.

57   The audit team reviewed the operation of AQM through the various stages of its reporting process, including the papers and output of the December meeting of QAC. The team noted some overlap between the issues discussed in reports from associated SQGs and PBs, and suggests that this duplication might be addressed in the context of streamlining quality assurance procedures (see paragraph 50 above). The reports available to the team were generally found to be critical and evaluative and gave confidence that monitoring was taking place in an appropriate manner at each level, with good practice as well as areas for improvement or enhancement being identified. Specifically, the extension of AQM to involve the CLL on an equivalent basis to a school is good practice and it gives emphasis to the CLL's evolving role in delivering the University's widening participation strategy.

58   However, the audit team noted some variation between schools in their approaches to reporting upwards to QAC. Moreover, in meetings with the team, the deans expressed differing views about the purpose of school board reports. At one extreme there was the view that this purpose was to make visible what schools were doing anyway, and at the other that it was to channel upwards only issues requiring resolution at university level, but not issues schools could deal with themselves. The team identified one school board report where a single statement about staffing resources was used to summarise a number of serious quality assurance issues raised in reports at prior stages of the process, although it acknowledges that QAC subsequently asked for this report to be expanded to include details of action being taken at school level.

59 The audit team noted that the format of reports from school boards had been amended for the most recent round (pertaining to 2002-03). Although the corresponding guidelines are explicit that reports should 'draw attention to strengths and weaknesses' and 'concentrate on actions that are required at the school level', this is within the context of 'a commentary on the academic work of the school and issues which need to be brought to the attention of QAC and Academic Board'. This, in the team's view, gives the school a degree of discretion about which issues should be included in the report and which left out, creating a risk that reports would no longer function as a 'reflector' of school activities, but rather as a 'filter'. Therefore, the team considers it advisable for the University to review the scope of upward reporting from school boards to improve the consistency and comprehensiveness of annual reports with a view to ensuring that, in addition to referring matters upwards for resolution, these allow for effective institutional oversight of issues identified for action at school level.

Institutional quality audit

60 The University conducts an internal audit of its quality assurance and control processes on a five-yearly basis, through the IQA process, coordinated by a steering group convened by the Chair of QAC. The SED clarified that the most recent IQA had begun early in 2003, with the formation of the Audit Strategy Group and the larger Audit Working Group, comprising staff drawn from across the University and including student representatives. Their remit was extended to include preparations for the present external institutional audit. The adopted approach was to carry out a discipline audit of each school and the CLL, and themed audits of the University's processes for module approval, student feedback, internal moderation of coursework, peer observation of teaching, and placement learning and careers guidance.

61 The SED indicated that September 2004 was the earliest possible date for the full implementation of recommendations arising from the current IQA. It was later clarified that there would be a synoptic report, which would also include the outcomes of the present institutional audit, produced for QAC over the summer. However, there had been an interim report, which had been considered by QAC in September 2003 and which had suggested a number of areas for improvement in quality assurance processes.

62 While appreciating that the IQA process was ongoing and that it would take time to incorporate a level of scrutiny equivalent to a discipline audit as

a matter of routine in the current quality assurance system, which was an option currently under consideration, the audit team nevertheless formed the view that changes to procedures in the areas covered by the themed audits were somewhat slow in being implemented. From its reading of documentation and its discussions with students and staff, the team noted that recommended modifications to the MARP process (see paragraph 46 above) had not yet been incorporated in the guidance information for staff on the website and students appeared not to have seen any improvement in the reporting back of the results of survey questionnaires (see paragraphs 95 and 96 below). Moreover, it was unclear to the team whether the proposals relating to peer observation of teaching had been approved and, more generally, how recommendations taken on as executive responsibilities were impacting on students and staff, or being monitored by QAC or other committees. The team therefore considers it desirable for the University to give greater priority to putting into operation the recommendations of committees or their working groups, according to clearly defined timescales.

External participation in internal review processes

63 External participation is an integral part of the approval and review process, being a requirement for MARPs (for modules at level 2 and above), CARPs and PARPs. External panel members are usually academic subject peers, but may be representatives from industry, commerce or the professions, as appropriate to the modules or courses under consideration. Schools appoint external members to MARPs, with guidelines provided by PaQS, whereas PaQS is directly involved in the selection of external members for the centrally organised CARP and PARP processes. The constitution of SQGs allows for external employer involvement in the regular school-based quality assurance processes.

64 The University stated in its SED that the peer approval and review process for courses and partnership arrangements generally worked well and, in the great majority of cases, led to significant improvements to the original proposals, as evidenced by the fact that very few proposals were approved without any conditions or recommendations. It also expressed the view that discussions between panel members and course teams acted as a valuable staff development tool, and that serving on panels offered opportunities for staff to see how courses operated in

other areas of the University, thus facilitating the dissemination of good practice.

65   From its reading of documentation and discussions with staff, it was clear to the audit team that the University valued and acted upon the often detailed comments made by external peers on curriculum content and standards, and that their involvement in the approval and review process was indeed leading to enhancement of provision. However, given the attention paid to external contributions by both MARPs and PARPs, the team doubted whether SCARPs, which in mirroring CARPs also incorporate external scrutiny, represented the optimum use of resources (see paragraph 50 above). The involvement of employers in SQGs and PBs within PEPs is highlighted by the team as a particularly effective form of external input to the approval and review process (see paragraph 180 below), although the team recognises that such arrangements are difficult to emulate outside areas with very close links to industry. Overall, the team concluded that the University had appropriate mechanisms in place for external participation in its approval and review processes.

External examiners and their reports

66   The Academic Regulations, together with the Assessment Strategy for taught programmes, prescribe the overall framework within which the external examiner system operates as the University's most well-developed mechanism for monitoring and evaluating academic standards year-on-year. The role of the external examiner, as defined by the Academic Regulations, is 'to ensure that justice is done to each student and that the standard of the University's awards…is maintained'.

67   According to the constitutions of both SABs and PABs, their membership is to include external examiners. The majority are appointed to one SAB and one PAB, the appointment letter specifying the modules and awards for which they are responsible. All modules at level 2 and above, which contribute to the final award, have a designated external examiner (in line with the *Code of practice*). The University also makes clear in its appointment letter that external examiners should normally attend all boards to which they are appointed, although there is provision for exemption in special circumstances, and should present their reports after the final meeting. External examiners are each provided with the Handbook for External Examiners for Taught Courses (the Handbook), which explains the University's two-tier system of assessment boards and the respective responsibilities of SABs and PABs (see paragraph 32

above). This Handbook is updated annually and there are also annual briefing sessions, aimed mainly at newly-appointed external examiners.

68   External examiners present their reports on a standard form that is divided into sections, comprising a questionnaire about procedures, templates for evaluative narrative and, following a recent amendment, a section for publication on the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website (see paragraph 211 below). The reports are received, on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor, by the Academic Registrar who circulates them to the Chair of QAC and also to the dean (or associate dean) of the appropriate school who coordinates a formal response to each report. This is based on the annual reports to the school board from SQGs and PBs, as part of the AQM process, wherein external examiners' comments are addressed. The deadlines are set for the various stages of AQM to enable responses to be returned to external examiners without undue delay. In addition, the Academic Registrar compiles an institutional-level summary of external examiners' comments for consideration by QAC at its December meeting and also by Academic Board. The arrangements for collaborative provision are equivalent to those for in-house provision (see paragraph 141 below).

69   The SED stated that the great majority of external examiners performed their duties diligently, and that their reports were valuable and constructive. It acknowledged that the institutional summary of reports for 2002-03 had highlighted that, in a few areas, external examiners had been reluctant to attend both a SAB and a PAB, which often occurred a week apart, usually giving priority to the PAB. The University had attempted to counteract this by giving increased emphasis to the responsibilities of the SAB for setting academic standards, in both the Handbook and the briefing of external examiners.

70   The issue of attendance at assessment boards notwithstanding, the evidence available to the audit team allowed it to conclude that the University was making good use of external examiners in summative assessment procedures, particularly at the module level. While not always dealt with specifically in the narrative section, it was apparent to the team, from meetings with staff, that the institutional strategy of alignment of standards with level and qualification descriptors was a feature of subject-level discussions with external examiners. Generally, it was clear to the team that external examiner input was taken seriously, appropriately fed into the AQM process and acted upon conscientiously. The team was able to confirm,

across a range of collaborative provision, equivalence with the in-house provision in the procedures for considering external examiners' reports.

71   Through both institutional meetings and the DATs, the audit team explored the issue of external examiners' attendance at both SABs and PABs, noting that the University elicits separate responses from external examiners as to whether their attendance was 'essential' at the SAB and the PAB, and what boards they actually attended. The team also noted that the issue had been presented in the institutional summary of external examiners' comments in the context of a prior recommendation to review the role on the respective boards. This summary also clarified that the roles had not been explicitly reviewed by QAC, but that a new set of procedures for the consideration of extenuating circumstances was to be implemented from 2003-04, such that PABs would no longer have discretion at the margin to make awards, or consider classifications other than those determined by computation of module marks, or request changes to marks already approved by SABs.

72   The audit team concluded that the combined effect of giving emphasis to the external examiner's role on the SAB without a parallel specification for the role on the PAB, alongside the reduction in discretionary powers of the PAB was adjusting the relationship between the boards without tackling the issue of reluctance on the part of some external examiners to attend two separate boards or fully taking into account their expressed view about whether attendance at both boards was essential. Therefore, the team considers it advisable for the University to review its arrangements for securing appropriate input from external examiners to decisions relating to the standards achieved by students over their entire course.

External reference points

73   The University's approach to the *Code of practice*, as described in the SED, is one of progressive alignment of its procedures with the various sections of the *Code*. Early sections were considered by a relevant department or committee, but once the majority had been published a more systematic process was introduced for both the initial matching and continued monitoring of practice against the *Code*. Administrative responsibility for this process lies with PaQS, which produces summary tables showing how the precepts of the *Code* are addressed, by identifying the corresponding University policies, procedures or guidance and the officer or committee responsible for their maintenance. On the basis of this exercise,

which is updated annually for consideration by QAC, the University expressed its view that 'the great majority of the precepts are secure'. From 2003-04, there is to be a standing item on the spring term agenda of school boards to confirm that school practice is consistent with the relevant sections of the *Code*, either directly, or through adherence to University policy and procedures; outcomes will be reported upwards to QAC at either its summer term or September meeting.

74   The SED cited the Assessment Strategy (see paragraph 32 above) as an illustration of how the University was addressing gaps identified in institutional strategy and policy and was tackling variability in local practice. Following approval of the Assessment Strategy, the group responsible for its formulation has been reconstituted to facilitate its full implementation by developing further policies and guidelines, while the associated responsibility for monitoring overall consistency with the *Code of practice* has been delegated by Academic Board to TALC. Other examples of work in progress include a substantial revision of the University Code of Practice for Sandwich Placements and a review of all aspects of recruitment and admissions. A recent IQA themed audit recommended widening the scope of this Code of Practice to cover all types of placement activity (both credit and non-credit bearing) and also strengthening central monitoring of local arrangements to encourage consistency and the sharing of good practice.

75   The SED stated that the University had adopted the FHEQ qualification descriptors to elucidate standards in the documentation supporting course approval and review. It had also amended the regulations for extended undergraduate masters courses to stipulate that the ILOs of the final stage should be at masters level. The SED additionally stated that there had been no reports from staff of significant difficulties in taking account of the learning outcomes expressed in relevant benchmark statements when designing or reviewing courses. The Business School, for example, was currently reviewing its suite of MBA programmes against the *Subject benchmark statement* for masters awards in business and management. Other reference points used in module and course design include NICATS level descriptors for module content and assessment, and PSRB requirements, where applicable.

76   The University's approach to programme specifications has been to integrate their implementation with the CARP process, by making them a requirement, from 2001-02, for the approval or reapproval of a course, with the effect that they

have replaced the former standard course document. However, the University also imposed a target date of July 2003 for the production of programme specifications, applicable to all courses, including those not due for review. This coincided with an internal deadline for the revision of module descriptors from learning objective to learning outcome format. The quality of the resultant programme specifications was 'quite variable', as the SED acknowledged, but once the format had been deemed 'acceptable' by PaQS, the programme specification was submitted to the external examiner for verification that it was in line with the original course approval.

77   Regarding the *Code of practice*, it appeared to the audit team that the University had been rather slow in its response to the last two sections (*Section 9: Placement learning,* and *Section 10: Recruitment and admissions*), particularly given the extent of revision now proposed to its internal Code of Practice for Sandwich Placements. A recent developmental engagement report had commented on the limited engagement of staff with the section on placement learning. However, the team considered that, in general, the University was using the *Code* in an appropriate way, as a framework for the ongoing review of its own practice and as an instrument for targeting areas of its activity where it perceived institutional oversight might be improved.

78   The audit team was able to verify, particularly through the DATs, that subject staff were routinely engaging with external reference points. When presenting module and course proposals, they were clearly aware of the requirement to take into account NICATS, the FHEQ and relevant subject or other benchmarks in formulating ILOs. When they were involved in approval, monitoring and review processes, they were also aware of the requirement to check the module and course ILOs against these reference points. The team saw examples of inconsistencies in the format of programme specifications, which had also been commented on in a developmental engagement report, and agreed with the University's own view that the precision with which assessment statements were linked to ILOs (termed 'constructive alignment'), was variable. However, it also recognised that the University had 'made progress' with constructive alignment.

79   The audit team noted that the University was seeking to make the connection between ILOs and external reference points more transparent in the approval and review process, by briefing CARP chairs to ensure that external panel members commented specifically on the linkages, and also by encouraging more explicit use of NICATS in the MARP process, as

recommended by the themed audit. Overall, the team concluded that the University was making effective use of external reference points and evaluating critically its practices in relevant areas.

Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

80   There have been nine Agency subject reviews since the last audit, all resulting in approval of the quality of education in the relevant subject. Aspects of provision were found to be making a full (in the majority of cases) or a substantial contribution to the stated aims and objectives, with the exception of the teaching, learning and assessment aspect of one review and the student progression and achievement aspect of another, which were found to be making only a satisfactory contribution. The mechanism for discussing the outcomes of subject review reports was through QAC, which required a response from the relevant school to the published report. This, as the SED explained, had the dual purpose of identifying both corrective improvements that might require input at institutional level and good practice that might be extended to other areas of the University, leading to enhancement.

81   After its final subject review (November 2001), the University produced an analysis of its overall performance from which it identified assessment policy and practices, and student progression, as the two key themes for further consideration at institutional level. In the case of assessment, the most persistent issue had been inconsistency of practice in the internal moderation of summative assessment, related to both setting assignments and marking students' work. The University had introduced a Policy on the Internal Moderation of Assessment (October 2001), which has since been subsumed within the institutional Assessment Strategy. The moderation of coursework has also been the subject of a recent themed audit.

