

University of Teesside

DECEMBER 2004

Institutional audit

Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) 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 QAA carries out reviews of individual HE institutions (universities and colleges of HE). In England and Northern Ireland this process is known as institutional audit. QAA 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 QAA 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 QAA 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.

ISBN 1 84482 255 9

© Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2005

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

Printed copies are available from:

Linney Direct

Adamsway

Mansfield

NG18 4FN

Tel 01623 450788

Fax 01623 450629

Email qaa@linneydirect.com

Contents

Summary	1		
Introduction	1		
Outcome of the audit	1		
Features of good practice	1		
Recommendations for action	1		
Business and administration studies (taught masters programmes); English; physical sciences; sociology	2		
National reference points	2		
Main report	4		
Section 1: Introduction: the University of Teesside	4		
The institution and its mission	4		
Background information	5		
The audit process	5		
Developments since the previous academic quality audit	6		
Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes	7		
The institution's view as expressed in the SED	7		
The institution's framework for managing quality and standards, including collaborative provision	7		
The institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards	9		
Internal approval, monitoring and review processes	9		
External participation in internal review processes	11		
External examiners and their reports	12		
External reference points	12		
Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies	13		
Student representation at operational and institutional level	14		
Feedback from students, graduates and employers	14		
Progression and completion statistics	15		
Assurance of the quality of teaching staff, appointment, appraisal and reward	16		
Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development	16		
		Assurance of the quality of teaching delivered through distributed and distance methods	17
		Learning support resources	18
		Academic guidance, support and supervision	19
		Personal support and guidance	19
		Collaborative provision	20
		Section 3: The audit investigations: discipline audit trails	22
		Discipline audit trails	22
		Section 4: The audit investigations: published information	28
		The students' experience of published information and other information available to them	28
		Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information	29
		Findings	32
		The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes	32
		The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards	35
		The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning	35
		Outcomes of discipline audit trails	36
		The use made by the institution of the Academic Infrastructure	37
		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	38
		Commentary on the institution's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards	38
		Reliability of information	38
		Features of good practice	38
		Recommendations for action	39
		Appendix	40
		The University of Teesside's response to the audit report	40

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Teesside (the University) from 6 to 10 December 2004 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the University offers in its name.

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 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 opportunities 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 management 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 range, accessibility and utility of the learning resources provided to students, including those in partner institutions
- the strength of the Higher Education Business Partnership, its value in respect of the provision of regional opportunities for higher education, and its potential for future development
- the professional commitment of academic staff in providing a high level of support for students

- the range, nature, and effectiveness of the University's access and widening participation activities and their clear link to its mission and strategic plan
- the ways in which staff development is aligned with the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy to provide opportunities for all staff, including part-time staff and those in partner institutions, and the promotion of learning and teaching through a comprehensive programme for the induction and reward of staff.

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.

The University is advised to:

- develop a consistent policy on the level and availability of formative feedback prior to the final submission of assessed work
- consider the University's position on the final approval mechanism for academic programmes, and its practice in appointing chairs and members to approval panels
- make more precise and consistent the methods by which issues arising from the reports of external examiners are recorded, considered and subsequently actioned
- ensure that appropriate use is made of the wider data set now being made available to Schools for the purposes of quality assurance.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- review the current structure of committees and working groups with a view to reducing its apparent complexity, and to consider the issue of officer membership of committees within the University's deliberative structure
- review the nature, consistency, and timeliness of the annual review process to ensure that it contributes fully to the University's framework for quality management and assurance
- consider developing a University-wide systematic feedback through student evaluation and satisfaction surveys
- continue to develop the guidelines for collaborative provision in order to ensure that they are comprehensive enough to meet any future expansion, particularly of international partnerships, and to review the arrangements for the approval of such partnerships.

Business and administration studies (taught masters programmes); English; physical sciences; sociology

To arrive at the conclusions and recommendations in the paragraphs above, the audit team also conducted a number of discipline audit trails to find out how well the University's systems and procedures were working at the discipline level. The University provided the audit team with documents, including student work, and the team spoke to members of staff and current students. As well as supporting the overall confidence statement given above, the team considered that the standard of student achievement in all the programmes was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The team considered that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for programmes of study leading to those 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 QAA has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points at help to define both good practice and academic standards. The findings of the audit suggest that the University has responded appropriately to the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements, programme specifications and the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, published by QAA.

From 2004, the published information set will include the recommended summaries of external examiners' reports and of feedback from current students for each programme. The University is alert to the requirements set out in the Higher Education Funding Council for England's (HEFCE) document 02/15, *Information on quality and standards in higher education*, and to the implications of HEFCE's document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*, and is moving in an appropriate manner to fulfil its responsibilities in this respect.

Main report

Main report

1 An institutional audit of the University of Teesside (the University) was undertaken during the week commencing 6 December 2004. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility for its awards.

2 The audit was carried out using a process developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) 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 QAA at the request of UUK and SCOP, and universal subject review, undertaken by QAA 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 examples of institutional processes at work at the level of the programme, through 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: the University of Teesside

The institution and its mission

4 The origins of the University go back 75 years to the period following World War I, when Joseph Constantine made a gift to the town which helped to establish Constantine College, a technical college, in support of Middlesbrough's engineering and shipping industries. In 1969, Constantine College became Teesside Polytechnic, and following the *Further and Higher Education Act (1992)*, the Polytechnic was designated as the University of Teesside. The University is located on a single campus close to the centre of Middlesbrough.

5 In 2002-03 the student population was 19,228, of which 17,174 were on undergraduate programmes, 1,822 were on taught postgraduate programmes and 232 were on postgraduate research programmes. A distinctive feature of the University is the high proportion of students studying on a part-time basis (55.3 per cent). There is a significant proportion of students aged 25 or over (55.6 per cent). For 2002-03 a high proportion of first-year students were registered on sub-degree programmes (64.6 per cent) compared to First degrees (24.2 per cent), however, 87.9 per cent of the total number of sub-degree students were following part-time study. Only 26.9 per cent of full-time students were studying sub-degree programmes and the remaining 73.1 per cent were studying first degree programmes. Another feature of the student population is the significant number of students that are domiciled in the Northeast. These figures characterise the University's commitment to and strategy for widening and deepening participation at a region level. Pivotal to this strategy is a commitment to working with a range of partners in the delivery of its programmes.

6 The University organises its work through six academic schools: arts and media; health and social care; social sciences and law; computing; science and technology; and business. In addition, there are a number of specialist centres/institutes, for example, food technology; social futures; clean environment management; student retention; and the information technology (IT) response unit.

7 The University has a commitment to supporting the economic, social and cultural regeneration of the region. It is reflected in the University's claim to have strong emphasis on the development of practical and transferable skills, and the vocational orientation and links that the majority of programmes have through, for example, project work and work placements. It is the aim of the University to provide relevant academic programmes at a range of levels across a wide variety of disciplines, characterised by flexible entry and strong employer links.

8 During 2003-04, the University decided to implement changes to both its pattern of delivery of modular provision (module credit values) and to its semesterised year (by moving to year-long or block delivery). By September 2005, it intends to have re-approved all its programmes within this revised structure, with some re-approved programmes commencing in September 2004.

9 The University presents itself as 'the opportunity university', which is reflected in its mission statement: 'To provide high quality, accessible opportunities in learning and teaching, research and enterprise in order to enable individuals to fulfil their potential and to contribute to the effective economic, social and cultural development of the Tees Valley and the wider community.' In support of this mission, the Board of Governors has approved corporate objectives for the University for the period 2004-07, which include the maintenance of a dynamic, relevant, accessible and properly resourced academic portfolio; widening participation; international development; retention and attainment; research and development; and enterprise and knowledge transfer. These are reflected in the University's Forward Plan, with relevant strategies.