82   In the case of student progression, the University commissioned a major report on students' engagement with their studies, triggered, according to the SED, by the 'growing numbers of students, who simply do not engage sufficiently with their studies to ensure success', a factor which was, to an extent, offsetting local efforts to improve retention. This report, produced by the then Director of CHED, and considered by TALC in May 2002, provided an analysis of the underlying causes of disengagement and a number of general recommendations, but work on the issue afterwards fell into abeyance because of changes in staffing, and is only now being taken forward through SACC. While appreciating the

reasons for the delay in progress, the audit team also viewed this in terms of there being no clear definition of timescales for implementation of the report's recommendations (see paragraph 62 above).

83   The University offers courses in a wide variety of professional subjects and a considerable number of its courses are externally accredited. In its response to the previous audit (included as an appendix to the SED), the University outlined a 'strengthened' process for considering PSRB reports centrally, but the audit team considered this not to be well-established in that it could find no consistent reporting of the outcomes of PSRB reports to QAC. In meetings with the team, staff expressed the view that PSRB reports were directed at schools, where immediate priority was given to taking appropriate action. The outcomes were then fed into the AQM process through SQGs or PBs, with only comments passed upwards to QAC. PSRB reports were submitted to the Academic Registrar when required in support of a CARP process.

84   Although noting a recent decision by QAC to consider an annual report on PSRB outcomes at its December meeting, at which it also considered the output of the AQM process, the audit team was concerned about the evident delay in establishing a procedure for giving regular central consideration to PSRB reports. It was also aware that the already 'full agenda for the December meeting of QAC', acknowledged in the SED, created a risk of rather 'cursory consideration' being given to the subject of PSRB reports. Therefore, the team considers it desirable for the University to ensure that the reports of PSRBs are routinely and adequately considered centrally, while also clarifying for schools the rationale for institutional oversight, this being (as with the subject review reports) to facilitate the identification of common themes and good practice.

Student representation at operational and institutional level

85   The University stated in its SED that it placed great importance on feedback from students both within the formal committee structure and at course and module level. Student representatives on central committees are drawn from the CUSU executive; student representatives at school level, known as 'school chairs', are elected by secret ballot from the student body, and are ex-officio members of school boards and of the CUSU Executive Committee. The membership of PBs allows for a minimum of four student representatives drawn from across the courses covered by the PB. School offices support the local election process by distributing and collecting nomination forms, while training for student representatives is provided by CUSU.

86   Additional student representatives are elected to serve on CCCs, which meet once a term. The purpose of these is to give students and staff regular opportunities to exchange views, in a comparatively informal setting, about the nature and quality of course delivery and about future developments. There is a University Code of Practice for the Operation of Course Consultative Committees, which stipulates that the number of student representatives should be at least equal to the number of staff, to facilitate discussions in an atmosphere described as 'diplomatic openness'. The notes from CCCs go to PBs and form part of the AQM process at the programme level. Formal processes for student representation are complemented by informal events, such as face-to-face meetings between student representatives and senior staff, including the Vice-Chancellor, and annual meetings in each school with senior school staff, a representative of Academic Registry and the PVC (Academic Development and Quality).

87   In the SED, the University reported that over 500 students were involved at some level in the representation system during 2002-03, but that there were recurrent problems in filling vacancies and in communicating with representatives once in post. The challenge of increasing take-up was perceived by the University in terms of needing to convince students that the issues they raised were taken seriously within reasonable resource constraints. It hoped that a recently introduced facility, giving students remote access to their University email accounts via the internet, would ease communication problems.

88   The SWS, while pointing to much good practice across the University and to 'excellent' practice in some schools, also expressed specific concerns relating to the overall operation of the student representative system: student issues were not always a standard item of school board agenda; CCC minutes were not always a standard item of PB agenda; there were sometimes few action points emanating from issues raised by students; and it was therefore difficult to trail issues upwards and downwards through the committee system and eventually 'close the loop'. In addition, only a third of student representatives attended the training provided by CUSU.

89   However, the students to whom the audit team spoke presented a more positive picture. They commented favourably on the ways in which student representation occurred through CCCs, school boards, central committees and the informal meetings with senior staff, clarifying that students were less willing to

be involved in PBs, since their views were heard elsewhere and the matters under discussion did not always seem relevant to them. They gave examples of issues raised through CCCs being publicised on notice-boards, or on the VLE, together with a response from staff on action being taken. Nevertheless, the team was aware that this particular approach to providing immediate and open feedback was not in systematic use across the University.

90   The audit team particularly noted the breadth of CUSU involvement over a range of central committees and advisory, working or project groups, including the Audit Strategy and Audit Working Groups, which conduct the IQA process. While recognising that some procedures could be strengthened, the team concluded that the University had appropriate representational systems in place and that these were generally being used in an effective and timely manner to respond to students' concerns. Furthermore, there is good practice in the University's effective engagement with CUSU representatives that extends beyond their active participation in formal and informal meetings to their involvement in project work and related activities. Examples of the productive liaison with CUSU were prevalent in various areas of the University's activity (see paragraphs 60 above and 134 below).

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

91   The University has mechanisms in place to gather wide-ranging feedback from its current students. Feedback on modules and courses is collected through standard questionnaires, courses being evaluated every year and modules at least once every three years. Survey results are used by SQGs and PBs to inform their ongoing deliberations and as input to AQM. Wherever possible, discussions with students form part of the review element of the CARP process. Support areas, such as the library and CSV carry out regular student surveys in relation to specific services (see paragraphs 117 and 118 below) and have other less formal mechanisms for gathering feedback, including face-to-face discussions with CUSU representatives and helpdesk and email contact with their student client base. The University ensures that student feedback is gathered on its collaborative provision either through similar mechanisms to those used in-house or through the partner's own arrangements and, in some cases, through a dual approach.

92   The University receives feedback from graduates through its annual first destination survey and this information is circulated to schools for consideration.

In addition, the alumni society has its own website, although there is no claim that this provides a mechanism for obtaining systematic feedback from former students. Neither is there a standard approach to obtaining feedback from employers, with methods ranging from employer advisory boards or associated forums for discussion with representatives from industry or the professions, to less formal or *ad hoc* arrangements.

93   A themed audit of the student feedback system had shown that students and staff were often not clear about the purpose of the standard module and course questionnaires, even though these had been in use for many years. The themed audit revealed that elements of complacency had set into the process; for example, staff distributing questionnaires were not always given the accompanying guidelines and students completing questionnaires were not always given clear instructions. The University stated in the SED that it intended to review the current range of student surveys and was considering making greater use of on-line questionnaires. In addition, the SED highlighted the particularly well-developed links with employers who contribute directly to course design and delivery (for example, in Foundation degrees and PEPs), which generate regular and systematic feedback.

94   The SWS commented favourably on the design of the standard module questionnaire in terms of both content and general layout, highlighting that it had been suitably adapted for short course provision offered through the CLL. It was similarly enthusiastic about the principle of embedding student feedback within the AQM process to provide a source of management information, but expressed a 'concern with transparency'. Although recognising the need for both student anonymity and for confidentiality in relation to staff named in questionnaires, the SWS pointed to considerable variation in the priority given to discussing survey output at SQGs, PBs, and school boards within and across schools, and in the CLL. In the case of support services, while accepting that the variety of feedback mechanisms reflected differing service needs, the SWS also suggested that it reflected a 'fragmented approach', particularly in the area of student support services (see paragraph 133 below).

95   The audit team was able to see first hand, through the DATs, the inconsistencies in the use made of module and course questionnaires by SQGs and PBs and that issues raised in questionnaires were not automatically addressed in annual reports. Staff at both institutional and discipline-level meetings spoke fairly positively about recent developments in the student feedback system,

whereas students were rather less positive, echoing comments made in the SWS and adding that completion rates for course and module questionnaires were often low. They offered several explanations: the excessive number of questionnaires they were asked to complete; the lack of personal benefit to be derived, since questionnaires were often given out towards the end of the module; and the fact that after completing the questionnaires they did not get adequate feedback on the outcomes of the process.

96   The audit team noted that the themed audit of the student feedback system had identified these same issues and that its interim report to QAC (September 2003) included seven recommendations, which had already been communicated to schools. It appeared to the team that these had, as yet, had little impact on students' perception of the process and, while recognising that the recommendations were quite recent, the team encourages the University to follow up their implementation.

97   With regard to feedback from employers, the audit team learned that the Employability Group, whose remit was primarily concerned with embedding skills for employment and careers advice in the curriculum (see paragraph 132 below), also provided a forum for exchanging and sharing employer feedback. The team noted that information on employers offering work-based learning through sandwich placements was routinely collected from PBs through AQM and that employer satisfaction had recently been introduced as a performance measure in the Corporate Plan. Generally, the team considered the initiative to be indicative of a more integrated approach to improving overall student achievement, in accordance with the University's own definition, which gives emphasis to enterprise and employability.

Progression and completion statistics

98   The SED outlined the ways the University used statistical information to evaluate the quality and standards of its provision. SQGs, PBs and school boards comment on significant features of admissions, progression and completion statistics in their annual reports within the AQM process. The University has a single student record system, UNIVERSE, giving schools direct access to statistical information at module and course levels through a series of centrally produced standard reports. Course reports are designed on the basis of undergraduate datasets, but can be downloaded and adapted, as necessary, for postgraduate provision. The University also produces a set of performance measures,

covering staff and student numbers, applications to acceptance ratios, student progression and completion, for the purposes of internal comparison of trends and external monitoring against comparator universities. UNIVERSE provides the capability to forward electronically individualised student data to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and student numbers to HEFCE, to meet the requirements for statistical information to be published by these agencies on the TQI website.

99   The recently established Recruitment and Admissions Office has responsibility for the recruitment and admission of all full-time UK students, with the International Office having the parallel responsibility for prospective students from outside the UK. Both offices are portrayed in the SED as having primarily a marketing function, although very much as part of an increasingly integrated approach to 'giving students a much clearer view of what they are aiming to get out of HE'. Improving students' motivation and engagement with their studies is at the heart of the institutional strategy for enhancing student progression, while improving the linkages with recruitment and admissions at one end of the continuum and with employment at the other, both within the context of widening participation, are regarded as key priorities.

100 The SED presented a particularly positive view of the statistical information now being generated by UNIVERSE which, 'teething troubles' aside, had achieved the specification requirement 'to make student progression and attainment data readily available at course and module levels'. However, the SED also acknowledged the need to improve the quality of the data entered on the UNIVERSE system and explained that this was being addressed by developing tools to assist with data reconciliation, for example, the facility to list the names of students included within the computation of particular statistics. It also highlighted the continuing development of statistical reporting to reflect the increasing complexity of student study patterns, with the aim of moving to full-scale cohort analysis and increasing use of charts to show student movement through the flexible pathways of the various modular frameworks.

101 The audit team was able to verify, primarily through the DATs, that statistical data relating to admissions, progression and completion rates were being commented on in the AQM process and that the utility of the reports provided centrally had improved over time. Through one DAT, it learned there had been high failure rates over an extended

period, impeding progression from Stage 1 to Stage 2 and, in the case of one course, from Stage 2 to Stage 3 However, the recruitment targets for the affected courses had barely changed, leading the team to question the extent to which progression and completion data were being used to inform admissions policy as distinct from strategies for student support.

102 The audit team was generally unclear as to how the standard statistical reports could readily be used to inform institutional admissions policies, since they did not permit easy tracking of particular student 'types', such as those entering through 'clearing' or from 'feeder' HND/C programmes (see paragraph 150 below). Nevertheless, the monitoring by SAGOP of the performance of students entering with advanced standing from overseas partner institutions was recognised by the team, as was the University's success in widening participation, demonstrated by its matching or exceeding all the HEFCE benchmarks. The team considered that, overall, the University was making appropriate and increasing use of statistical management information and had itself identified areas for improvement to which it was giving suitable priority.

Assurance of the quality of teaching staff, appointment, appraisal and reward

103 According to the SED, the University Procedure for Recruitment, Selection and Appointment to Vacant Posts, which deals comprehensively with all aspects of staff recruitment, seeks 'to ensure a consistent approach across all areas of the University and compliance with employment and equal opportunities legislation, good practice and complementary policies' (for example, those relating to equality and diversity). For teaching posts, where the method of selection is by panel interview, candidates are short-listed against a person specification. University staff involved in short-listing and interviewing receive training through an internal Recruitment and Selection course, and candidates will normally give a presentation as part of the selection process. 'Separate, highly devolved' procedures exist for the recruitment of hourly-paid teaching staff.

104 The University has recently re-launched its annual appraisal system as the Staff Development and Performance Review which, the SED explained, placed greater emphasis on aligning individual objectives with school business plans and institutional goals. Under the new scheme, which remains compulsory for teaching staff, including part-time lecturers and those on short-term contracts, the review is based on self-appraisal,

facilitated by an appraisal interview, the intended outcome of which is the formulation of an agreed action plan. Training for those conducting reviews is mandatory, but it is also offered to those being reviewed. The scheme specifically excludes matters relating to conduct, capability, probation or promotion, which are covered by other procedures.

105 The current reward mechanisms for teaching staff differ according to the level of appointment, but all include provision for recognising exceptional performance. At lecturer level this may be by accelerated progression along the scale or promotion to senior lecturer; at senior and principal lecturer levels merit increments may be applied within the existing scales. All such cases for internal promotion involve recommendation by the relevant dean and are considered at an annual meeting of the Academic Executive, convened specifically for this purpose. Appointment to principal lecturer is by open competition, internally or against an external field, and conferment of the title of reader or professor is on the basis of meeting specific criteria, which have recently been made more explicit by the publication of new guidelines. A system of performance-related pay operates for deans and directors of service, with salaries and rewards for top-level posts being individually determined by the Board of Governors.

106 The SED did not provide a specific evaluation in relation to teaching staff of the effectiveness of the arrangements for their appointment, appraisal and reward, although it indicated that there was to be a review of the procedures and contractual arrangements relating to hourly-paid lecturers. This had been prompted by some evident differences in induction arrangements and staff development opportunities between schools. However, the SED did draw attention to the University's general monitoring of 'ethnic origin, gender and disability' throughout the stages of its recruitment process. This had indicated that 'the profile of those appointed broadly reflect[ed] the ethnic composition of the population at local and national level', but that there was 'under representation of disabled applicants', a point now being addressed by a Human Resources Strategy Working Group.

107 From its meetings with a wide range of academic staff, including several recent appointees, the audit team was able verify that the University's procedures for appointment, appraisal and reward were being operated as described in the SED. New staff commented very favourably on the induction process, which they found to be comprehensive. Teaching and support staff alike reported positively on their experience of appraisal, which they confirmed was

developmental and supportive, while senior academic and service managers emphasised the link between their annual performance objectives and school or corporate plans. In the context of reward mechanisms, the team noted the University's emphasis on promotional or financial incentives, with apparently little or no use being made of other possible rewards. Overall, the team found the University's processes for staff appointment, appraisal and reward to be effective, clearly articulated and well-embedded.

Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development

108 The Human Resources Development Committee (HRDC), replacing the former Staff Development Committee, has responsibility for monitoring staff development activity organised by the main central providers, including CHED. CHED reports annually to TALC and within schools there are teaching and learning committees (or the equivalent), which identify the priorities for development activity. Ongoing projects and developments coordinated by CHED are given publicity through a well-established annual conference for University staff and staff from partner institutions, and through an annual exhibition of the work being done by technicians in support of students' learning. CHED also offers training sessions, workshops, seminars and group consultancy for staff, in addition to courses in education at certificate, diploma and masters levels.

109 The University requires all newly-appointed staff without a recognised teaching qualification or substantial teaching experience to enrol on the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching during their 12-month probationary period. This course, which is an integral component of a postgraduate certificate, diploma and MA programme in teaching and learning in HE, is recognised as providing accredited teacher status by both the Institute of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE, now within the Higher Education Academy) and the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA). The University also offers a route to accredited teacher status for experienced staff, involving a combination of course modules and accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL), while postgraduate research students or assistants, undertaking teaching or demonstrator duties, are required to take a shorter variant of the course. Supplementing formal training are mentoring arrangements to support new staff and a well-established system of peer observation and review of teaching, applicable to all teaching staff, including hourly-paid lecturers.

110 The SED emphasised the significance of the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the associated Human Resources Strategy in driving the development of teaching skills for teaching staff. It explained that formalising the relationship between TALC, which had overall responsibility for delivering the Learning and Teaching Strategy, and CHED had closely tied task force activities to the Learning and Teaching Strategy and broadened their scope to encompass all six of its strategic goals. The earlier emphasis on information and communication technology (ICT) had been redirected towards pedagogy within a blended learning approach. Similarly, locating teaching skills development within the wider remit of the HRDC had facilitated its integration with other staff management policies and also with the activities of other providers of staff development opportunities. The SED also highlighted the achievement of IiP status for all schools and service departments, which had 'resulted in greater scrutiny of the effectiveness of staff development activity in each devolved unit…'.

111 Through its reading of documentation and meetings with staff, the audit team gained a clear impression of the range of well-established and useful training opportunities on offer to staff and also of the University's strong commitment to staff support and development at all levels. Within schools, teaching fellows were clearly perceived as agents of change and the CHED task force as active in disseminating good practice in general and not just that associated with the use of ICT. Staff were uniformly positive about the link between appraisal and staff development, reinforcing to the team that appraisal was a valuable, developmental process. Senior staff made the point that they used staff development strategically as a tool for assuring the quality of teaching and promoting enhancement. The team learned of initiatives to increase the staff development opportunities for research staff, and also of informal arrangements for including staff from partner institutions in staff development activities organised in-house, although take-up was fairly low. In relation to this point, the team acknowledges that the appropriateness of arrangements for staff development within partner institutions is evaluated as part of the approval processes for collaborative provision, and that joint staff development does occur within validation arrangements. In conclusion, there was much evidence in support of the statement in the SED that 'the University seeks to maximise the potential of its staff'.

Assurance of the quality of teaching delivered through distributed and distance methods

112 Courses delivered by distributed and distance methods are subject to the same approval, monitoring and review processes as courses delivered in-house, involving face-to-face contact. In its SED, the University acknowledged 'that it [was] not as advanced or experienced in these [distance or blended learning] techniques as some institutions', indicating that it had learned this through experience, in that its initial venture into distance delivery through a postgraduate certificate course had resulted in a self-critical report following its first year of operation. Since then, the University had continued to pursue a 'cautious' approach to distance learning, with procedures strictly aligned to the *Code of practice*. It had approved a limited range of programmes, notably in the Business School, 'in each case with expert external scrutiny and advice'.

113 The University has been developing its on-line learning environment, through a proprietary VLE, since 1999 when all modules were given a web page, and usage has been increasing year-on-year. A TALC report on the evaluation of on-line learning (May 2002) showed that some 50 per cent of modules across the University made extensive use of the VLE and where the development of on-line provision had been incorporated into strategic targets, 75 to 80 per cent adoption had been achieved.

114 In meetings with the audit team, students confirmed the variability in usage of the VLE across the University, as identified by the TALC report, while staff expressed the belief that they might now be falling behind other universities in their development of on-line learning. The team formed the view that the University had in place appropriate structures for moving to the next stage of development of the VLE as a managed learning environment. It had agreed on a blended learning approach and had clearly recognised its responsibility to train staff in the pedagogical principles that should inform distributed learning, as well as in the use of the software platform, with CHED and CSV both instrumental in their respective capacities. Moreover, as stated in the SED, it had gained experience of distance delivery on which to base the necessary protocols 'to ensure that the quality of the student experience and the standards achieved via on-line learning have parity with…more traditional methods'.

Learning support resources

115 Since the last audit, the University has built the new Lanchester Library, which also houses the Teaching and Learning Support Unit, providing support to staff in the development of teaching and learning materials. The delivery of library services is coordinated by a management group, comprising the heads of its major services. This has responsibility for budget monitoring and producing the annual business plan. The latter feeds into the University planning processes, which link academic developments to resource requirements. The SED claimed that 'a great deal of care' was taken to ensure consonance between the development of library services and the University Learning and Teaching Strategy. In this connection, the annual report on library services, incorporating action plans based on feedback from users, was formally considered by TALC, although the report also had a wider circulation to the Vice-Chancellor's Group and to schools. According to the SED, monitoring the performance of library services through TALC represented 'tangible evidence of accountability to users'.

116 CSV supplies central ICT services, including PC support for staff and student usage as well as for administrative and academic software applications, with technical support being provided at both central and local levels. CSV similarly produces an annual business plan, which feeds into the University's annual planning cycle, and also contains projections for the provision of computing facilities for the next four years. Forecasting is based on information from schools and departments about their ICT requirements, collected by means of capacity-planning questionnaires. According to the SED, the development of computing services is shaped by the University Information Strategy, its related strategies and corporate management decisions, the implementation of which fall within the remit of the Information Strategy Group. This, like TALC, is chaired by the PVC (Academic Development and Quality).

117 However, as the SED indicated, these arrangements for deciding priorities for learning resources provision are also informed by feedback from staff and students about the quality of services, collected by a variety of means. For library services these comprise a twice-yearly student survey; CCCs; representation on school and programme boards; meetings with subject librarians; and, more recently, staff surveys, the first of these being conducted in 2002 with a generally favourable response. Parallel mechanisms for CSV involve annual student and staff questionnaires, with input from students also coming from CCCs, programme and school boards. Both services also have extensive representation on institutional committees including, in the case of library

services, SAGUK and SAGOP, to facilitate links with partner institutions. In addition, they hold separate annual meetings with each dean and are represented at the PVC's annual meetings with students.

118 The SWS confirmed that students were generally satisfied with the resources and services offered by the library, indicating that staff were particularly helpful and responsive. Noise from other users was consistently mentioned as the main problem, which had also been acknowledged in the SED. In a small number of cases, students reported that there were insufficient copies or outdated editions of standard texts and postgraduate research students raised the issue that some electronic materials were not accessible off-campus. The SWS also confirmed that students were generally satisfied with the University's ICT provision and recognised the recent and considerable investment in ICT services, including a significant increase in the number of PCs available. However, it noted the criticism from student representatives across schools regarding access to the network and, in engineering specifically, access to specialist software. The SWS referred to the ways in which the library and CSV conducted their student surveys and posted the results on University and departmental websites as 'excellent practice'.

119 The audit team noted the steady improvement being achieved in students' access to learning resources, such as the extended library opening times, commented on by staff in one DAT as being helpful to both full-time and part-time students, and the recent extension of internet access to some student halls of residence, clearly welcomed by the student beneficiaries. The team also considered the appointment of the Library Teaching Fellow to be indicative of the 'care' that the University claimed in integrating the development of library services with its Learning and Teaching Strategy. In meetings with the team, staff confirmed the active participation of library and CSV staff in a range of institutional and school committees and that both services were involved at an early stage in the CARP and PARP processes. The team concluded that the University was taking a coordinated and strategic approach to the provision and development of learning resources and had appropriate mechanisms in place for monitoring and responding to user feedback.

Academic guidance, support and supervision

120 The University has a variety of mechanisms for the academic guidance and support of students, spanning the duration of their studies, ranging from induction, through personal support, to developing skills that enhance employability. For students in

partner institutions, the mechanisms are confirmed as comparable through the University's procedures for institutional approval and the ongoing monitoring processes (see paragraph 140 below).

121 In the context of academic guidance, the SED placed considerable emphasis on its arrangements for communicating information to students through induction, which comprises a series of central and local events, prescribed in content by a set of 'quality guidelines'. At induction, students are issued with school student handbooks containing an insert produced by Academic Registry, together with course-specific study guides and instructions on how to access the electronic module information directory (MID), which provides them with essential information about modules within their programmes of study, including the titles of free-choice modules. There are separate induction packs for part-time students unable to attend the induction events.

122 The arrangements for academic support are governed by the University Code of Practice for the Personal Support of Students, which also covers pastoral support. The SED indicated that, provided they met the minimum level of support stipulated by this Code of Practice, schools were permitted to adopt different systems, with some using course and year tutors, others providing named personal tutors, at least for first-year students, but most operating a surgery system, whereby students are given guaranteed access to designated staff at specified times. In addition, there are specialist support facilities for English language (aimed at international students), computing, and mathematics through the well-established Mathematics Support Centre. An equivalent centre, directed towards improving students' academic writing skills, is starting up in May 2004.

123 With respect to employability, the SED referred to the University's longstanding requirement, dating back to the Enterprise Code of Practice (1995), that each course should have a clearly stated strategy for providing students with a range of 'transferable' skills. This Code of Practice has subsequently been updated and renamed the Code of Practice for Academic and Professional Skills (2001) and, in their course planning activity, schools are required to demonstrate how the development of these skills is addressed.

124 The University's arrangements for the supervision of research students are outlined in the Research Degrees Handbook, which is issued to both research students and supervisors. Two associated guides are also available, one of which is specifically aimed at new students. Central oversight of research students' progress is through RDC, with local monitoring and action planning being undertaken

by school-level subcommittees. The University offers a generic module in research methodology, which all research students are required to attend and pass, along with one other subject-related module. The Research Section of the Academic Registry is responsible for coordinating seminars, symposiums, newsletters and other events for postgraduate research students. There is also a website on the VLE providing a mechanism for research students to raise queries or issues to be addressed.

125 In its SED, the University drew the connection between student progression and student support, suggesting that retention provided a measure of how effective support arrangements were in counter-balancing what it viewed as an increasingly prevalent problem of students' lack of engagement (see paragraph 82 above). In this context, it attributed a significant improvement in retention to 'local induction and enhanced academic and pastoral support in the early weeks of courses'.

126 Collectively, the students on taught programmes who met with the audit team had experienced the whole variety of different arrangements for academic support outlined in the SED, including that of being introduced at induction to the tutor who would provide their academic and pastoral support. Individually, they were uniformly of the view that they were receiving an appropriate level of academic support. Postgraduate research students expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their supervisory arrangements, which included a minimum of two supervisors, with some students having a third external supervisor or access to external advisers.

127 In its meetings with staff and students, the audit team organised its enquiries under the broad headings of information and advice, support arrangements, and skills development. Taught students generally commented favourably on their experience of induction and on the usefulness of the student and course handbooks and the MID. However, in the specific case of free-choice modules, the majority were clearly of the view that there was limited opportunity to take options from other subject areas or schools, because tutors advised against doing this or there were restrictions arising from timetabling clashes or the stipulation of prerequisite modules. The team pursued the matter, first raised in the SWS, with several student groups, who consistently made the same point, which the team connected with the University's moves to control module proliferation and group together related courses, and to substitute school-based module fairs for the former university-wide event.

Therefore, the team considers it desirable for the University to review its stated commitment to the principle of 'free-choice' modules since, in practice, there appears to be limited opportunity or encouragement given to students for selecting options outside their subject area.

128 While accepting that the University was stipulating minimum requirements within a strategy of targeting support according to 'student type and culture', the audit team considered that the wide variety of systems in place was potentially leading to a lack of equivalence in the provision of academic support. For instance, staff confirmed that not all schools had in place a personal tutor system in the early stages of their courses and that in some schools this arrangement was restricted to full-time students, with a different system for part-time students. Through the DATs, the team also found that some subject areas were rather more proactive than others in their arrangements for student support, for instance, in relation to monitoring students' attendance (see paragraph 151 below). However, the team noted that the University was itself aware of the need to address the issue of consistency and was seeking to implement best practice in tutor support across the University, particularly in the early stages of courses. In the case of postgraduate research students, the team was able to verify that there were robust arrangements in place for their supervision and for progress-monitoring, which occurred at individual, school and university levels, with pastoral support being provided by school-based tutors.

129 In relation to 'transferable' skills, while students were able to describe some of the ways these were being addressed within their courses, the audit team was unable to gain a strong impression, from students or staff, of the University's commitment to the development of skills to enhance employability. In relation to systems for the delivery of progress files and personal development planning, staff acknowledged that the University was not at the forefront of these developments, although it was starting to consider them. Students seemed to be aware of the recent availability of the on-line careers management system, but not of any developments in the area of progress files. Notwithstanding these observations, there is good practice in the expansion of dedicated arrangements for assisting students to improve their mathematical and academic writing skills. The pilot student mentoring system for Asian and black students in the School of MIS (see paragraph 164 below) is also highlighted as an innovative initiative for enhancing students' employability.

Personal support and guidance

130 A comprehensive range of welfare services is provided through the Student Services Department by the various teams, officers or coordinators, who give specialist advice or practical help to students in areas such as counselling, disabilities (physical or sensory), mental health and financial support. These arrangements are complemented by an alternative independent service from CUSU's Advice Centre and there is additional support for international students available through the International Office. Also located within Student Services are the nursery, the chaplaincy and the careers team, which also offers an employment service that helps to find paid work for students compatible with their study commitments.

131 In the SED, the University cited its good track record in the 'student support and guidance' aspect of subject review as giving recognition to the overall effectiveness of its student support system. It also explained that although there had not subsequently been an internal review of Student Services, pending implementation of a revised method for conducting such reviews (see paragraph 45 above), the Department had achieved IiP status and the careers team had been awarded a kitemark from the Guidance Council (2002). In common with other support services, Student Services contributes to a number of University committees, notably the Equality and Diversity Committee and the HRDC, and student feedback on its activity is monitored through survey questionnaires, CCCs, programme and school boards.