10 The University of Teesside Partnership (UTP) was formed in 1993 and now includes eight further education colleges (FECs) and six sixth-form colleges within the Tees Valley sub region and County Durham. The University and the FECs are also members of a regional collaborative partnership, the Higher Education Business Partnership (HEBP), which enables students to undertake some or all of a University course at a local or regional college. In describing the University's collaborative provision, the self-evaluation document (SED) listed 12 partner institutions, eight of which are FECs in membership of the HEBP. There are also collaborations with four overseas partners. The programmes offered through these collaborative arrangements include HNC/HNDs; Foundation, honours, and master's degrees; and professional qualifications. At the time of the audit, over 2,000 students were registered for awards (1,199 full-time and 878 part-time). Of these, almost 270 were studying with overseas partners (255 full-time and 21 part-time). The University's collaborative provision was addressed as an integral part of this institutional audit and is discussed in further detail in paragraphs 111 to 118 below.

Background information

11 The published information available to the audit team included:

- QAA continuation audit report from August 2001
- QAA subject review reports published since December 1998
- QAA subject reports for three academic reviews.

12 The University provided QAA with:

- the institutional SED

- the University's Quality Manual, Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, and Minimum Standards document
- a discipline self-evaluation document (DSED) for each of the four areas selected for DATs
- supporting documentation for the DSEDs including documents referenced within them, examples of assessment instruments, examples of student work and information on collaborative links
- a variety of other policy strategy and operational documents.

13 The University of Teesside Students' Union provided the audit team with a students' written submission (SWS) on behalf of the students at the University.

14 During the audit visit further documentation was provided, including: minutes of committee meetings, policy papers, quality monitoring data, periodic review data, and access to the institution's intranet.

The audit process

15 Following a preliminary meeting held at the University on 17 March 2004 between the Assistant Director and representatives of the University to discuss the University's provision and internal review arrangements, QAA identified that four DATs would be conducted in the course of the audit. On receipt of the institutional SED and SWS, the audit team confirmed that DATs would be in business and administration studies (taught master's programmes); English; physical sciences; and sociology. The SED and SWS were received in August 2004, and the DSEDs were received in October 2004. The DSEDs were prepared specifically for the purposes of the audit.

16 The briefing visit took place from 1 to 3 November 2004. Three meetings were held during the visit to discuss matters raised by the SED and the SWS with the Vice-Chancellor, a group of senior staff responsible for the management of quality and standards of awards, and student representatives. At the end of the briefing visit a programme of meetings was submitted to the University in preparation for the audit visit.

17 At the preliminary meeting for the audit, the representatives of the Students' Union (SU) were invited to submit a separate document, a SWS, to express their views on the student experience at the University as well as identifying any matters of concern or commendation with respect to the quality of the student experience and the standards of awards. The SWS took the form of an analysis of a questionnaire completed by 782 students. The audit

team is grateful to the SU for preparing this statement to support the audit.

18 The audit took place from 6 to 10 December 2004. During the audit visit the audit team met with staff and students both at institutional level and in relation to the selected DAT areas. The team is grateful to all those who made themselves available to discuss the University's quality managements and academic standards arrangements.

19 The audit team comprised Professor J Beeby; Dr P Easy; Mr C Griffiths; Mr P Leyland; Professor P Periton (auditors); and Dr C Robinson (audit secretary). The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr D Gale, Assistant Director.

Developments since the previous academic quality audit

20 The University was last audited in August 2001. The findings of the continuation audit report gave confidence in the University's management of its academic quality and standards of awards and associated programmes of study.

21 The audit report identified a number of areas of good practice worthy of commendation:

- its sensitivity to, and arrangements for, managing the balance between creating opportunity and maintaining academic standards
- the commitment of staff at all levels to the University's Mission and priorities;
- the strength of its commitment to meeting regional needs, by working in partnership with other educational providers through HEBP and UTP;
- the role of the administrative staff in quality management, and the effectiveness of administrative networks and fora
- its well-established commitment to a strategic approach to learning, teaching and assessment, within the context of its Mission, and the procedural frameworks and other developments resulting from the most recent Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy
- the thoroughness of the recent admissions review which, as an exercise in self-evaluation, might usefully be considered as a model for future internal reviews
- the provision, by the Vice-Chancellor's office, of regular information for all staff, in both paper and electronic form.

22 The audit report advised the University to consider further:

- the way in which the University, as an institution, learns from and responds to the findings of external reviews and information available internally
- giving high priority to the completion of its work to ensure its adherence to the precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA, relating to collaborative provision, with specific attention to the publication of comprehensive policies and procedures, and the need to secure the University's oversight of this area of its work
- ensuring, as a matter of priority, that the work of the Academic Board, the Academic Standards Committee and other committees concerned with quality management, provides sufficient evidence of the University's engagement with, and overview of, quality and standards matters, so as to encourage continuing debate within the deliberative structure
- considering whether its reliance on the Quality Unit, and the current volume and scope of that Unit's work, renders vulnerable the University's stewardship of quality and standards
- prioritising the objectives of the Information Strategy, taking into account student needs, particularly those of part-time students, and the need for improved statistical data to support the internal and external benchmarking of academic standards.

23 The audit report also concluded that it was desirable that the University should consider the development of a transparent procedure for determining its priorities for audit, and securing an early implementation of the proposals for developing the audit process as a means of verifying quality and standards.

24 Since 2001, the University has hosted one subject review and six academic reviews (of which two are awaiting publication of the report). They all resulted in confidence or commendable outcomes.

25 In response to the recommendations following the 2001 audit, the University has introduced several organisational developments:

- the former Quality Unit and Academic and Staff Development Unit have been combined to form the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement
- the previous Regional Office and Research and Enterprise Unit have been merged to form a combined Department of Academic Enterprise. The University also intends to create a Graduate Research School

- the creation of a new University Secretary's department, together with a new Student Data Analysis section
- the forming of a new Department of Information and Communication Technology Systems to provide a more coherent IT infrastructure
- the creation of a senior post of Director of Educational Partnerships and the relocation of the work of Schools and Colleges Liaison unit into the Centre for Lifelong Learning
- the reconfiguration of some academic portfolios within schools.

26 In its Progress Report following the audit, the University identified a series of ongoing activities but argued that, while the ongoing process and structural change would address the relevant issues, it would not necessarily produce immediate evidence. The SED drew attention to the actions taken to address the recommendations of the 2001 audit and expressed its confidence in the progress made to date. A new quality manual has been produced, although this was delayed due to the University's academic restructuring exercise. Procedures for the quality assurance of collaborative provision have been reviewed and are now contained within the new quality manual. Considerable attention has been given to the terms of reference, membership and roles of Academic Board and its subcommittees. A draft information strategy is currently being approved as part of the Forward Plan and will provide a clear focus on priorities. These matters will be covered in the following sections of this report.

Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes

The institution's view as expressed in the SED

27 The SED indicated that the University's quality strategy was derived from its mission and based on a number of key components including an institution-wide planning cycle, a broad regulatory framework, the support of other strategies, and appropriate management and committee structures. In developing its quality strategy, the University claimed in the SED to have focused more clearly on enhancement processes, to have attempted to minimise the burden on staff, and to have ensured the ownership of quality at appropriate levels through empowering teams and individuals. In respect of the University's approach to the management of standards, the SED cited the use of

internal and external reference points, the rigour of the institution's approval, monitoring and review processes, its arrangements for staff appointment and development, and its admissions, progression, and conferment procedures. In the view of the University, its quality system is 'fit for purpose' and 'its approach to the establishment, maintenance and enhancement of its awards is robust'.