132 The SED drew attention to aspects of the University's practice where there were ongoing developments, discussing these in the context of the *Code of practice*. Areas identified for improvement, in the light of the *Code, Section 3: Students with disabilities*, included management information, the estate in relation to disabled access, and staff training. With reference to the *Code, Section 8: Career education, information and guidance*, the University was seeking to embed this more firmly in the curriculum and was promoting closer collaboration between the careers team and academic subject groups through the Employability Group. Careers staff are also members of programme and school boards.

133 The SWS referred to the close and productive relationships between CUSU's Advice Centre and some University departments, highlighting the referral systems between the Finance Office and the Student Funding Office as particularly beneficial, although also alluding to a lack of awareness on the part of some

school staff about the range and location of services provided by CUSU. The SWS also suggested that a more standardised approach to eliciting student feedback on support services was generally warranted, to include the library and CSV as well as Student Services. In meetings with the audit team, students were extremely positive about the range and quality of services provided by both Student Services and CUSU's Advice Centre. Some students, who were receiving dyslexia support, commented favourably on the assistance they were given.

134 Through the DATs, the audit team found practice at local level worthy of specific mention, notably the working partnership between school-based learning support coordinators and the University Disability Adviser in assisting dyslexic, partially-sighted or blind students; and the collaboration between the School of MIS and the careers team in piloting the mentoring scheme for black and Asian students (see paragraph 129 above). Also worthy of mention is the production of a Mature Students Guide to Higher Education as part of a project carried out by CUSU, funded by HEFCE under its widening participation initiative.

135 The audit team concurred with the positive conclusions of earlier audits and reviews. It found the University's arrangements for the personal support and guidance of students to be premised on careful consideration of 'student type and culture', generally effective in their operation and well-received by the student body. There is good practice in the University's continuing development of a range of local and central support services.

Collaborative provision

136 At the strategic level there is separation of the University's UK and overseas collaborative provision, with the former being linked to its strategy for providing access to HE by working with other providers in the Coventry and Warwickshire sub-region, and the latter to the University's overall strategy for international development, which is the responsibility of the International Development Committee (IDC). This separation is reflected in both the nature of the collaborative arrangements themselves and their monitoring, routed through SAGUK and SAGOP respectively.

137 The University's UK collaborative arrangements still mainly involve franchised courses, whereby the University retains responsibility for the award and regulation of the course, and the partner institution has delegated responsibility for the delivery of all or part of the teaching. Franchises are respectively full

or hybrid according to whether the University or the partner institution has responsibility for the funding; two of the present 18 franchises involve hybrid franchised courses. The number of validated courses has been significantly reduced, with the termination in 2003 of the University's principal validation arrangement with a college of HE. Nevertheless, it continues to validate a small number of sub-degree programmes in FECs and is building up its Foundation-degree portfolio through validation arrangements. These are not governed by the University's regulations or detailed quality assurance processes, although the University is responsible for the standards of the awards. In addition, there is a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology that is a joint award with the University of Warwick.

138 Overseas collaborative arrangements more typically involve validation than the standard franchise and include both 'recognised courses', guaranteeing entry to specific courses at the University, and latterly courses approved within the University's 'supported validated' framework. This gives the University more control in the early stages of a partnership, while allowing the partner to take on greater responsibility as confidence in the collaboration develops. A variant, known as the 'autonomous franchise', clarifies that the curriculum and ILOs of courses delivered at a partner institution should match those delivered by the University and that there should be sharing of assessment responsibilities. In the case of ICM, this has allowed the University to take into account both the maturity of its partnership and the stipulation of the Malaysian national accreditation body Lembaga Akreditasi Negara that, in order to obtain 'approved' status, courses offered through collaborative arrangements should be the same as in the parent institution. The University has recently concluded its exit strategy from a franchise involving engineering programmes.

139 Despite the division of responsibility for the monitoring of collaborative arrangements between SAGUK and SAGOP, the main processes for approval, monitoring and review are essentially the same for both UK and overseas collaborative courses and reflect the in-house processes previously described (see paragraphs 40 to 44 above). The first stage is institutional approval of the partner concerned, which entails panel scrutiny, although the institutional approval panel (unlike a CARP or PARP) does not have delegated authority, but makes recommendations to QAC. Where overseas partnerships are concerned, there is the prerequisite that the 'business case' must be proven to the satisfaction of both IDC and the Vice-Chancellor's Group. Once institutional approval is in place,

validated and recognised courses are subject to approval through the standard CARP process. Franchised courses, in recognition that their in-house equivalent will normally already have been approved, are subject to approval by a variant process involving PARPs, whose purpose is specifically to ensure that appropriate mechanisms are put in place to monitor the franchise and that suitable staffing and facilities are available. In the case of a new franchised course, the CARP and PARP processes are combined. An integral part of all approval procedures is a formal agreement signed by both the University and the partner institution, which defines the respective responsibilities for course delivery and quality assurance. Franchises are subject to review after six years, unless the PARP stipulates a shorter period. Administrative support for institutional approval, CARP and PARP processes is provided through PaQS.

140 There are documented procedures for the approval of both UK and overseas collaborative arrangements, which include pro forma for preparing proposals and guidance for staff on assessing the suitability of collaborative partners and evaluating the rationales for prospective collaborations and the feasibility of proposals. There is a University Code of Practice for the Operation of Franchised Courses, intended to ensure that, as far as possible, the student experience is comparable with that of the equivalent in-house course. Primary responsibility for day-to-day liaison between the University and its collaborative partners lies with link tutors.

141 AQM (see paragraphs 52 to 55 above) incorporates all types of collaborative provision, with franchised courses feeding into the process at the programme level and validated courses at the school level, and from there onwards to SAGUK and SAGOP. The University appoints all external examiners for its collaborative courses, who send their reports directly to the University. The same SABs and PABs (where practical) have responsibility for franchised courses as for the equivalent in-house course, with special examiners appointed to PABs for the small number of courses where there is no such equivalent. The University's standard procedures for monitoring its practice against the *Code of practice* (see paragraph 73 above) are applied to the section on collaborative provision and, in respect of the overseas collaboration with ICM, consistency with the *Code* was confirmed in the April 2003 quality audit report.

142 The SED acknowledged the market shift away from the traditional franchise on which the University's existing structures and procedures were essentially based, while pointing to the continued

improvement of certain features of its franchise work and to the more generous allocation of funds to partner FECs. The SED signalled the University's likely move towards recognition arrangements, allowing student progression from further to higher education, with the new FEC Collaboration and Partnership Group being instrumental in this area. It also cited nascent developments, led by the CLL, to offer an integrated curriculum, comprising modules and short courses at different levels, within a regional network of 'providers', based on NTI.

143 In the case of overseas collaborative provision, the University was firm in its belief that it had 'appropriate procedures, a committee structure and internal networks, which allow[ed] effective discharge of [its] responsibility for quality and standards in overseas collaborative provision'. It emphasised features such as the clear division between commercial interest and quality assurance and the rigour of its approval procedures, which it was proposing to strengthen by introducing further separation between institutional and course approval through extending the interval between these stages, despite the obvious advantages of being able to combine them in a single overseas trip. In the general context of institutional approval, the SED acknowledged that several of the existing UK arrangements predated the current process. In addition, the SED stated that SAGUK and SAGOP had greatly assisted QAC 'to exercise effective quality control of the University's collaborative developments', but it also suggested that there would be benefits from closer collaboration between them, for instance, as a means of harmonising pro forma and reporting methods, and increasing the pool of staff available for approval of overseas arrangements.

144 The audit team was clearly unable to comment on new ventures related to UK widening participation, other than to refer to its earlier conclusion about the consideration given to 'student type and culture' in the current systems for student support (see paragraph 135 above). With regard to existing UK arrangements, it was apparent to the team, from discussions with staff at both ends of the collaboration, that the University's link tutors, working across partner institutions, were providing an effective communication channel at the planning and approval stages, as well as day-to-day liaison for courses once in operation.

145 Generally, the audit team found the University's confidence in its arrangements for overseas collaborative provision to be well-placed.
The proactive approach to quality assurance was evident from initiatives such as the pre-departure

briefings for staff involved in approval processes, the pro forma and guidelines provided by SAGOP to schools in connection with AQM reporting to facilitate cross-school comparisons, and the interim reviews of new overseas partnerships after two or three student intakes. Overall, there is good practice in the University's considered approach to the management of collaborative provision, which incorporates mechanisms for relating the degree of direct involvement to the level of confidence built up in the partnership arrangement.

Section 3: The audit investigations: discipline audit trails

Discipline audit trails

146 In each of the selected DATs, appropriate members of the audit team met staff and students to discuss the programmes and also studied a sample of assessed student work, annual module and programme monitoring reports, including external examiners' reports, and annual and periodic review documentation relating to the programmes. Their findings are as follows.

Biological and sport and exercise sciences

147 The scope of the DAT comprised biological science (BIO) and sport and exercise science (SPO) programmes within the School of Science and the Environment as follows:

- BSc (Hons) Biological Sciences;
- BSc (Hons) Biochemistry;
- BSc (Hons) Pharmaceutical Sciences;
- BSc (Hons) Biomedical Sciences;
- BSc (Hons) Sport and Exercise Science;
- BSc (Hons) Sport and Exercise Science with Health Sciences;
- BSc (Hons) Sport and Exercise Science with Human Resource Management;
- BSc (Hons) Sport and Exercise Science with Dance;
- BSc (Hons) Exercise Physiology;
- HND/C Sport and Exercise Science, as part of the 2+2 BSc (Hons) Sport and Exercise Science, a hybrid franchise arrangement with Henley College Coventry, for which there is no equivalent in-house provision.

148 The basis of the DAT was a DSED written specifically for the audit, with the respective programme specifications for the BIO, SPO and HND/C programmes provided in an annex. The dates of the last CARPs were May 2001 for BIO and SPO programmes and September 2002 for the

HND/C programme. For ease of reference, changes made to programme specifications since their CARP approval were noted separately.

149 Programme specifications were systematically produced as input to the CARP process, initially as definitive course documents and latterly according to the University template. Reference was made to the FHEQ and to appropriate subject benchmark statements: for the BIO programme, the *Subject benchmark statement* for biosciences and biomedical science respectively, and for the SPO programme, the *Subject benchmark statement* for hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism. The SPO programme also made use of guidance issued by the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences. The HND/C programme specification was designed to reflect the aims of the Edexcel/BTEC HND/C award in Science and to allow progression to the in-house BSc (Hons) Sport and Exercise Science course at Stage 2, although both diploma and certificate awards are matched to Intermediate level of the FHEQ. Within programme specifications key (transferable) skills were mapped through individual modules and there were also clear references to more detailed assessment procedures contained in student handbooks.

150 Progression and achievement data for the AQM process, available from UNIVERSE, were reviewed at both module and course level in the respective SQG and PB reports. Although the analysis was consistently based on the data presented, it was unclear to the audit team how the data might be used to follow the progression of specific student 'types', specifically those entering from the 'feeder' HND/C programme.

151 Annual reports produced for AQM illustrated a progressive improvement in the level of detailed evaluation undertaken over the three-year period examined. It was clear to the audit team that the subject groups were able to identify areas of concern (for instance, recruitment, progression and non-attendance) and were collaborating with SACC to address these areas. As an example, the team was told about the pilot project for monitoring student attendance every three weeks, under which every student receives a colour-coded letter commending (green) or otherwise commenting on (amber or red) their commitment to their studies.

152 From the documentation provided, the audit team was able to verify that module and course approval and review processes were in line with the University's MARP and CARP procedures. The May 2001 joint CARP of the BIO and SPO programmes involved four panel members, external to the University, who were able to confirm that programme standards were comparable with those in other institutions. The documentation indicated that there had been discussion by the CARP about programme ILOs in relation to the FHEQ, subject benchmarks and about the quality of students' learning opportunities in relation to the *Code of practice*. Programme specifications have subsequently been modified to accommodate minor changes that have occurred since the CARP. The September 2002 combined CARP and PARP for the HND/C programme similarly included an external panel member. This event specifically considered the 2+2 progression route and provided the audit team with an illustration of the rigour of quality assurance processes undertaken in conjunction with collaborative partners.

153 The audit team had full access to all relevant external examiners' reports and was able to track from documentation the various stages through SQGs, PBs and the School Board to the final response communicated by the Associate Dean to both the external examiners and the University. The link between this process and the AQM process was well illustrated and also articulated clearly by staff in meetings with the team. The team considered that responses were timely and balanced and indicated a willingness by the School to take action in a wholly appropriate manner.

154 The 2002 reports for the BIO programme, revealed that both external examiners, in answering the question concerning 'the extent to which the course meets its aims and objectives and stated expected outcomes', responded that they were unable to comment since they were responsible only for individual modules. It was clear to the audit team that external examiners were being utilised well in the maintenance of standards at module level, but it was less clear whether an appropriate overview of standards was being maintained at course level.

155 The School's existing assessment strategy was found to be in alignment with the emerging University Assessment Strategy and, therefore, consistent with the *Code of practice*. Students confirmed that assignments and assessment criteria were clearly communicated to them and that feedback on their performance was generally timely, usually within six weeks, although with some variation depending on the workload of the responsible member of staff. The audit team also heard of pilot projects to explore the use of the VLE in both formative and summative assessment. From its examination of assessment criteria, marking schemes and progression requirements, the team concluded that assessment was being conducted in line with the School's stated intentions.

156 The audit team saw examples of assessed work drawn from across all the courses covered by the DAT, although it was not in every case provided with the related examination paper or assessment task. However, it was able to appreciate the variety of assessment tools employed and, to a lesser extent, to consider the range of student performance across a particular assignment. The student work was found to match the expectations of the programme specifications and this was confirmed in the relevant external examiners' reports. Marking was consistent with the general criteria published in student handbooks and due care had been exercised in the moderation of marks awarded. In the case of the HND/C programme, assessment was conducted in accordance with generic Edexcel/BTEC criteria. Overall, the team found the standard of student achievement to be appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

157 The audit team examined a number of the School's student handbooks and, although there were minor differences in the format used, the standard, content and presentation was good. Information is provided to students in both printed format and electronically, via the VLE and the MID. The students confirmed that the handbooks were both accurate and helpful and that they included a summary version of the programme specification and detailed module descriptions. The team concluded that the handbooks and other information provided to students were a significant contributor to student academic support.

158 Following the subject review of biosciences, which had identified deficiencies in staff numbers and other learning resources within the sport science area, additional staff have been appointed and new investment has been made in the Human Performance Laboratory. The University has also recently secured a grant from HEFCE to refurbish and re-equip the in-vitro physiology and pharmacology facility used by both the BIO and SPO programmes. Students commented to the audit team that laboratory facilities and library and information technology (IT) provision were generally good, although sport science students expressed a preference for more laboratory practical work to be included in the earlier years of their courses. In addition, the students appreciated the high level of academic and personal support they received from enthusiastic staff.

159 In the context of student feedback, the audit team learned that it was School practice to administer annual module questionnaires, as well as an end-of-year course questionnaire. Students are also able to make their views known more generally via CCCs and through on-line discussion on the VLE. Examples of issues raised in CCCs included requests for the VLE to be used to feedback marks from laboratory sessions (BIO) and for the attainment of 'coaching qualifications' to be incorporated in the 'coaching' modules (SPO); both requests have since had a positive outcome. The students with whom the team met were confident in the consultative processes operating within the School and satisfied with the timeliness of the responses to issues raised.

160 Overall, the audit team was satisfied that:

- the standard of student achievement in the programmes covered by the DAT is appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ;
- the quality of the learning opportunities is suitable for the programmes of study in BIO and SPO, leading to the named awards.

Computing

161 The scope of the DAT comprised provision in computing, within the School of MIS, selected from the schemes of degree courses in computing, interdisciplinary degree courses in IT and vocational courses in computing and IT, as follows:

Scheme of Degree Courses in Computing

- BSc Computer Science;
- BA Business Computing;
- BSc Software Engineering;
- BSc Computer Systems.

Scheme of Interdisciplinary Degree Courses in IT

- BA Business Information Technology;
- BA Multimedia Computing.

Scheme of Vocational Courses in Computing and IT

- BSc Computing (2+2);
- HND Computing.

162 The basis of the DAT was a DSED written specifically for the audit, with the programme specifications for each of the three separate schemes provided in an annex. The date of the last CARP, which covered all the courses, was March 2002 and the CARP documentation was also made available to the audit team.

163 The main features and detailed aims of the courses were set out in the programme specifications which, although in a slightly older format than that currently in use, complied with University requirements. Appendices mapped the relationship of ILOs to outcome statements within

the *Subject benchmark statement* for computing; the contribution of the mandatory modules to the ILOs; and, where relevant, linkages between ILOs and the University's Enterprise Capabilities (since replaced by the University Code of Practice for Academic and Professional Skills Development). The 2002 review of courses was influenced by both the FHEQ and the *Subject benchmark statement* for computing and recent external examiners' comments have confirmed the appropriateness of the curriculum to this statement. Modules within the courses were developed with reference to NICATS level descriptors and also to the requirements of the British Computer Society (BCS) for accreditation of courses or exemptions for membership.

164 Progression and achievement data are available from UNIVERSE at module and course level for the respective use by SQGs and PBs for annual reporting within AQM. The audit team learned that data at module level might be used to trigger a 'mini-review' of a module, identifying action to be taken before its next delivery was due. Similarly, data on progression between stages of a course might result in action at course or scheme level; for instance, the School was currently addressing concerns about progression and achievement on some courses in a number of ways, including a strengthened personal tutor system for students at Stage 1. First destination statistics had shown that the rate of employment among graduates from computing courses had fallen recently and that the employment rate for black and Asian graduates was significantly lower than for other ethnic groups. As a result, a pilot mentoring scheme has been introduced, in collaboration with the careers team, for current MIS students within these ethnic groups to provide additional support to enhance their employability.

165 The School operates within the University's systems for approval, monitoring and review, using MARPs for the approval (reapproval) of modules and a SCARP to prepare for the 2002 CARP event. For this review, employer input was specifically sought through a survey, while two forums, the Commercial Services Advisory Board and the Industrial Advisory Board help to ensure regular contributions from employers. In addition to the annual reports produced by SQGs, PBs and the School Board, the International Programme Manager also prepares a report for AQM. The audit team found these reports generally to be comprehensive and to provide a balance between issues of concern, areas of good practice and points for action, although some duplication was evident, particularly between the SQG and PB reports. Staff

confirmed that feedback from AQM was received by the School Board from QAC.

166 The audit team had access to recent external examiner reports and was able to confirm that appropriate and timely action was being taken in response to their comments. Through AQM documentation, it was also able to track the progress of reports through SQGs and PBs, culminating in the preparation of the response by the Associate Dean.

167 The audit team was also able to verify that the assessment practices relating to computing courses were consistent with both the University Assessment Strategy and the *Code of practice*. In the sample of assessed work provided to the team, there was evidence of standard coversheets being used for coursework assignments to record the ILOs being assessed and of internal and external moderation of assessment tasks, such as sample double-marking of examination papers and full double-marking of final-year projects. The team learned that there was a four-week turnaround time on feedback from assessment being offered to students on computing courses, compared with the University 'norm' of six weeks, and students confirmed that the return of assessed work was generally in line with this policy.

168 From its review of the examples of student work, combined with external examiner reports, the audit team was able to confirm that in all cases student achievement was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

169 Students are provided with school-based student handbooks and course-specific study guides, which provide them with a relevant subset of the information contained in the full programme specifications. Comprehensive information and guidance concerning sandwich placements and final-year projects are also contained in separate handbooks. Students commented favourably on the usefulness of these various handbooks and guides and also confirmed that the on-line availability of module specifications through the MID assisted their understanding of learning outcomes and module assessment requirements.

170 In general, learning resources were found to be appropriate and sufficient, although students drew attention to some difficulties regarding access to one particular piece of specialist software, a concern which staff confirmed had recently been addressed. Students generally considered library facilities to be adequate, with helpful and supportive staff, but a minority commented adversely about the books available to support their courses, saying that there

were not enough, or that they were out of date. In relation to teaching staff as a learning resource, peer observation is in operation in accordance with University policy and staff confirmed that appropriate mechanisms for staff induction and development were in place, including induction for part-time staff and the use of mentors for new or inexperienced staff.

171 Both staff and students were of the view that an appropriate range of academic and personal support services was available, either from the School or centrally from the University or CUSU. The School runs a personal tutor system for students in the early stages of their courses, with support also provided through level tutors, programme managers and the Programmes Support Office. Students were complimentary about the assistance available to those with special needs from the School's Learning Support Co-ordinator and also saw the use of 'student proctors' in programming laboratories as a welcome and proactive response by the School to the need to give additional support in modules identified as 'difficult' for some students. Students were also positive about the use being made of the VLE and felt that it enhanced their overall learning experience. Additional specialist academic support in the School is offered through the Mathematics Support Centre and the Computing Support Centre.

172 Feedback from students is gathered through a variety of standard University mechanisms and is passed into the formal AQM process. These mechanisms include module questionnaires, CCCs, and student representation on PBs and the School Board. However, students seemed unaware of the mechanisms for formal response to the issues raised through module questionnaires, although staff explained that results could be posted on student notice-boards or on the VLE.

173 From the minutes of CCCs and the School Board, and to a lesser extent from PBs, the audit team was able to confirm that a wide range of student feedback was discussed, including issues such as access to open-access laboratories, library and IT resources, workloads on specific modules and the quality of food in student catering facilities. In general, the team found that appropriate and timely action was being taken to deal with the issues raised.

174 Overall, the audit team was satisfied that:

- the standard of student achievement in the programmes covered by the DAT is appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ;

- the quality of the learning opportunities is suitable for the programmes of study in computing, leading to the named awards.

Engineering

175 The scope of the DAT comprised the PEPs within the School of Engineering, as follows:

- MSc/PgDip Automotive Engineering;
- MSc/PgDip Competitive Manufacture;
- MSc/PgDip Engineering Business Management;
- MSc/PgDip Information and Communication Technology for Engineers;
- MSc/PgDip Engineering and Manufacturing Management;
- MSc/PgDip Automotive and Automotive Component Manufacture (part-time only);
- MBA/PgDip Engineering Management;
- MSc/PgDip Operational Communications;
- MCM Operational Communications.

176 The PEPs were first approved in 1994 to satisfy industrial needs and currently there are approximately 100 sponsoring companies. In addition, nine of the programmes are now offered through franchise or supported validation arrangements by MSRSAS, Bangalore, India.

177 The basis of the DAT was a DSED written specifically for the audit, with programme specifications provided in an annex. The most recent CARP review dates back to June 2000 and the CARP documentation was also made available to the audit team.

178 Programme specifications were written according to the University template and meet the expectations embodied within the FHEQ qualification descriptors for M-level programmes. The MBA Engineering Management also takes account of the *Subject benchmark statement* for masters awards in engineering. PEPs are also aligned to national credit guidelines, following amendment in 2002-03 of the number of credits required for intermediary postgraduate certificate (PgCert) and diploma (PgDip) awards. Industrial relevance is a key reference point for PEPs and external examiners have confirmed that PEPs successfully meet the developing needs of modern industry.

179 Progression and achievement data are provided from UNIVERSE to SQGs and the PB and are included in their annual reports. Monitoring of student progression is the responsibility of the programme managers, areas of concern being discussed with course tutors and the Dean. From available documentation, the audit team noted the

regular discussion of student progression and retention rates (generally around 95 per cent) at SQGs, the PB and the School Board.

180 Development and approval of modules and courses within PEPs follow the University's MARP and CARP approval and review processes, but there is also a Postgraduate Executive Committee, which is responsible for day-to-day management of the programmes, and which acts as a platform for discussion before proposals are formally made to the PB. There is also considerable input from local industry; each module has an 'industrial champion' and there is a formal point of liaison through the PEPs Industrial Steering Committee. The audit team saw much evidence of the integrated approach to module development with industrial collaboration, including a programme of 'Prestigious Lectures' delivered by industrial experts.

181 Responsibility for the monitoring of modules and programmes rests with SQGs and the PB respectively. The audit team was provided with AQM documentation and was able follow through the process whereby annual reports from SQGs and the PB feed into the preparation of the Dean's report, which was considered at the School Board, before being submitted to QAC. Staff confirmed to the team that there was often considerable feedback to the PB regarding actions required and taken at school level, although they were less aware of feedback from central committees. They also confirmed that the monitoring of collaborative provision occurred through normal University procedures.

182 There are four PEPs external examiners, allocated to module groups appropriate to their area of expertise. They attend a joint SAB/PAB, where module results are considered first, before issues of student progression and award. External examiner reports are considered by SQGs and action points are agreed. As PEPs modules run on a block timetable, so that they are completed at various times during the year, external examiner involvement continues throughout the assessment process. However, there are annual reports from external examiners giving comments covering the whole programme. The audit team reviewed these reports within AQM documentation and found that external examiners were generally satisfied with their level of involvement in PEPs. The team also considered the formal responses from the Dean to provide appropriate detail on issues raised in external examiner reports.

183 The audit team found staff generally unaware of the planned implementation of the University Assessment Strategy. However, on closer examination of the assessment practices within PEPs, the team concluded that they were broadly in the spirit of the guidelines within the University Strategy. All modules within PEPs are assessed by assignments and these are firmly based upon the ILOs articulated in the programme and module specifications. Assignment details, along with marking schemes and assessment criteria, are provided to students on commencement of a module; following the taught element of a module, assignment surgeries are held which ensure students are aware of assignment requirements. Students praised the block design of modules, and reported that feedback on assessed work was both timely and sufficiently detailed to be helpful.

184 As stated in programme specifications, PEPs students are required to attend more than 80 per cent of sessions. Students not achieving this attendance requirement are usually penalised by having marks for the module capped at 40 per cent. Module files provided to the audit team contained evidence of this process in action. However, during the meeting with staff, the team heard about a further policy, based upon attendance falling below 50 per cent, which would lead to automatic failure of a module. As far as the team could ascertain, this policy was not documented and had not been approved by the CARP. Therefore, the team encourages the University to follow up this matter as a priority with the School.

185 From examples of students' work, the audit team saw clear evidence of both internal and external moderation. It also learned that University staff made regular visits to partner institutions overseas to moderate the assessed work within collaborative provision. Based on the assessed work it reviewed and on external examiner reports, the team was able to confirm that student achievement was appropriate to the title of the individual awards and their location within the FHEQ.

186 The audit team heard from students that the student handbook, available electronically and in hard copy, provided useful guidance on study at the University and that the contents had been explained fully at induction. Students also confirmed that the on-line MID had assisted their understanding of learning outcomes and assessment requirements and it seemed that many, particularly international students, had used the MID prior to coming to Coventry, to select their modules.

187 The DSED highlighted a variety of learning resources, including the Postgraduate Centre and a student lounge, serving as a useful focal point for students. Links with local industry are utilised to facilitate arrangements for PEPs students to go on

industrial visits. However, students indicated that the library did not adequately meet the needs of their programme, although they did have access to supplementary material electronically. The VLE is also available for a number of PEPs modules as an aid to self-learning. In the context of staffing as a learning resource, there is a comprehensive School of Engineering staff development strategy and staff induction programme. Staff, including visiting staff, reported to the audit team that the University's expectations in relation to both appraisal and peer observation of teaching were being met.

188 All PEPs students are given an induction, some with personal attention, as required, and provided with a handbook. Students with whom the audit team met confirmed the accuracy and usefulness of all information provided. The team learned that student support was initially available through an approach to the Postgraduate Office, then the School Registrar and the Programme Manager. Students were generally satisfied with the support they received, commenting that staff were approachable and responsive. The team also noted that English language support was provided for non-native speakers.

189 Student feedback is obtained at module level through a standard feedback questionnaire and a post-module discussion forum chaired by a member of staff who has had no involvement with the module. Students who met the audit team were satisfied that these mechanisms allowed them to raise any major issues upon which they would wish to make their views known. Module leaders afterwards prepare a synopsis of issues arising from module-level evaluations and the actions proposed. Students, in addition, complete a programme questionnaire, the analysis of which is considered by the PB. Students are represented on CCCs, the PB and the School Board and the attendance at these meetings shows a high degree of student participation. The team was assured by students that they felt actively involved in the quality management processes relating to their courses.

190 Overall, the audit team was satisfied that:

- the standard of student achievement in the programmes covered by the DAT is appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ;
- the quality of the learning opportunities is suitable for the programmes of study in postgraduate engineering, leading to the named awards.

Graphic design and visual arts

191 The scope of the DAT comprised the graphic design and visual arts programmes within the School of Art and Design, focusing on the

established courses within a recently expanded provision, as follows:

Graphic Design Programme

- BA (Hons) Graphic Design.

Visual Arts Programme

- BA (Hons) Contemporary Crafts;
- BA (Hons) Fine Art;
- MA Fine Art.