28 In the institution's view, an important feature of its quality strategy is the concept of Minimum Standards, a series of statements which articulate the balance between central regulation and local autonomy. These statements set out the University's expectations regarding outcomes while permitting schools to develop local processes to achieve those outcomes. The introduction and impact of Minimum Standards is further discussed in paragraph 34 below. In presenting the University's quality strategy, the SED also emphasised the challenge of the 'issues posed by the translation of Teesside's Mission into the programme portfolio'. In particular, it articulated a strong belief that, through the concept of the 'Opportunity University', 'widening opportunity, quality and comparable standards can co-exist in the same University'.

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

29 The SED described the Academic Board as the 'collegiate academic authority of the University'. The Board has established a series of sub-committees to which it devolves the more detailed aspects of its work. In the context of quality and standards, the most important of these are: the Academic Policy Committee (APC), which has particular responsibility for the approval of new academic programmes at the planning stage; the Institutional Audit Committee (IAC), which manages the process of internal Quality Audit; the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC), which also has institutional oversight of assessment policy and strategy; and the Academic Standards Committee (ASC), which is the chief sub-committee for the management and development of quality assurance. The Monitoring Sub-Committee of ASC has important responsibilities in respect of the University's annual monitoring and review processes and for the consideration of external examiner nominations. The ASC also has overall responsibility for the University's research degrees programmes and a Research Degrees Sub-Committee undertakes the detailed work related to the approval, supervision and examination of research degrees. In respect of the

University's collaborative provision, matters related to quality and standards are considered by the ASC's Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee for formal report/recommendation to the UASC.

30 Under the executive authority of the Vice-Chancellor, responsibilities for quality and standards are vested in the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) who chairs ASC, APC and LTC. The work of these committees is supported by the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement (CLQE). As described in the SED, the CLQE provides 'a single central focus for staff development, learning and teaching development, and quality management and enhancement'. It is also responsible for the production and maintenance of the University's Quality Handbook as well as a wide range of other documents related to quality assurance, staff development, and teaching and learning.

31 The SED described the University's six schools as its 'main academic communities...and the main agents for driving the implementation of its academic strategies'. Although the management structure of schools is still in the process of implementation, it is the intention that each school should be managed by a team which includes a Dean, a Deputy Dean, and a number of Assistant Deans each taking a particular management responsibility in the school's portfolio. Each school also has a deliberative structure which matches that of the University. Accordingly, the chief committee in this structure for quality and standards issues is the School Academic Standards Committee.

32 In the view of the audit team, the University has a comprehensive, if complex, structure to support its quality strategy. Academic Board, for example, has 13 sub-committees of which one, the ASC, has four sub-committees of its own together with reporting lines from the major school committees. A briefing paper supplied by the University, Current List of Working Parties/Working Groups, listed 16 current working parties or working groups, including those undertaking work on behalf of LTC, but describes them as 'short-lived, time-constrained and focussed'. In some cases, the remits of these groups suggested a much longer lifespan and a more diverse remit. The remit of the Assessment Working Group, for example, requires it *inter alia* to monitor performance against relevant targets in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, to monitor and periodically review the University Assessment Marking Criteria, and to promote the use of formative assessment. Although the simple volume of sub-committees and working groups is not in itself of particular note, there is the potential

for some duplication, overlap or misplacement of responsibilities. The University may find it desirable to review the structure of committees and working groups to ensure its efficiency, and to satisfy itself that key aspects of quality and standards management are not being placed inappropriately with working groups of limited membership.

33 In considering the role of the CLQE, the audit team noted the considerable amount of work which it undertakes with commendable efficiency. In some senses, however, the CLQE occupies much the same position as the former Quality Unit which the 2001 Audit Report noted as having such a range and diversity of responsibilities that the University's reliance on it might render vulnerable its general stewardship of quality and standards. In this context, and noting the common presence of CLQE staff as committee members and chairs, the team discussed with the University the issue of officer membership of committees within the deliberative structure. The University's position is that it wishes to ensure that all available expertise is captured for use within that structure whatever the provenance of members, although it has recently made amendments to the chairing arrangements for some committees. The University may wish to consider the desirability of a further review of this matter. In making this recommendation, the team would stress that the intention is not to criticise individual competence, which was apparent and recognised, but to raise as a more general issue of governance whether the proper role of the CLQE is to give professional support and advice to committees rather than to chair or be members of them.

34 A significant feature of the University's quality strategy is the concept of Minimum Standards. These comprise a series of statements on seven areas of the University's activities: assessment practice; student support systems; placement learning; student representation; information for students; school quality manuals; and the development of progress files. An eighth statement on student evaluation was being developed at the time of the audit. The SED described Minimum Standards statements as an articulation of 'the balance between central regulations and local autonomy' and an indication of where 'system-wide requirements are essential'. In its discussions with staff, the audit team found that Minimum Standards were accepted and acknowledged although, in most cases, it was thought that they were being easily exceeded. In this sense, they appeared to the team to be serving a useful purpose in the context of the University's quality strategy. Less well understood appeared to be

the concept of Minimum Standards as defining common outcomes rather than common processes, that is, in the description of the SED, the statements 'specify outcomes while allowing Schools to establish their own process/procedure for achieving outcomes'. The team noted however that some Minimum Standards statements, for example, assessment practice, were often process-based, while others, for example, student support systems, were more inclined to specify outcomes accompanied by examples of best practice rather than describe set procedures. As it develops the concept, the University might wish to consider this apparent conflation in Minimum Standards of regulatory matters and the encouragement or promulgation of good practice.

35 The University also presented its Quality and Standards Assurance and Enhancement Framework Overview as an important feature of its quality strategy 'designed to maintain rigour' and 'to provide a clearer focus on enhancement'. The latest version of this document, published in March 2004, was made available to the audit team. The team found it difficult to understand the precise function and purpose of the document which contained a summary of major quality assurance processes, a note of changes to those processes (some actual and others proposed), and some detailed discussion of two particular areas: documentation required to support delegated approval of academic programmes, and periodic review judgments. In some senses, the Framework appeared more akin to a discussion paper than to a permanent feature of the quality strategy and, since much of its material is already contained in the Quality Handbook (or could easily be included there), the University may wish to reflect on whether it is serving a distinct and useful purpose.

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

36 The SED drew attention to a number of activities and initiatives which the University intended to address as part of its agenda for the enhancement of quality and standards. These included: the continued evolution and implementation of its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (LTAS); the more systematic production and use of data for quality assurance and enhancement purposes in a number of areas including student evaluation, performance monitoring, the evaluation of employers' views, and research student completion rates; the capturing of good practice from the implementation of Minimum Standards; the development of the Quality Audit process; the strengthening of the infrastructure for the establishment of international collaborative provision

and regular review of the relevant guidelines; and the establishment of a standard procedure to ensure a systematic approach to the initial recording of responses to external examiners' reports.

37 The audit team noted that good progress was being made in relation to some of these intentions. In particular, the University's purposeful and co-ordinated investment in matters of learning and teaching will doubtless assist it to achieve its aims in this area, including the objective to enhance further its current national profile. The team welcomed the intentions related to international collaborative provision as recognition on the part of the University that the appropriate infrastructure, procedures, and guidelines would benefit from further monitoring and development. In respect of the more systematic production and use of data for the purposes of quality assurance and enhancement, the University itself identified some areas for development in the timeliness and detail of such data at module, programme and School level. Whilst some progress has been made, the team would suggest that this is an area of high priority for the University.