192 The basis of the DAT was a DSED written specifically for the audit, with the respective programme specifications for undergraduate graphic design, undergraduate visual arts and the fine art (postgraduate award) provided in an annex. The date of the last CARPs for the undergraduate programmes was May 2003 and the CARP documentation was also made available to the audit team. The fine art (postgraduate award) programme was last approved in March 1999 and the programme specification was produced to meet the University's requirement for all courses to have programme specifications by summer 2003

193 Programme specifications all followed the University template, therefore, they were explicitly referenced to the FHEQ, with 'exit' requirements for intermediary awards clearly identified. Appropriate links were made to the *Subject benchmark statement* for art and design, as generally illustrated by the curriculum maps, provided as annexes, which tabulated mandatory and core option modules against their contribution to ILOs, under the headings of knowledge and understanding, cognitive, practical, and transferable skills. Specific evidence of alignment included the introduction of the reflective research/practice modules in both graphic design and visual arts programmes to encourage deeper critical thinking and analysis of professional practice. The professional experience core options (placements or projects) at the end of Stage 2 were referenced to the University Code of Practice for Sandwich Placements.

194 Staff reported that student progression and achievement data were accessible through UNIVERSE at module and course level for the respective use by SQGs and PBs. They gave examples of refinements to both content and delivery of level 1 modules, resulting from the university-wide drive to tackle retention, and of adjustments to the first term curriculum of the postgraduate course, in recognition that the proportion of full-time international students was increasing and that students coming to UK for the first time might need a chance to settle into the course.

195 The documentation provided to the audit team on approval, monitoring and review processes showed SQGs, PBs and School Boards to be operating within MARP, CARP and AQM procedures. Feedback from staff and students along with external examiners' comments were incorporated in the annual reporting for AQM at School Board and subsidiary levels. In their meeting with the audit team, staff described employer input to course development as informal but useful.

196 The audit team had access to recent external examiner reports and related minutes of meetings where responses were discussed. External examiners see a sample of marked and internally moderated work at level 2 and above. In the undergraduate visual arts programme, which has two established awards, external examiners have been involved in parity exercises, looking at standards across both courses - a policy which the team was told would be extended to include new course provision. The team noted the steady increase, over the past four years, in the proportion of First class honours awards, as part of an improving profile of student achievement. Reports from external examiners on the MA Fine Art were generally very supportive of both the level of work and of course management. The team saw evidence in AQM reporting of appropriate and timely action resulting from external examiners' comments, including the formal responses from the Associate Dean of School.

197 In respect of assessment strategy, staff indicated that there had been significant consultation with schools over the formulation of the University Assessment Strategy, and that the School's existing assessment procedures were consistent with the University Strategy. The audit team saw examples of the standard pro formas used to align assessment tasks and criteria with ILOs. Feedback to students on assessment performance was within the six-week University stipulated period. Students considered feedback to be generally clear and useful.

198 The audit team saw examples of assessed students' work drawn from all the courses included in the DAT. Mark sheets were also provided together with external examiners' reports. The team was able to verify adherence to marking schemes and to the assessment criteria provided to students in module descriptors via the MID, while congruence was also was confirmed by external examiners' comments. The work reviewed by the team at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels aligned with expectations elucidated through the aims and ILOs within programme specifications, therefore, the team concluded that the overall level of achievement was appropriate to the named awards and their location within the FHEQ.

199 The audit team examined a range of guides for students, including school and course handbooks, module descriptors and handouts, and found the format to be consistent across the programmes. The content was comprehensive and included ILOs and assessment methods, criteria and schedules. The School was currently considering how best to present programme specifications to a student audience. However, in the interim, staff were satisfied that student handbooks contained the relevant information, and pointed out that the full programme specifications were available on-line. Students confirmed the current position.

200 The students who met with the audit team considered learning resources to be of good quality and appropriate for study at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, commenting that library provision included a slide library and multimedia loan material, such as CD-Roms and videos. They were generally satisfied with studio and workshop space and equipment for practical work. MA Fine Art students were additionally provided with a dedicated space for study and informal meetings. Staff commented that the central location, close to the library, and recent reconfiguration of its accommodation had been beneficial in improving learning resources provision and that the current focus for improvement was in the area of IT, specifically expanding the range of software and use of the VLE as a learning resource, based on work undertaken in the visual arts programme.

201 The system of undergraduate student support operating in the School is primarily a surgery system, involving all module leaders, although students also have a designated personal tutor whom they first meet at induction. In discussions with the audit team, students clearly perceived the tutorial system as open and flexible, confirming that they could go to any tutor, as well as their personal tutor for advice and were able to change personal tutor if they wished. They also commented on the ways they were helped to prepare for the 10-week professional placement, such as sessions on curricula vitae and interview skills, which the team recognised, along with the placement itself, as generally providing skills for employment. There are different arrangements for the MA Fine Art, which is a small course, with students having two personal tutors, one for practical and the other for theoretical studies, as well as additional support from module tutors. The students were also positive about welfare support, giving instances of caring treatment,

including the dyslexia support, often provided outside office hours.

202 Student feedback is collected by the standard University module and course questionnaires. The audit team saw examples of the summaries of module questionnaires, addressed at SQGs, which were often brief, although staff confirmed that they were useful as a basis for making adjustments in time for the next delivery of the module. Students were generally unclear about what happened to the questionnaires they returned and about any resultant action. However, they said they were encouraged to contact staff directly as issues arose and gave examples of one-to-one discussions leading to group meetings with staff, where reported issues were generally solved quickly and informally. Students have representation on CCCs, PBs and the School Board and, as such, contribute to the formal AQM process. The team learned that MA Fine Art students kept a reflective logbook and that both students and staff complete coversheets on modules, which provide a source of feedback.

203 CCCs discuss all aspects of the student experience and examples of their business included matters relating to library provision, technician support and central support through Student Services. Students clearly saw this as an important forum for referring issues to service departments such as the library or Student Services. They expressed general confidence that their views were sought, listened to and respected through formal and informal structures and that their recommendations generally elicited useful outcomes.

204 Overall, the audit team was satisfied that:

- the standard of student achievement in the programmes covered by the DAT is appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ;
- the quality of the learning opportunities is suitable for the programmes of study in graphic design and visual arts, leading to the named awards.

Section 4: The audit investigations: published information

The students' experience of published information and other information available to them

205 The University coordinates the production of an extensive range of corporate publications in support of student recruitment, marketing and induction: three annual prospectuses, respectively covering full-time undergraduate, postgraduate and professional, and all part-time courses; promotional literature targeted at particular student groups; induction packs, suitably customised for full or part-time students, providing information on how to access the MID; and a separate guide for students at partner institutions. Specifically for research students, there is a Research Degrees Handbook and associated guides, including one aimed at new students.

206 Supplementary information is produced by schools in the form of detailed course leaflets; handbooks that include an insert (supplied by the Academic Registry) summarising 'essential information for all students' on the modular frameworks governed by the Academic Regulations; and detailed course and module guides. Increasingly, information is published on the University website or made available to students through the VLE. The audit team discussed the provision of information with the student groups it met through the DATs, in separate institutional meetings with taught and research students, and also with representatives of CUSU at the briefing visit.

207 The SED stated that the University made 'every effort to provide a fair and balanced picture…', and that this was achieved through its corporate approach to publicity material, which was either produced through, or with the approval of, the Corporate Affairs Unit, with PaQS undertaking an intermediate check on the status of course information provided by schools. The SED clarified that there were University guidelines for the production of promotional materials by its partner institutions and that the University promptly addressed any breach of the guidelines it discovered. In respect of the website, while highlighting its potential as a 'key sales and marketing tool', the SED also recognised the tendency for it to become 'unwieldy and difficult to maintain' and described the system of 'custodians and providers' within schools, which was intended to ensure integrity of the information. A web development team located within the Corporate Affairs Unit was responsible for the design of the website and its navigational systems.

208 According to the SWS, 'in the main, information [provided for students] is accurate and correct and any changes required, post production, are clearly pointed out by teaching staff'. In meetings with the audit team, students confirmed this view and also described course handbooks as giving important detail on the overall structure of their courses, and module guides as useful and easy to understand. With regard to the MID, some students clearly

found it useful as an aid to module selection, but generally they confirmed that in practice there was limited access to free-choice modules.

209 The audit team was able to review a variety of University and school publications, as well as the University website and the websites of some of its partner institutions. On balance, the information provided appeared to be appropriate and effective. The team considered the insert produced by the Academic Registry to contain particularly helpful information on the avoidance of plagiarism and on student appeals. However, in the case of free-choice modules, the team concluded that promotional and course literature might raise expectations about the extent of choice and scope for flexibility afforded by the modular frameworks, which, on the evidence of current students, could not be realised in practice. At the time of the audit the website was in a state of radical overhaul, so it proved difficult for the team to make an assessment of the consistency and currency of internet-based information, although that provided through the first phase of the new website was clear and easy to navigate. While accepting that the University monitors, as a matter of policy, the information published about it by its collaborative partners, the team noted from a spot check of a partner's website that this omitted to mention that courses were franchised from the University, thus contravening the franchise agreement. These observations aside, the team broadly agreed with the University's own assessment that the Corporate Affairs Unit, by providing a locus of responsibility for publicity material and coordinating extensive internal communication mechanisms, 'helps protect the University's integrity'.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information

210 The SED indicated that, following publication of HEFCE's document, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance (HEFCE 03/51)*, the Academic Registrar had produced a summary paper setting out the information required and the current status of this information within the University. This had revealed that most of the information already existed and that the task was one of coordinating its publication in a form suitable for uploading to the TQI web site and a QAC working party had been recently established with this remit. With regard to the qualitative information set, the challenge was to convert the University's own information, which was essentially based on modules and courses, into meaningful summaries at award level and within Joint Academic Coding

System subject groupings. With regard to the quantitative information set, the task was more in the nature of making presentational refinements.

211 The audit team was able to verify that the University was addressing the publication of information on the TQI web site: the external examiners' report form now includes a section specifically geared to producing the requisite summaries electronically; the QAC working party is currently considering how best to compile the periodic review summaries from information derived from the CARP and AQM processes; the listing of employer links is envisaged to be prepared without difficulty; and there are plans to provide a directory of programme specifications, equivalent to the MID. In the case of the quantitative information, the development of UNIVERSE was on course to return the necessary data to HESA. The team was satisfied that the University was taking seriously its responsibilities in respect of *HEFCE 03/51* and was making steady progress towards uploading the prescribed information onto the TQI web site.

Findings

Findings

212 An institutional audit of the University was undertaken by a team of auditors from the Agency during the week 26 to 30 April 2004. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's programmes of study and on the academic standards of its awards. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with HEFCE, SCOP and UUK, four DATs were selected for scrutiny. This section of the report summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged from the audit, and by making recommendations to the University for enhancing current practice.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes

213 Responsibility for the quality assurance of the University's taught programmes is delegated to QAC from Academic Board (the principal academic committee). At school level, there are school boards, which have responsibility for the quality and standards of the courses within their remit, discharging this through SQGs and PBs, which deal with the quality of modules and courses respectively. The University's courses are designed to fit within four separate modular frameworks: Foundation degree, HND/C, undergraduate, and taught postgraduate courses. Procedures for approval, review and monitoring of courses are fully documented between the Academic Regulations and the relevant section of the Administrators' Handbook, pending production of a virtual quality handbook, which will bring together all regulatory, procedural and policy information pertaining to quality assurance. Central administrative support for the University's quality assurance system is provided primarily through PaQS.

214 Approval of a course commences with approval in principle, based on academic, regulatory and market considerations. The course is then planned in detail, typically by a PB subgroup, which refers any new modules for comment on content and design to the relevant SQG, which then submits them for approval by a MARP, established by the related school board. MARPs have responsibility for assessing the quality of modules in terms of aims, ILOs, size and level, and also for evaluating the proposed teaching, learning and assessment methods. External representation is required on MARPs for modules at level 2 or above. For modules offered by the CLL, most of which are at level 1, a flexible approach is adopted, often entailing approval by correspondence, but also incorporating external input.

215 Courses are approved at institutional level by CARPs, which have delegated authority from QAC. They include external representation and have responsibility for ensuring that courses take account of relevant external reference points and satisfy institutional requirements. However, before being submitted to a CARP, the course proposal may also be scrutinised by a SCARP, which mirrors the activity of the CARP, but within the school. In endorsing the standards of courses, CARPs are also confirming the standards of their constituent modules, previously approved by MARPs. The CARP normally approves a course to run for six years, at which point reapproval is necessary. Periodic review is effectively the reapproval of a course on the expiry of its approval period and is also undertaken by a CARP. However, in this case, the documentation includes a critical appraisal of the operation of the course. There is an equivalent process for the reapproval of modules by MARPs, which takes place in advance of the course review. The University also conducts a five-yearly IQA, the most recent of which commenced in 2003, and involved a mixture of discipline audits and themed audits.

216 There is programme monitoring in the form of AQM, which involves annual reports being produced at each level: by SQGs about modules and PBs about courses, for consideration by school boards; by school boards in the form of a summary and action plan for consideration by QAC; and by the Chair of QAC as an overview for consideration by QAC and Academic Board. QAC meets in December to consider the various annual reports, including separate reports from the CLL on short courses and from SAGUK and SAGOP on collaborative provision. It meets again in March and June to monitor progress made throughout the University with the implementation of action plans.

217 Among the inputs to AQM is feedback from students and employers. Feedback on modules and courses is collected through standard questionnaires, courses being evaluated every year and modules at least once every three years. Survey results are used by SQGs and PBs to inform their ongoing deliberations and annual reports. Current students are also able to make their views known through representation on University and school committees, in addition to which there are several informal events where students and senior staff are able to meet and discuss matters of mutual interest. The University receives feedback from graduates through its annual first destination survey and this information is circulated to schools for consideration. Feedback from employers is obtained through a range of methods, including employer

advisory boards or associated forums for discussion with representatives from industry, as well as less formal or *ad hoc* arrangements.

218 Courses delivered by distributed and distance methods are subject to the same approval, monitoring and review processes as courses delivered in-house, involving face-to-face contact. The processes relating to collaborative provision also reflect the in-house processes and are essentially the same whether the provision is based in the UK or overseas. Student feedback mechanisms similarly follow those for in-house provision. There is a University Code of Practice for the Operation of Franchised Courses, intended to ensure that, as far as possible, the student experience is comparable with that of the equivalent in-house course.

219 There are two additional bodies giving advice to QAC on the University's partnership activities: these are SAGUK and SAGOP, which have a specific remit for monitoring quality assurance processes as they relate to UK and overseas collaborative provision respectively. Courses are subject to the same MARP and CARP processes, although franchised courses, in recognition that their in-house equivalent will normally already have been approved, are subject to approval by a variant process involving PARPs, whose purpose is specifically to ensure that appropriate mechanisms are put in place to monitor the franchise and that suitable staffing and facilities are available. Franchises are subject to review after six years, unless the PARP stipulates a shorter period. Before a new collaborative venture is entered into there is scrutiny of the partner and partnership arrangements by a special panel which makes a recommendation to QAC; overseas partnerships must also have their 'business case' proven to IDC and the Vice-Chancellor's Group. An integral part of all approval procedures is a formal agreement signed by both the University and the partner institution, which defines the respective responsibilities for course delivery and quality assurance.

220 In the SED, the University has stated its commitment to 'continuous quality improvement through regular cycles of formal and informal processes of quality assurance and control plus ongoing programmes of quality enhancement': in other words, a quality spiral. The University sees its approval and review processes as comprehensive and thorough, as evidenced by external audit and review reports and the University's own themed audit of the MARP process, as part of the 2003 IQA. However, the SED also acknowledged that these processes were the focus of 'continual internal debate' about streamlining procedures to reduce the amount of staff time

involved. Similarly, the University sees the AQM process as well-embedded, having remained basically the same for many years, and as forming the prime mechanism for checking whether teaching and learning activities are working as intended.

221 With regard to student feedback, an IQA themed audit had revealed that students and staff were often not clear about the purpose of the standard feedback questionnaires, even though these had been in use for many years. The University stated in the SED that it intended to review the current range of student surveys, but also highlighted the particularly well-developed links with employers who contribute directly to course design and delivery, which generate regular and systematic feedback. The University sees its student representation arrangements as wide-ranging, with the SED reporting over 500 students to be involved during 2002-03, but acknowledging that there were recurrent problems of filling vacancies and in communicating with representatives once in post. It hoped that a recently introduced facility, giving students remote access to their email accounts via the internet, would ease communication problems.

222 In the context of flexible and distance-learning programmes, the University has agreed on a blended learning approach and has clearly recognised its responsibility to train staff in the pedagogical principles that should inform distributed learning, as well as in use of the software platform. For collaborative provision, the SED stated that SAGUK and SAGOP had greatly assisted QAC 'to exercise effective quality control of the University's collaborative developments', but also suggested there would be benefits from closer collaboration between them. On UK collaborative provision, the SED acknowledged the market shift away from the traditional franchise on which the University's existing structures and procedures were essentially based, while pointing to the continued improvement of certain features. In the case of overseas collaborative provision, the University is firm in its belief that it has 'appropriate procedures, a committee structure and internal networks, which allow effective discharge of responsibility for quality and standards'.

223 The audit team was able to confirm that the course and module approval and review processes, including those for collaborative provision, were being operated as described in the SED, and that appropriate use was being made of external reference points and external advisers. Moreover, there is good practice in the flexible approach to the integration of provision offered through the CLL into the formal approval and

review processes (see paragraph 273 i below). The team concluded that the University had developed an extensive and rigorous system for approval and review, which was well established and generally well understood by staff.

224 However, the audit team took an interest in the debate about the amount of staff time involved in operating quality assurance processes, noting that in its Learning and Teaching Strategy, the University had identified streamlining of these processes as a 'means' of achieving its 'purpose to build capacity for change'. From various examples, it seemed to the team that the University had made limited progress in its efforts to scale down its procedures. Looking for external comparisons, the team considered external examiners' comments on the features of module and course design to be fairly typical of those being made on provision throughout the HE sector. This led the team to question whether the University's extensive discussion of modules and courses prior to approval, and the level of staff input this entailed, were being matched by corresponding benefits (see 275 i below).

225 Within AQM, the audit team found some overlap between the issues discussed in reports from associated SQGs and PBs and also some variation between schools in their approach to reporting upwards to QAC. There were differing views among deans about the purpose of school board reports, with the result that some schools were reporting comprehensively on their activities and others restricting the reporting so as to channel upwards only issues requiring resolution at university level, but not issues the schools could deal with themselves (see paragraph 274 i below). However, the team also noted as good practice the fact that, again, the CLL was integrated into AQM (see 273 i below). The team was able to see first hand the inconsistencies in use made of module and course questionnaires by SQGs and PBs and that issues raised were not automatically addressed in annual reports. The recent IQA themed audit of the student feedback system had identified these issues and made several recommendations, but these had yet to have an impact. Based on several examples, the team formed the view that changes to the procedures in the areas covered by the themed audits were somewhat slow in being implemented (see 275 ii below), although appreciated that the IQA process was still ongoing.

226 The audit team, while recognising that some procedures could be strengthened, concluded that the University had appropriate student representational systems in place and that these were generally being used in an effective and timely manner to respond to students' concerns. Furthermore, there is good practice in the University's effective engagement with CUSU representatives that extends beyond their active participation in formal and informal meetings to their involvement in project work and related activities (see 273 ii below).

227 In respect of distributed and distance delivery, the audit team formed the view that the University had in place appropriate structures for moving to the next stage in developing a managed learning environment. The team found UK collaborative arrangements to be working satisfactorily, with good communication channels between the University and partner institutions. The team also found the University's confidence in its overseas arrangements to be well-placed, with a proactive approach to quality assurance being adopted. Overall, there is good practice in the University's considered approach to the management of collaborative provision, which incorporates mechanisms for relating the degree of direct involvement to the level of confidence built up in the partnership arrangement (see 273 iv below).

228 Notwithstanding the recommendations for action by the University, the findings of the audit confirm that broad confidence can be placed in the University's present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

229 The Academic Regulations, together with the Assessment Strategy for taught programmes (approved for full implementation in 2004-05), prescribe the overall framework for securing the standards of awards. Within this framework the external examiner system operates as the University's most well-developed mechanism for monitoring and evaluating academic standards year-on-year.

230 The University has a two-tier system of assessment boards. SABs have primary responsibility for securing academic standards: their delegated authority extends to considering students' results module by module and confirming that assignments and examinations have been set and marked at an appropriate standard. PABs take decisions about individual students' progression or awards, based on their overall performance across a range of modules. According to the constitution of both SABs and PABs, their membership is to include external examiners. The same SABs and PABs (where practical) have responsibility for franchised courses

as for the equivalent in-house course, with special examiners appointed to PABs for the small number of courses where there is no such equivalent.

231 The majority of external examiners are appointed to one SAB and one PAB. The University's appointment letter specifies the modules and awards for which they are responsible and also makes clear that they should normally attend all boards to which they are appointed and present their reports after the final meeting. The University also appoints all external examiners for collaborative courses and their reports are sent directly to the University. External examiners are each provided with the Handbook for External Examiners for Taught Courses and there are also annual briefing sessions, aimed mainly at newly-appointed external examiners.

232 External examiners' reports are received, on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor, by the Academic Registrar who circulates them to the Chair of QAC and also to the dean (or associate dean) of the appropriate school who coordinates a formal response to each report. This response is based on the annual reports to the school board from SQGs and PBs as part of the AQM process, wherein external examiners' comments are addressed. In addition, the Academic Registrar compiles an institutional-level summary of external examiners' comments for consideration by QAC alongside the annual reports from schools, and also by Academic Board.

233 The annual reports from SQGs and PBs also address significant features of admissions, progression and completion statistics. The University has a single student record system, UNIVERSE, giving schools direct access to statistical information at module and course levels through a series of centrally produced standard reports. The University additionally produces a set of performance measures for the purposes of internal comparison of trends and external monitoring against comparator universities.

234 The SED stated that the Assessment Strategy had drawn together and harmonised existing assessment policies, placing emphasis on the use of ILOs linked to assessment criteria and providing guidance on the generic criteria for different mark ranges applicable at undergraduate level. The SED also stated that the majority of external examiners performed their duties diligently and that their reports were valuable and constructive. However, the institutional summary of reports for 2002-03 had highlighted that, in a few areas, external examiners had been reluctant to attend both a SAB and a PAB, usually giving priority to the PAB. The University had attempted to counteract this by giving increased

emphasis to the responsibilities of the SAB for setting academic standards.

235 The SED presented a particularly positive view of the statistical information now being generated by UNIVERSE, although it acknowledged the need to improve the quality of data entered on the UNIVERSE system and explained how this was being addressed. The SED also highlighted the continuing development of statistical reporting to reflect the increasing complexity of student study patterns.

236 The evidence available to the audit team allowed it to conclude that the University was making good use of external examiners in summative assessment procedures, particularly at the module level. It was apparent to the team that the institutional strategy of alignment of standards with level and qualification descriptors was a feature of subject-level discussions with external examiners. Generally, it was clear to the team that external examiner input was taken seriously, appropriately fed into the AQM process and acted upon conscientiously. The team was able to confirm, across a range of collaborative provision, equivalence with the in-house provision in the procedures for considering external examiners' reports.

237 The audit team explored the issue of external examiners' attendance at both SABs and PABs, noting that this had been raised by external examiners in the context of their request for a review of the roles of the respective boards. While a review as such had not been initiated, there had been a reduction in the discretionary powers of the PAB. The audit team developed a concern that this reduction, combined with the emphasis being given to the external examiner's role on the SAB, without a parallel specification for the role on the PAB, was adjusting the relationship between the boards without tackling the issue of reluctance on the part of some external examiners to attend both boards or fully taking into account their expressed view about whether attendance at both boards was essential (see 274 ii below).

238 The audit team was able to verify that statistical data relating to admissions, progression and completion rates were being commented on in the AQM process and that the utility of the reports provided centrally had improved over time. However, the team questioned the extent to which progression and completion data were being used to inform admissions policy as distinct from strategies for student support. For instance, it was generally unclear as to how the standard statistical reports could readily be used to inform institutional admissions policies,

since they did not permit easy tracking of particular student 'types'. Nevertheless, the monitoring by SAGOP of the performance of students entering with advanced standing from overseas partner institutions was recognised by the team, as was the University's success in widening participation, demonstrated by its matching or exceeding all the HEFCE benchmarks. The team considered that, overall, the University was making appropriate and increasing use of statistical management information and had itself identified areas for improvement to which it was giving suitable priority.

239 Notwithstanding the recommendation for action by the University, the findings of the audit confirm that broad confidence can be placed in the University's present and likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

240 Library services are centred on the new Lanchester Library, also housing the Teaching and Learning Support Unit, which provides support to staff in the development of teaching and learning materials, while ICT services are supplied by CSV, encompassing hardware, software and technical support for both staff and students. Both the library and CSV produce an annual business plan, which feeds into the University's planning processes. Arrangements for deciding priorities are informed by feedback from staff and students about the quality of services, as well as by capacity planning questionnaires, completed by schools and departments, in the case of forecasting ICT requirements. There are specific student and staff surveys, as well as feedback from CCCs. Both the library and CSV also have extensive representation on institutional committees including, in the former case, SAGUK and SAGOP, to facilitate links with partner institutions.

241 The University has a variety of mechanisms for the academic guidance and support of students, spanning the duration of their studies, ranging from induction, through personal support, to developing skills for enhancing employability. Procedures are in place to confirm that comparable mechanisms exist in partner institutions. Induction comprises a series of central and local events during which students are issued with school student handbooks, course-specific study guides and instructions on how to access the MID, which provides essential information about modules within their programmes of study. There are separate induction packs for part-time students unable to attend the induction events.

242 Arrangements for academic support are governed by the University Code of Practice for the Personal Support of Students, which also covers pastoral support. This Code stipulates minimum standards, beyond which schools are permitted to adopt different systems for support, although most operate a surgery system, whereby students are given access to designated staff at specified times. In addition, there are specialist support centres for English language, computing and mathematics, to be followed soon by one for students' academic writing skills. With respect to employability, under the Code of Practice for Academic and Professional Skills, each course must have a clearly stated strategy for providing students with a range of 'transferable' skills, the development of which must be addressed in course planning. The University's arrangements for the supervision of research students are outlined in the Research Degrees Handbook, which is issued to both research students and supervisors. A generic module in research methodology is offered, which all research students are required to attend and pass, and various seminars and symposiums, aimed at research students, are also organised.

243 A comprehensive range of welfare and advisory services, including the careers service, is provided through the Student Services Department, complemented by services offered by the CUSU Advice Centre and the International Office.

244 The University has well-established procedures for the appointment, appraisal, reward and development of teaching staff. The appraisal system has recently been re-launched as the Staff Development and Performance Review to place a greater emphasis on aligning individual objectives with school business plans and institutional goals. The scheme is compulsory for teaching staff, including part-time lecturers and those on short-term contracts and is based on self-appraisal, facilitated by an appraisal interview, leading to an agreed action plan. Training is mandatory for those conducting reviews. Staff development activity is monitored by the HRDC and the main central provider of staff development is CHED, whose remit is to promote and develop innovation in teaching, learning, assessment and educational technology, which it pursues through a task force and a team of teaching fellows working within and across schools and service departments to provide consultancy and support for pedagogic developments. CHED reports annually to TALC and within schools there are equivalent committees which identify the priorities for development activity.

245 The University requires all newly-appointed staff without a recognised teaching qualification or substantial teaching experience to enrol on the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching during their 12-month probationary period. This gives accredited teacher status, recognised by both ILTHE (now within the Higher Education Academy) and SEDA, to which there is also a route offered by the University for experienced staff, involving a combination of course modules and APEL. Postgraduate research students or assistants, undertaking teaching or demonstrator duties, are required to take a variant of the teaching course. In addition, there is a well-established system of peer observation applicable to all teaching staff.

246 According to the SED 'a great deal of care' is taken to ensure consonance between the development of library services and the University Learning and Teaching Strategy, as evidenced by the monitoring of these services through TALC. The development of computing services is shaped by the University Information Strategy, under the remit of the Information Strategy Group which, like TALC, is chaired by the PVC (Academic Development and Quality). Both the SED and SWS highlighted the recent considerable investment in ICT provision, including a significant increase in the number of PCs available.

247 In relation to academic guidance, the University places considerable emphasis on its induction arrangements as a channel for communicating information to students. In the SED, it also draws the link between student support generally and levels of student progression and retention, attributing a significant improvement in retention to 'local induction and enhanced academic and pastoral support in the early weeks of courses'. The SED also cited the University's good track record in the 'student support and guidance' aspect of subject review as giving recognition to the overall effectiveness of its student support system.

248 On the subject of staff development, the SED emphasised the significance of the Learning and Teaching Strategy and the associated Human Resources Strategy in driving the development of teaching skills for teaching staff and the importance in this context of the formal linkage between TALC and CHED. The SED also highlighted the achievement of IiP status for all schools and service departments.

249 The audit team concluded that the University was taking a coordinated and strategic approach to the provision and development of learning resources, with appropriate mechanisms in place for monitoring and responding to user feedback, and

noted such recent improvements as the extension of library opening times and the expansion of internet access to some halls of residence.

250 In relation to academic guidance, the audit team found students to be positive about the induction programme and student handbooks, but to have mixed views about the usefulness of the MID in relation to free-choice modules, chiefly because of the restrictions faced by students wishing to take modules from other subject areas or schools, rather than because of any specific shortcoming in the MID itself (see 275 iv below).

251 In respect of academic support, the audit team considered that the wide variety of systems currently in place was potentially leading to a lack of equivalence in provision across the University. However, it also acknowledged that the University was itself aware of the need to address the issue of consistency and was seeking to implement best practice in tutor support, particularly in the early stages of courses. In the case of postgraduate research students, the team was able to verify that there were robust arrangements in place for their supervision and for progress monitoring.