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

Programme approval

38 The University has an established structure for the development and approval of academic programmes which begins with the consent of the Academic Policy Committee for the establishment of new awards. Once approval has been given, a proposed programme will typically be subjected to a two-stage process, the first at School level and the second at University level. The whole process is informed by a number of principles including that of a strong external presence. For the most part, the audit team confirmed that this process was rigorous and thorough. The team noted the University's requirement that the second stage approval panel should be chaired by a member of University staff external to the host school, although the CLQE - to whom the responsibility for the establishment of panels has been devolved - was able to exercise discretion in the constitution of an approval panel depending on the scale and nature of the event. However, in reviewing the approval events held during 2002/2003, it did not appear unusual for such events to be chaired by members of the host school and the pattern of discretion was difficult to discern. The University may wish to consider publishing more formal guidelines as a means of demonstrating clearly the strict impartiality which it regards as an important feature of this quality

process. The devolution of the responsibility for the appointment of approval panels and their chairs to the CLQE clearly works in practice although, in the same context as the governance issue raised in paragraph 33 above, the University may wish to consider the advisability of then permitting CLQE staff to chair or be members of such panels.

39 The audit team also raised with the University its response to the *Code of practice (Programme approval, monitoring and review)*, a precept of which states that 'the final decision to approve a programme should be taken by the academic authority, or a body acting on its behalf. The body should be independent of the academic department, or other unit that will offer the programme'. In the University's system, it is the approval panel itself - and specifically its Chair as the individual who formally signs off the outcomes of an event - which has the responsibility for the final approval of new programmes. Although the Quality Handbook describes recommendations being made to ASC, no specific approval from that committee is required prior to a programme commencing. Similarly, the remit of the Monitoring Sub-Committee of ASC requires it to 'receive all reports of review and approval panels' but there is no evidence that it does this on any regular basis as an approval mechanism prior to the commencement of a programme. An annual compilation of all approval and review reports is placed before ASC but this is a quality assurance rather than an approval process. In discussion, it was the University's position that the individual approval panel, on each occasion, constituted the 'body' acting on behalf of the academic authority of the University.

40 In the view of the team, it appeared that, apart from the annual review of reports, there was no independent check on the actions of validation panels conducted by the deliberative structure. While it may be a matter of interpretation of the precepts of the *Code of practice*, the team would suggest that, rather than being bodies which can assume an awarding role, approval panels are transient, are selected for a specific purpose and, except in the case of fortuitous continuity of membership, are unlikely to be able to provide a structured consistency in overseeing the final approval of awards. The team would advise the University to review its practice in relation to the final approval of new academic programmes.

Annual monitoring and review

41 As described in the SED and the University's Quality Handbook, the process of annual review begins with Module Review Reports which comprise tutors' evaluation, a summary of student feedback, an initial response to the external examiner, and an

action plan. In aggregate, these are used as the foundation for both Subject Summary Reports and Annual Programme Reports which are considered by the relevant School Academic Standards Committee (SASC). The SASC is then responsible for compiling an overview report which, having passed through the School Policy Committee, is submitted to the Monitoring Sub-Committee of ASC. In the final stages of the process, an Annual Monitoring Report from the Monitoring Sub-Committee (MSC) is submitted to ASC and Academic Board. According to the *Quality Handbook*, this annual cycle begins four weeks after the end of the second semester and is completed by December.

42 Although it has been the subject of revisions and enhancements, this subject and programme annual review and monitoring process (SPARM) - using the term employed by the University - has been established for some time. As a process, therefore, it is tested and, from the evidence of discussions with staff, was considered to be an effective framework for annual review. The SED did not provide any substantial evaluation of the process. In the view of the audit team, the SPARM process has clearly been effective in the past but, currently, there are elements of it which may warrant some refreshment. As an example, the team found that review at the module level was inconsistent and conducted in a variety of different formats other than the standard Annual Module Review Report; the reports varied in their detail with some being comprehensive accounts of the module's delivery and the student reception of it, while others were considerably more cursory. For the most part, the use of data for review purposes was rudimentary. The subject and programme level reports also varied according to the part of the institution from which they originated. In discussion with staff, the team heard that subject reports were likely to be more detailed and focused with programme reports being used for more summary or overview purposes. The team found that this balance was more likely to be dictated by the school in which the reports were compiled and whether its internal academic organisation was based on subject groupings or academic programmes.

43 At the institutional level, the final stages of the SPARM process for reviews conducted on programmes which ran in 2002-03 encountered some problems. At the meeting of the MSC in January 2004, seven reports were expected from the six schools and Centre for Lifelong Learning. Of these, two were not submitted (an oral report was given in one case), and of the five which were submitted two had not been seen by the appropriate

SASC or School Policy Committee. The MSC did not then submit an annual monitoring report to ASC until June 2004 which in turn did not reach Academic Board until July 2004. This sequence runs counter to a process which the University expects to be completed in its totality by December; it must also reduce the role which could be actively played by these two institutional level committees. The major restructuring exercise which the University has undertaken has had the potential to disrupt some standard quality assurance processes; however, the University may find it desirable to consider its annual review process to ensure that it is contributing fully to the University's framework for quality assurance and standards.

Periodic review

44 The University operates a Periodic Programme Review process on a five-year cycle with procedures based on those used for programme approval. At the time of the audit, the University was considering changes to this process described in the Quality Handbook as 'building on annual review and containing a distinct focus on evaluation of standards and the quality of the student learning experience with a view to enhancement'. In effect, the periodic review process has been in abeyance during the restructuring process. As a practical move, periodic review has been replaced by events which consider and approve the major reconfiguration of modules and programmes caused by restructuring. The level of scrutiny of these events, and the nature of external representation, has been dictated by the closeness of the scheduled periodic review for any given area. The audit team considered this to be a pragmatic and effective exercise. It would, however, support the University's intention to reinstate periodic programme review when restructuring has been completed.

Other review processes

45 The University also maintains two other major processes which contribute to the review and evaluation of its work. As a means of monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of Minimum Standards, the University required each school to submit a Quality Management and Enhancement Report (QMER) for the first time in 2004. The audit team was able to consider the reports made to ASC which, although they varied in their length and coverage, were for the most part informative and fit for purpose. The opportunity had also been taken to ask schools to report within their QMER on the progress of academic restructuring. In discussion with staff, the audit team heard that QMER, as a process, was already being seen as a quality enhancement

rather than a quality assurance or management mechanism. QMER is a new process within the University's quality framework and, as such, was clearly still in the process of development at the time of the audit. Originally conceived as operating over a six-year cycle, with interim updating, the University is considering that it may have more value as an annual exercise. The team would concur with this view especially if the concept of Minimum Standards is to assume growing importance in the University's quality strategy, and if QMER is to be further informed by standard review processes. In this case, the University may wish to consider whether there should be a closer connection between, or even merger of, QMER and the school-level stage of SPARM.

46 The SED also described the process of internal Quality Audit which was established in 2000 'to review the performance of the University in the discharge of policies and procedures, to comment on the adequacy of procedures, to identify best practice, and to secure enhancement'. Overseen by the Institutional Audit Committee, this is a process based on the selection and auditing of more general cross-institutional areas including, as past examples, aspects of approval and review, assessment practice, and the student complaints procedure. The SED described the work of Quality Audit as 'rigorous and robust'. Having scrutinised a number of Quality Audit reports, the audit team would concur with this view.

External participation in internal review processes

47 The SED noted that the University was committed 'to the involvement of external advisors in the design, delivery and enhancement of provision'. The audit team was able to confirm the systematic use of external academic and, where appropriate, professional peers in the approval process (although some further comment is made on this topic in the discussion of the University's collaborative provision in paragraph 116 below). In respect of periodic programme review, it is the standard practice to include external representation on the review panel. More recently, and in the period that review exercises associated with academic restructuring have been taking the place of periodic programme review, an individual decision has been reached as to whether external membership of the review panel is necessary. The team heard that the decision has been chiefly guided by the timing of the programme's scheduled periodic review. The team noted that external membership was not a feature of the Quality Audit process: the University may wish to consider

whether an external perspective might further enhance the current effectiveness of this process.

48 On the evidence available, the audit team concluded that external participation in internal review processes is well established and effective, and that it supports a judgement of broad confidence in the University's management of quality and standards.

External examiners and their reports

49 The roles and responsibilities relating to external examiners are clearly and extensively set out in the Quality Manual in use since 2000 and only slightly updated in the November 2004 Interim Quality Handbook (IQH) made available to the audit team at the time of the audit. The changes relate specifically to the need for external examiner involvement in TQI and to the intention to amend the Handbook in the light of academic restructuring.

50 The University has a two-tier examination system and two associated external examiner roles. Module Examiners are concerned with individual modules or clusters of modules. They are subject specialists working closely with the academic staff responsible for the development and delivery of modules and have the specific role of assuring the University of the overall standard of achievement within a specific subject area. Minimum Standards sets detailed rules for assessment approval, second marking, moderation and the access of examiners to assessments. Award Examiners are concerned with the application of progression and award regulations and the comparability of treatment between students. The SED stated that 'external examiner involvement in the setting and subsequent sampling of appropriate assessments is a critical part of their role' and that they 'are seen as a valuable source of advice, guidance and external comparability, rather than as a source of checking/re-marking student work'. As part of the module change procedure, comments are sought from external examiners about any significant policy changes in assessment.

51 The reports which external examiners are required to produce each year using a university pro forma are considered in a variety of ways. At module and subject level they form part of the annual monitoring process, at school level the comments are addressed and feedback provided and at university level common areas of strength or concern are identified and associated actions planned. The focus of these processes is a specific meeting of MSC, from which a report is made to ASC. The SED listed as a strength that the 'well established external examiner

structure and defined process for comment and response [is] working effectively overall' and as one of the University's strategies to further enhance practice that 'monitoring of response to external examiners [is] now being systematically strengthened'. Evidence seen by the audit team supports both these comments. In particular, the responsibility of school ASCs to inform external examiners of actions in response to their reports will be carried out more effectively and uniformly following the recent adoption of a standard pro forma.

52 However, the team noted a degree of variability in the manner in which school ASCs have, in the past, dealt with and followed up actions in response to external examiners' comments. A draft MSC paper, dated November 2003, suggested that, in future, CLQE should maintain a record of actions agreed in order that they could be cross-checked against the Annual Monitoring Reports for assurance that they have been carried out. Although reporting on actions taken forms part of the current annual reporting process, it is important that the University should have a systematic way of assuring itself that all agreed actions have been completed, as is proposed in the draft paper.

53 The audit team concluded that in most respects the University is making good use of the external examiner system to maintain the standards of its awards and to assure itself that its assessment procedures are sound, but that it is advisable that a rigorous procedure be put in place for ensuring that agreed actions have been taken.

54 Overall, the audit team concluded that the University's external examiner arrangements were robust and effective in securing the standards of the University's awards.

External reference points

55 The focus of the University's response to the *Code of practice* is the ASC, which established a small working group of suitably experienced members to consider each section as it was published. The working groups were required to review current University practice and to propose any changes thought to be necessary 'where precepts are seen to be relevant to enhancing university practice'. Action plans were then agreed and monitored by ASC. As university systems have been modified subsequently 'care has been taken to ensure that such developments take full account of the Code'. The SED noted further that 'the University has recognised the Code as a relevant component against which practice can be audited, and as a potential driver for further developments'.

56 As part of these considerations, the ASC established, and now maintains, an ongoing mapping exercise between the *Code of practice* and university processes, giving comments on each precept, the relevant evidence, possible actions and a summary of action to date. The audit team was able to see the most recent version of this mapping and noted the care and thoroughness with which this process had been undertaken. In the University's view individual teaching staff do not have to be familiar with the *Code* because following the agreed university procedures should be sufficient to ensure an appropriate level of alignment. The University requires that collaborative partners comply with its own guidelines, in this way including its partners in its application of the *Code*.

57 A similar mapping was undertaken in respect of the FHEQ, in this case by Academic Board. University level descriptors for undergraduate and postgraduate provision were developed in 2000 and reviewed and revised in 2003. The revised descriptors range from level 0 to doctorate and, as required by the University's LTAS, make clear the development of student autonomy between different levels of a programme. Marking criteria for each ten percentile over the full range are also used and the SED noted that 'the establishment of generic marking criteria and programme specifications has extended confidence in the University's position in relation to FHEQ'. The level descriptors are included in the IQH to provide guidance to programme teams when writing learning outcomes for programmes and modules. Most external examiners' reports seen by the audit team confirmed explicitly that the levels achieved by students were appropriate to their award.

58 Programme specifications were introduced in 2003-04, replacing and enhancing what were previously called award specifications. The programme specifications, now required for each award, are 'guided by relevant subject benchmarks and professional body requirements' and the appropriate subject benchmarks must be listed on any new award proposal form or review documentation. Any panel established to consider the proposal or to review an existing award is then required to ensure that there is a proper fit between the programme specifications and the external reference points. It is through the reports of those panels that the University is able to assure itself that subject benchmarks are used appropriately. Professional body requirements are tested directly through accreditation processes. Programme specifications studied by the audit team during the

DATs took proper account of subject benchmarks as is also confirmed by external examiners' reports.

59 The SED and documents made available during the audit visit illustrated well the positive manner in which the University reacts to external influences. Accordingly, the audit team was satisfied that the University pays appropriate attention to external reference points and responds carefully to them. Further, it is vigilant in responding to current external changes, such as the revision to the *Code of practice* which has just begun. The *Code* and FHEQ mappings are applied without variation to collaborative programmes.

Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

60 The SED set out a full list of QAA subject and academic review outcomes from 1993 to 2004. It stated that 'the University has welcomed the role of QAA subject review in contributing to the reinforcement of good practice and identifying areas for improvement'. While it admitted that 'there may still be specific cases where aspects of subject delivery are not completely satisfactory or do not conform to University or School standards', several significant changes have been recently introduced which are expected to remedy the problems. These new procedures include Minimum Standards and subsequent Quality Audit, improved student evaluation practices, revised documentation and forms, and 'the identification of assessment as a priority need in LTAS'.

61 Subject review reports are received by ASC with the intention of identifying and managing any cross-institutional issues. Any necessary action plans arising from the review reports must be prepared by the subject group and the SED stated that 'outcomes are consolidated periodically in an overview report' presented to the Committee. The reports of subject reviews in 2003 and 2004 have been a little less critical than some in earlier years, reflecting the improved procedures for the management and enhancement of quality and standards which have been introduced in recent years.

62 The SED included only a relatively brief discussion section on programme level review and accreditation by external agencies and did not analyse any specific issues raised during them. Many of the University's awards have vocational character and the University has strong and extensive links with local companies and professionals. The views of the national professional bodies of the overall quality and appropriateness of qualifications is regarded,

according to the SED, as 'a critical dimension in quality assurance and enhancement'. Where possible, con-joint approval and review activities are used, allowing a close mapping of academic and professional standards. When this is not possible, the framework and standards set by the professional bodies 'are addressed at approval and review events'. This engagement with professional and statutory bodies is managed at school level and overseen at institutional level by the standard monitoring and review processes. Only when there is a significant issue, which cannot be resolved by the professional body and the subject team, will the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) become involved.