252 In the context of transferable skills, the audit team was unable to gain a strong impression, from students or staff, of the University's commitment to the development of skills to enhance employability, although there were some examples of good practice, notably the expansion of dedicated arrangements for assisting students to improve their mathematical and academic writing skills (see 273 iii below).

253 The audit team found the University's arrangements for academic and personal (pastoral) support to be premised on careful consideration of 'student type and culture', generally effective in their operation and well-received by the student body. Furthermore, there is good practice in the University's continuing development of a range of local and central support services and its involvement of CUSU in project work under the widening participation initiative (see 273 ii and iii below).

254 The audit team regarded the University's processes for staff appointment, appraisal and reward to be effective, clearly articulated and well-embedded, and recognised its strong commitment to staff support and development at all levels. Within schools, teaching fellows were clearly perceived as agents of change and the CHED task force as active in disseminating good practice. Overall, the team considered the University's procedures for supporting learning to be effective, with an appropriate level of institutional oversight.

Outcomes of discipline audit trails

Biological and sport and exercise sciences

255 The scope of the DAT comprised BIO and SPO programmes within the School of Science and the Environment, focusing on BSc (Hons) undergraduate programmes and including the HND/C Sport and Exercise Science, which is the first part of the 2+2 BSc (Hons) Sport and Exercise Science course, operated as a franchise arrangement with Henley College Coventry. Programme specifications set out appropriate learning outcomes, linking these clearly to teaching, learning and assessment, with reference made to relevant subject benchmark statements. The September 2002 combined CARP and PARP for the HND/C programme specifically considered the 2+2 progression route and provided the audit team with an illustration of the rigour of quality assurance processes undertaken in conjunction with collaborative partners. From its study of the students' assessed work and from its discussions with staff and students, the team found the standard of student achievement to be appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

256 Student evaluation of the provision was largely positive and students were satisfied with both the nature and extent of support they received from staff and the learning resources placed at their disposal. Students particularly valued the high level of academic and personal support they received from enthusiastic staff. They confirmed that the information provided by the School through handbooks and electronic means was accurate and helpful. However, they were unclear as to how the input collected through module evaluation questionnaires was utilised, which indicated that mechanisms for reporting back to students were not yet firmly established. The audit team found the quality of learning opportunities available to students to be suitable for the programmes of study leading to the awards covered by the DAT.

Computing

257 The scope of the DAT comprised provision in computing, within the School of MIS, including selected programmes from the schemes of degree courses in computing, Interdisciplinary degree courses in IT and vocational courses in computing and IT. Programme specifications set out appropriate learning outcomes and link these clearly to teaching, learning and assessment, with reference made to the *Subject benchmark statement* for computing. Where relevant, linkages are also made to the University Code of Practice for Academic and Professional Skills Development (formerly the University Enterprise Capabilities). Modules within courses use NICATS level descriptors and are designed, where appropriate, to meet the accreditation/exemption requirements of the BCS. The School's Industrial Advisory Board and the Commercial Service Advisory Board provide further mechanisms for external input to course content. From its study of the students' assessed work and from its discussions with staff and students, the team found the standard of student achievement to be appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

258 Student evaluation of the provision was largely positive and students were satisfied with both the nature and extent of support they received from staff and the learning resources placed at their disposal. They were particularly positive about the use being made of the VLE and the way they felt it enhanced their overall learning experience. Students commented favourably on the usefulness of the information they received by way of handbooks and guides and were generally satisfied with student feedback processes. The audit team found the quality of learning opportunities available to students to be suitable for the programmes of study leading to the awards covered by the DAT.

Engineering

259 The scope of the DAT comprised PEPs, within the School of Engineering. Programme specifications meet the expectations embodied within the FHEQ qualification descriptors for M-level programmes and have clearly articulated learning outcomes. PEPs are aligned to national credit guidelines and industrial relevance is also a key reference point, with the PEPs Industrial Steering Committee providing a formal mechanism for external input to the content of degree programmes. From its study of the students' assessed work and from its discussions with staff and students, the team found the standard of student achievement to be appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

260 Student evaluation of the provision was largely positive and students were generally satisfied with both the nature and extent of support they received from staff and the learning resources placed at their disposal. However, students indicated that the library did not adequately meet the needs of their programme, although they did have access to supplementary material electronically. In terms of representation and feedback, they said they felt actively involved in the quality management processes relating to their courses. The audit team found the quality of learning opportunities available to students to be suitable for the programmes of study leading to the awards covered by the DAT.

Graphic design and visual arts

261 The scope of the DAT comprised the graphic design and visual arts programmes within the School of Art and Design, focusing on established undergraduate courses (provision has recently been expanded), and also including the MA Fine Art course. Programme specifications set out appropriate learning outcomes and link these clearly to teaching, learning and assessment, with reference made to the *Subject benchmark statement* for art and design. The professional experience core options are referenced to the University Code of Practice for Sandwich Placements. From its study of the students' assessed work and from its discussions with staff and students, the team found the standard of student achievement to be appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

262 Student evaluation of the provision was largely positive and students were satisfied with both the nature and extent of support they received from staff and the learning resources placed at their disposal. Students expressed general confidence that their views were sought, listened to and respected through formal and informal structures and that their recommendations generally elicited useful outcomes. The audit team found the quality of learning opportunities available to students to be suitable for the programmes of study leading to the awards covered by the DAT.

The use made by the institution of the academic infrastructure

263 The University's approach to the *Code of practice*, as described in the SED, is one of progressive alignment of its procedures with the various sections of the *Code*. Administrative responsibility for this now lies with PaQS, which produces summary tables showing how the precepts of the *Code* are addressed, by identifying the corresponding University policies, procedures or guidance and the officer or committee responsible for their maintenance. On the basis of this exercise, the University expressed its view that 'the great majority of the precepts are secure', citing the formulation of the University Assessment Strategy and the revision of the University Code of Practice for Sandwich Placements as illustrations of how it was addressing gaps in institutional strategy and variability in local practice. From 2003-04, there is to be a standing item on the agenda of school boards to confirm that school practice is consistent with the relevant sections of the *Code*, with upward reporting of outcomes to QAC.

264 The University has adopted the FHEQ qualification descriptors to elucidate standards in the documentation supporting course approval and review. Other reference points include NICATS level descriptors for module content and assessment, and PSRB requirements, where applicable. The University's approach to programme specifications has been to integrate their implementation with the CARP process, by making them a requirement, from 2001-02, for the approval or reapproval of a course. However, the University also imposed a target date of July 2003 for the production of programme specifications, applicable to all courses, including those not due for review, and it now has a full set of programme specifications in place.

265 The audit team considered that, in general, the University was using the *Code of practice* in an appropriate way, as a framework for the ongoing review of its own practice and as an instrument for targeting areas of its activity where it perceived institutional oversight might be improved. However, it appeared to the team the University had been rather slow in its response to the last two sections (*Section 9: Placement learning,* and *Section 10: Recruitment and admissions*). The team was able to verify that subject staff were routinely engaging with external reference points both in formulating ILOs in the preparation of module and course proposals and in checking ILOs in the approval, monitoring and review processes. Subject staff were also reporting action in response to PSRB reports through the AQM and CARP processes, but there was not a well-established process for considering PSRB reports centrally (see 275 iii below). Although the team saw examples of inconsistencies in the format of programme specifications (which the SED had acknowledged), it recognised that the University had made progress in linking ILOs with assessment criteria (termed constructive alignment). Overall, the team found that the University was making effective use of external reference points and evaluating critically its practices in relevant areas.

The utility of the SED as an illustration of the institution's capacity to reflect upon its own strengths and limitations, and to act on these to enhance quality and standards

266 The SED provided a detailed account of the University's arrangements for the quality assurance and enhancement of its provision, describing the development of policies, procedures and strategies in response to previous external audit and review and to changes in the HE environment. It emphasised that the central features of the University's processes, namely the regulation of courses within the modular frameworks and the centrally-directed

quality assurance system, standardised across schools, had 'served [the University] well...and [were] unlikely to undergo major change in the short to medium term'.

267 The audit team considered the SED to be an informative and honest account of the University's ongoing achievements and the challenges it is currently facing. However, in the team's view, the clarity of the SED was not aided by its excessive length, and tendency to repetition, although it was clearly cross-referenced. In summary, the team perceived the SED to be detailed in its description of quality assurance processes, but more limited in its demonstration of the capacity of the University to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of these processes in delivering continuous improvement.

Commentary on the institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards

268 The SED identified four specific ways in which the University was seeking to achieve quality enhancement through its quality spiral (see paragraph 220 above): regular quality assurance activities; special initiatives recommended by working parties or senior staff; the six-year review cycle for modules and courses and the five-yearly IQA; and the quality assurance of collaborative provision.

269 The audit team particularly focused on widening participation and blended learning, which currently feature on the central quality enhancement agenda. With respect to the former, it noted planned developments in student support, such as the centre for academic writing skills, while with respect to the latter, it noted that structures were in place for addressing pedagogical as well as technological issues, through the designated teaching fellows and CHED.

270 While the audit team fully endorses the linkage between quality assurance, continuous improvement and enhancement, it was also aware of the need for a balance between the different stages within the cycle, which the University had also recognised in its Learning and Teaching Strategy in the context of building capacity for change. In some cases, the team questioned the value added by certain steps in quality assurance processes and whether initiatives recommended by working groups were being implemented in a timely fashion (see 275 I and ii below).

Reliability of information

271 The SED indicated that, following publication of *HEFCE 03/51*, the Academic Registrar had set out the information required and the current status of this information within the University. This had revealed that most of the information already existed and that the task was one of coordinating its publication in a form suitable for uploading to the TQI website. A QAC working party had been recently established with this remit. Progress to date is such that the external examiners' report form now includes a section specifically geared to producing the requisite summaries electronically; the QAC working party is currently considering how best to compile the periodic review summaries from information derived from the CARP and AQM processes; the listing of employer links is envisaged to be prepared without difficulty; and there are plans to provide a directory of programme specifications, equivalent to the MID. In the case of the quantitative information, the development of UNIVERSE is on course to return the necessary data to HESA.

272 The audit team was able to review a variety of University and school publications, as well as the University website and the websites of some of its partner institutions. On balance, the information provided appeared to be appropriate and effective, with particularly helpful information on the avoidance of plagiarism and on student appeals. However, in the case of free-choice modules, the team concluded that promotional and course literature might raise expectations about the extent of choice and scope for flexibility afforded by the modular frameworks, which, on the evidence of current students, could not be realised in practice. At the time of the audit the website was in a state of radical overhaul, so it proved difficult for the team to make an assessment of the consistency and currency of internet-based information, although that provided through the first phase of the new website was clear and easy to navigate. These observations aside, the team considered that the University was, as claimed in the SED, making 'every effort to provide a fair and balanced picture' through its published information and specifically, in relation to *HEFCE 03/5*, was making steady progress towards uploading the prescribed information onto the TQI website.

Features of good practice

273 The following features of good practice were noted:

i.   the flexible approach to the integration of provision offered through the CLL into the formal approval, monitoring and review processes (paragraphs 48, 57 and 94);

ii.   the effective engagement with CUSU representatives that extends beyond their active

participation in formal and informal meetings to their involvement in project work and related activities (paragraphs 90 and 134);

iii. the continuing development of a range of local and central student support services, notably the expansion of dedicated arrangements for assisting students to improve their mathematical and academic writing skills (paragraphs 129 and 135);

iv. the considered approach to the management of collaborative provision, which incorporates mechanisms for relating the degree of direct involvement by the University to the level of confidence built up in the partnership arrangement (paragraph 145).

Recommendations for action

274 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

i. to improve the consistency and comprehensiveness of annual reports from school boards, ensuring that, in addition to referring matters upwards for resolution, these allow for effective institutional oversight of issues identified for action at school level (paragraph 59);

ii. to review the arrangements for securing appropriate input from external examiners to decisions relating to the standards achieved by students over their entire course (paragraph 72).

275 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

i. to develop further and implement its plans for streamlining quality assurance processes to achieve a better balance between the value added by each of the various steps in these processes and the level of staff time involved (paragraphs 50, 57, 65 and 143);

ii. to give greater priority to putting into operation the recommendations of committees or their working groups, according to clearly defined timescales (paragraphs 62 and 82);

iii. to ensure that reports of PSRBs are routinely and adequately considered centrally, while clarifying for schools the rationale for institutional oversight; (paragraph 84);

iv. to review its stated commitment to the principle of free-choice modules since, in practice, there appears to be limited opportunity or encouragement given to students for selecting options outside their subject area (paragraph 127).

Appendix

Coventry University's response to the audit report

Coventry University welcomes the Institutional Audit report with its confirmation of full confidence in the academic standards of awards. The University is also pleased that the soundness of its approach to the management of quality, including future plans, is fully recognised.

The University has noted that a significant number of areas of good practice were identified by the audit team and have been referred to in the body of the audit report, with four specific areas being especially highlighted. In particular, the University is gratified that the auditors appreciated the on-going work being done to enhance the overall student experience at Coventry, for example through the links established with the Student's Union and student representatives, importance placed on student feedback and the continuing development of various support services including the dedicated arrangements to assist students with their mathematical and academic writing skills.

The University acknowledges the recommendations for action, some of which are already being actively addressed and others that will be subject to further development and will be monitored in line with an action plan. There has been progress on a number of aspects identified through the institution's own internal quality enhancement mechanisms and referred to within the self-evaluation document as well as the audit report. Specifically:

- a 'virtual' web-based handbook providing a focus for information relating to quality assurance and enhancement including policies, procedures and regulatory matters as well as guidance on course design, approval and monitoring is nearing completion. This will be regularly and systematically updated to respond to both internal and externally driven quality issues;
- during the 2003-04 academic year a growing number of reports have been designed to be automatically generated through UNIVERSE (the University's student records system), notably in the area of student completion and progression which will aid this year's round of annual quality monitoring; the processes inherent to annual monitoring will be revisited during 2004-05 to further encourage a more consistent approach;
- reports from professional and statutory bodies will be considered by the University's Quality Assurance Committee as an annual substantive agenda item as part of the annual monitoring cycle for the first time in December 2004.

A number of other issues addressed in the report will be the subject of discussion and action at University level in 2004-05, including: a review of the input by External Examiners to the assessment board process; a more effective link between progression and retention statistics and the admissions policy; the University's approach to free-choice modules, and the more timely implementation of the recommendations of committees and working groups.

In conclusion, the University is appreciative of the constructive approach adopted by the audit team, and of the positive outcome of the audit process, which endorses the good practice already in place and, in many respects, echoes the University's own intentions to continue to enhance the quality of the student experience.