63 In the view of the audit team, the University has in place effective mechanisms for the consideration of review and accreditation reports produced by external agencies and has used recommendations from those reports to enhance the quality of its teaching. Schools are encouraged to develop and maintain contacts with professional bodies and to seek accreditation where appropriate.

Student representation at operational and institutional level

64 The SED stated that the University provides 'students with the right of representation at all levels of the University's governance, quality assurance procedures and committee structures'. In the case of central University committees, student representation is normally in attendance through the President of the SU and/or the Education and Welfare Officer. Student representation occurs on appropriate University working groups, such as the Admission Review Group. Student views were also sought during the process of academic restructuring of the University. Students are represented at school level by means of Student Academic Representatives (StARs). StARs are members of Programme Boards. The SU provides training for StARs and supports them in their representational role. The University states in its Minimum Standards that it is 'fully committed to the principle of student involvement and representation', this is evidenced by the regular meetings between the Union President and the Vice-Chancellor and informal contacts at the University and School level.

65 The University does not collect systematic evidence of the effectiveness of the student representational system but instead uses its Minimum Standards policy as the mechanism for assuring itself that students' views are heard across the University. The University and SU both recognise that there are ongoing concerns about securing adequate representation from certain types of students. The

audit team found that several current StARs had yet to receive training. At postgraduate level not all Programme Committees had student representation. It has proved more difficult to capture student involvement in the StARs system for part-time and post-graduate students. The nomination process for StARs had been put back to later in the first term of the academic year to improve the recruitment and involvement of StARs. School Staff/Student Councils which StARs from each programme are invited to attend may appear distant from local student need and hence can attract variable attendance. Consequently, more informal methods to ascertain students' views have been developed at local level, particularly for part-time students. This complements the system of formal student representation and together ensures that student concerns and views can be voiced. The meetings which the audit team had with students and information provided within the DSEDs confirmed the view that student representation had influenced the decision making process. Student involvement secured revisions to University Regulations as in respect of Plagiarism and Mitigating Circumstances and, through the Assessment Working Group, had contributed to the drafting of guidelines on the extent and format of student assessment.

66 At programme level, students' views have been instrumental in curriculum developments and in securing improvements to support for the student learning experience. Students met by the audit team were satisfied with the systems of representation available to them. Any reluctance to engage in the StARs system was more due to personal inclination than to any disregard for the system itself. Officers of the SU met by the audit team confirmed that the University had been responsive to the issues raised in the SWS. They had met with the Vice-Chancellor to discuss issues of substance and a working party had been formed to progress these issues. Officers of the SU spoke positively of their role in the work of senior committees and the way in which the University listened to their views.

67 Overall the audit team considered that the University had established a context within which there were a range of opportunities for student representation and that in general these arrangements worked well.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

68 The SED stated that there is a requirement that feedback from students is considered during the SPARM process. Schools have developed their own processes for collecting such evaluations which are

predominantly at the module level. Feedback from students is also collected by other units across the University, for example by the Retention Team and by Library and Information Services. Representatives of the SU and the StARs provide student input on many working groups and committees. However there is no systematic process for reviewing student feedback on the overall student learning experience. Programme and University level student evaluation has yet to be fully developed. While there are pockets of good practice within individual programmes the SED accepted that 'the picture is not a uniform one'. The principle of student evaluation being included in Minimum Standards has been accepted by Academic Board. The University has set up a working group which will report to ASC and seek comments from SASCs on any proposals. The University expects that through such developments it can build upon good practice and as stated in its SED 'can monitor student evaluation more systematically than hitherto'.

69 The SED stated that 'the University places significant emphasis on the involvement of employers and professional bodies as part of the externality process in design, approval and review'. This has been found to be an effective means of providing input into the development of the curriculum and maintaining the currency of its provision. The University receives some feedback from employers of recent graduates but does not universally require it as in some disciplines, given the potential range of employment opportunities, it would be difficult to gain a consistent perspective. However given the nature and structure of many programmes it was inevitable that close relationships with employers would develop. The University's wider commitment to the development of the Tees Valley had led to localised networks which had established relationships with employers through placements, collaborative centres and more informal contacts. Employer feedback is not always formalised in committees although Schools do incorporate feedback in various ways. The Business School Advisory Council advises on the strategic direction of that School while in the School of Health Social Care all programme teams include service staff and users.

70 The direction of the University at senior level is to establish a stronger relationship with business. This manifests itself into a challenging blueprint to promote the transfer of knowledge and expertise from the University to the wider community. As a consequence there is an encouragement schools to work with employers and other stakeholders in the community which in turn provides links and advice beneficial to the development of programmes within the Schools.

71 The audit team found much evidence to support the University's view that it had developed strong relationships with employers and the wider community. The team, however, considered that the University had not yet developed as strong and systematic feedback from its students in respect of its programmes, student services and learning resources as might have been expected.

Progression and completion statistics

72 It is evident that the University has faced difficulties with progression and completion statistics for some time. On the one hand, the SED stated that 'student progression is monitored at module, programme, School and University level using information produced from the University's Student Record System [SITS]', data which has been available since 1998. Set against this is evidence from the DATs (see paragraphs 123 and 154 below) and from recent academic reviews (for example, History and Law), implying that the concern raised by the 2001 audit, about inadequate data being available for a consistent judgement of the effectiveness of teaching programmes, remains an issue. In part, it is the flexibility of the programmes and the multiple pathways they allow which make the collection of good statistics difficult. The high proportion of part-time, mature students is a further factor, since their movement into and out of programmes is more likely to be irregular and driven by external considerations. In 2002-03 and 2003-04 external examiners have remarked that student lists for examination meetings were sometimes not accurate.

73 The SED stated that although the institutional level data has been adequate, 'the effective use of timely and sufficiently detailed data at module, programme and School level is an aspect that has received continuing attention'. A new Student Data Analysis Section has been established within the Academic Registry and two projects are currently in place to contribute to a resolution of this difficulty. In a pilot exercise, a defined data set for 2003/4 is being provided from SITS for some programmes. MSC intends to review the effectiveness of this pilot, in respect of both the timing and the detail of the data. Academic staff indicated in meetings that discussions were ongoing to refine the data sets already provided as part of this pilot scheme, which in the first instance have been too detailed. The University recognises that such data is important for monitoring the impact of academic restructuring.

74 The Retention Project, one of the aims of which is to improve first year progression, has also focussed on the importance of the relevant data in

assessing the results arising from the retention strategy. Schools can only judge the effectiveness of changes in course delivery and student support by comparison of accurate figures for student progression. The SED listed a number of examples in which the Retention Team has been analysing such data in association with schools. A closely related but more general aspect of university policy is admissions. As noted earlier (see paragraph 5 above), the University has a substantial number of part-time and mature students and its admissions policy reflects its widening participation and regional strategies. Future refinements of the admissions policy are dependent on accurate and timely data for the progression of students, particularly those admitted with non-standard qualifications.

75 The audit team noted that the provision of good statistical data has been a long-standing issue for the University, which is only now beginning to be resolved. It is important that the current progress towards the provision to schools of high quality data for progression and cohort analysis be maintained and that the data be used effectively in support of enhancing the quality of learning opportunities.

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

76 The University Human Resource Strategy (HRS) provides the underpinning of the human resource needs of the Forward Plan. Essential to this is the recruitment and retention of quality staff. To this effect the University has, amongst other measures, increased minimum start points on salary scales and increased the number of senior posts including those at Professor and Reader level. The SED stated that there is a detailed Appointments Policy in place along with mandatory training for recruitment panel chairs and members.

77 Induction is an important part of the integration and support of new members of staff. On appointment, every member of staff is provided with both a central induction by Personnel and CLQE as well as induction at local level. Prior to joining the annual Personal Development Review (PDR) process, both new and promoted staff identify their specific, short term development needs in consultation with their line manager by means of an Initial Development Plan and the appointment of a mentor appropriate to their post. Feedback from the induction process has led to a more comprehensive set of key information being provided to staff at the beginning of induction.

78 The monitoring of staff performance is undertaken within an established PDR system.

Academic staff are normally reviewed by their subject leader with the focus on achievements over the past 12 months and work and personal objectives for the forthcoming year. Staff development plans are informed both by the process of PDR and by peer observation of teaching. However, not all staff met by the audit team considered it was effective in elucidating their own staff development needs and in recognition of this the University has revised PDR documentation to bring greater focus and clarity to the process. The University does not currently operate a formal appraisal scheme.

79 The University has various methods for rewarding excellence in teaching and learning. Staff who successfully complete the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGCLTHE) automatically receive one salary increment. The University has a well established Teaching Fellowship Scheme. A University Teaching Fellow is rewarded with a permanent Principal Lectureship position while an Associate Teaching Fellow attracts an honorarium for two years. The success of this Scheme in promoting innovation in teaching is demonstrated by the four National Teaching Fellows awarded to the University. The University also wishes to recognise wider contribution to teaching and learning through its Rewarding Excellence for Academic Achievement Scheme. The Scheme, which became operational in the current academic year, is an open competition for the award of an additional increment. The Teaching Fellowship and Rewarding Excellence Schemes demonstrate the University's success in rewarding and recognising teaching quality.

80 The audit team found that the University HRS was well established and aligned with its wider objectives. The HRS both informs the University's annual management conference and is used in the production of Schools' operational plans which form the basis for discussion at the University's annual planning conference. There is clear articulation between HRS at the central and local level which enables the identification of issues requiring further consideration and development such as appraisal.

Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development

81 The University clearly relates its Staff Development Strategy (SDS) to its LTAS. Overall responsibility for the SDS resides with the Staff Development Committee with responsibility for the implementation of committee decisions primarily the responsibility of CLQE.

82 The LTAS identifies priority areas which have created sabbatical opportunities at University and School level. One such sabbatical was to the Retention Group in CLQE demonstrating the way in which staff development has been aligned to one of the University's priorities in managing the transition to higher education for non-traditional learners. Innovation Fund Projects are based on submitted proposals which must demonstrate relevance to LTAS. The University has successfully managed its core funding for CLQE and its TQEF and RDS2 monies to direct staff development activities clearly to the enhancement of learning and teaching.

83 CLQE has lead responsibility within the University for all categories of staff development, learning and teaching development and quality management and enhancement. The Staff Development Team within CLQE has responsibility for the more generic aspects of staff development. The Learning and Teaching Development Team has responsibility for pedagogic developments for academic staff. Staff development needs are identified in several ways including PDR which provides the basis for each School Development Plan which in turn forms an integral part of the School's annual Operating Statement. An overview of the Schools' plans are provided for the Staff Development Sub Committee of the Corporate Management Committee which is where the University aligns the individual and local needs for staff development with the implications of institutional change as driven by the Forward Plan. Although the provision of staff development is managed centrally by CLQE, each Director/Head has direct responsibility for the quality of local staff development activities in their School or Unit.

84 The University has a well established PGCLTHE which over 25 per cent of current academic staff have completed. This programme is accredited by Higher Education Academy (HEA) and is compulsory for all new teaching staff with no teaching qualifications and less than three years teaching experience. The programme has been extended to a Postgraduate Diploma and MA in Education stage thus allowing for continuing professional development in learning and teaching for more experienced staff. The University also provides a University Certificate in Postgraduate Professional Development (UCPPD) in Learning and Teaching in HE for staff with reduced teaching responsibilities, for example librarians and part-time lecturers. A UCPPD in Advanced Practice was introduced in June 2003 for teaching staff of partner FECs delivering collaborative programmes. Participants on these programmes are allotted a mentor and can avail

themselves of the full range of staff development opportunities provided at the University. The audit team considered the accredited programmes for teaching staff to be working effectively and it was noted as a feature of good practice.

85 Staff development is intrinsically linked to the quality enhancement of teaching and learning. Central to this is the role of the School Learning and Teaching Coordinator. They chair their School Learning and Teaching Committees and lead related staff development activities in their Schools. Hence the Learning and Teaching Coordinators play a crucial role as change agents across the University in implementing new policies and good practice. They work alongside the Teaching Fellows and support staff undertaking Learning and Teaching Sabbaticals and Innovation Fund Projects. All such schemes link to the LTAS and provide a range of personal development opportunities structured within the framework for the enhancement of teaching and learning. Supporting Professional Standards funding for 2004 - 06 is being used to enhance the Learning and Teaching Coordinator role in recognition of the demands of the role in supporting staff development both within each School and across the University.

86 The University has developed other policies to improve the performance of its staff. A two year senior management development programme delivered by external training facilitators, commenced in 2000 for Directors and Heads. This was rolled out to Assistant Directors in 2002. It has been further cascaded to those with responsibilities for programme and academic leadership.

87 Peer observation of teaching operates across the University though there is no uniform scheme. It is less developed in some Schools than in others and it is the intention of the University to formally review the peer observation systems with the possibility that peer observation might be merged with a system of peer review.

88 The audit team considered that there were numerous opportunities available for staff development within the context of a range of innovative and well structured schemes. These were tied into both the HRS and policies for the enhancement of teaching and learning, and demonstrated a commitment by the University to the retaining and improving of the quality of its staff.

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

89 The University has very little provision that is delivered wholly by distance/distributed methods,

though in line with the institutional Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, programmes are beginning to include some distributed methods of delivery through e-learning. All such provision falls within the University's standard quality assurance processes as it is incorporated into the approval, review and annual monitoring of programmes and modules. Any particular issues relating to distance learning are taken up by Academic Policy committee.

90 An e-learning team based in CLQE trains and supports staff wishing to make use of distributed learning techniques to enhance new or existing modules. In order to meet the growing demand and to offer enhanced services the University's adopted virtual learning environment (VLE) is to be upgraded. Besides a programme of staff development relating to aspects of e-learning, a VLE support module is provided to offer staff a range of on-line information and training materials to help them get the most from the VLE. More particular advice and expertise relating to the use of ICT in learning and teaching is available to academic staff from a Courseware Development Team. This is also based in CLQE.

91 Although the take-up of the VLE is variable across the institution, evidence seen by the team suggested that good use was being made of it to improve communication with students, to enhance teaching and to develop ICT skills in learners. Students confirmed to the team the usefulness of the VLE and were particularly appreciative of the ease with which it could be accessed remotely over the web. The discussion group facility was considered useful both in helping to develop understanding and in creating a sense of community amongst learners.

Learning support resources

92 Library and Information Services (L&IS) is a major University facility that seeks to provide information and to support learning for both students and staff. The Learning Resource Centre (LRC) provides a range of study and learning environments including open access to IT and AV facilities. Following recent consultation with the SU opening hours for LRC during vacation periods have been extended in order to offer better access to part-time students. There appear to be ample ICT facilities and study space, with some rooms available for booking by students for group work and other study activities.

93 Special provision is made for disabled students and students with specific learning difficulties including help with the use of adaptive technologies, one-to-one induction sessions to the LRC, an extended loan period and a postal loans service. A

designated member of staff is available at all times in the LRC to support any student, and a wide range of printed information and advice on making use of both on- and off-campus bibliographic and other resources is readily available as a series of Factsheets. All facilities and services, with the exception of the provision of the interlibrary loans, are also available to students and staff from HEBP partner colleges.

94 The main gateway to L&IS resources, including the catalogue and electronic publications, is through the web and this facilitates access for all, but especially for part-timers, and students and staff in partner colleges. It is possible to reserve and renew books through the web and there is also a facility to suggest purchases to be added to the stock. There is close monitoring of demands on the stock, and the reservation by three or more users of an individual item will automatically lead to consideration of the need for the purchase of extra copies of the item in question.

95 A Drop In Students Skills Centre (DISSC) is sited in the LRC. DISSC provides a confidential service to help students develop appropriate study skills. It operates as a drop-in or by appointment service. Core staff are supported by the partial secondment of school academic staff, and an on-line version (DISSC Live) is also available offering advice on such things as the avoidance of plagiarism and academic referencing systems. A Maths Centre (staffed by members of the School of Science and Technology) offering similar levels of support to students is located nearby.

96 There are good links between L&IS and the schools. L&IS staff are actively involved in the induction of new students. An L&IS Subject Information Team Leader (SITL) is assigned to each school and they sit on appropriate school and subject committees. They liaise closely with academic staff for collection building to support the undergraduate curriculum and research programmes, undertaking for each subject area an annual Needs Analysis which informs the book and periodical purchasing decisions of the LRC. L&IS also maintains good links with HEBP College librarians and works closely with local health libraries.

97 High levels of student satisfaction with the provision of learning resources were apparent from the SWS. Students who met the audit team confirmed this. They were appreciative of the availability, accessibility and range of learning resources provided. They showed a strong sense of ownership of the LRC, and clearly recognised the vital contribution it makes to their learning. They were warm in their praise of the helpfulness of staff in the LRC, and were aware of the particular contribution to

learning made by DISSC and the Maths Centre, even if they personally had not made use of them.

Academic guidance, support and supervision

98 The University has laid down minimum standards for Student Support Systems in schools. All schools are required to provide each undergraduate or taught postgraduate student with a named personal tutor or equivalent access to support and guidance. Variation is allowed, providing that all students are able to benefit from advice and guidance on a list of defined essential topics, with referral to central student support services in appropriate cases. In some schools personal tutors play a significant role in supporting students academically and are actively involved in developing key skills, portfolio building and in personal development planning. This pattern is not universal, however, and in many instances students look to module tutors for this kind of academic support and guidance, as well as more general personal support.

99 In some schools support and guidance from academic members of staff is supplemented by that provided by teams of final-year students who are available at set times to provide information and answer fellow students' queries. In the Business School a 'buddy system' involving previous successful students provides additional support for current postgraduate students.

100 It was clear to the team that the provision of academic support and guidance was regarded by members of academic staff as a key part of their professional responsibilities and that as a consequence students benefited from a highly effective, if somewhat informal, network of support and guidance from the level of the module upwards. While a few students appeared unfamiliar with the concept of a 'personal tutor', it was generally clear that students felt able to approach any member of staff with whom they might come into contact for advice and guidance, and for their part the academic staff appeared wholly committed to making themselves available for consultation both at set times each week and on a drop-in basis.

101 Feedback to students on both formative and summative assignments is provided and written feedback can be supplemented by oral feedback in one-to-one meetings with tutors. The SWS suggested some slight unhappiness with the effectiveness and timeliness of this system of academic guidance, but this was not borne out by the students that the team met during the course of the DATs, who generally felt that they benefited

from helpful and supportive guidance that enabled them to improve their performance as they moved through the programme.

102 The audit team noted, however, that the nature and amount of formative feedback offered appeared to be subject to considerable variation within and across schools, both at undergraduate and postgraduate level. In addition, some students appeared to be offered comprehensive formative feedback on full drafts of assignments to be submitted subsequently for summative assessment, while others were only able to avail themselves of more informal advice based on outline plans. It was the view of the team that such variation could be confusing to students and could, potentially, give rise to inequity.

103 Appropriate research methods training is provided for postgraduate students and is often tailored to suit individual need. Research supervision is coordinated by a Postgraduate Tutor. Research students meet supervisors on a regular basis and a record of the principal structured interactions between student and supervisor (at least three per session) is kept in a Log Book. Research students complete annually a monitoring form indicating progress towards completion, and this is discussed with their supervisor. Re-enrolment cannot take place without the satisfactory completion of this form.

104 Research students are encouraged to make contact with the wider academic and professional community relevant to their field of study. Students are supported financially to facilitate conference attendance, and schools maintain good links with professional colleagues in appropriate disciplines providing valuable additional learning and networking opportunities for students.

Personal support and guidance

105 Student Services is a central department comprising the accommodation office, the careers service, the counselling service, the chaplaincy, disability services, the nursery, and sport and recreation. There is also an advisory team supporting students with financial problems and international students. The grouping of all these agencies in close proximity is held to facilitate referral between them in appropriate cases, and to make anyone visiting the department aware of the full range of services on offer.

106 It is recognised that an effective system of personal support and guidance for students depends on effective links between individual schools and the central services. To this end there is a formal mechanism for the exchange of information between the Student Services management team

and school management teams. Support is also provided for disability coordinators located in each of the schools and subject-based responsibilities are allocated to central careers staff, who contribute directly to induction activities for new students.

107 Student Services engages directly with members of staff in schools. It offers support and training to members of both the academic and non-academic staff on general issues such as mental health awareness, works with particular programme and school teams to develop skills in the general area of student support and also contributes sessions on student support to the PGCLTHE course.

108 There is a close working relationship between the department and the SU Advice Centre, which itself provides support to students over a whole range of academic and non-academic issues. Contact is also maintained with partner colleges to ensure that HEBP students are able to access the full range of services available to campus-based students. Staff from the department brief colleagues in partner colleges on matters, such as financial provision for HE students, to ensure that their students receive appropriate and accurate advice. Students from partner colleges may access staff in the department directly, where a similar level of provision is not available to them in their own college.

109 The department recognises that evaluation by users of its services is essential to their further development and enhancement, but is aware that such evaluation in the past has been only partial, addressing individual services rather than the totality. It believes that the situation will be substantially improved by the steps currently being taken to achieve MATRIX accreditation for the whole department, in addition to that already achieved by the Careers Service.

110 Although the SWS recorded high levels of satisfaction amongst those students who had accessed Student Services, it suggested that the awareness of the provision was relatively low. However, both full-time and part-time students that the team met appeared to be fully aware of the range of services available. Many had personal experience of the support and guidance offered on a number of issues, including financial entitlements and careers advice, and spoke positively of the quality and appropriateness of the information and advice received.

Collaborative provision

111 In essence, the University's collaborative provision falls into two categories: the regional

Higher Education Business Partnership (HEBP) and some international collaborations. The SED noted that 'the University's quality assurance framework and procedures apply equally to taught provision delivered wholly or in part in partnership with other institutions'. Thus, all matters related to quality and standards are the responsibility of ASC through its Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee (CPSC). The University has also recently established an International Co-ordination Sub-Committee with responsibility for the approval of prospective partners and reviewing existing agreements although, at the time of the audit, this committee had yet to meet.

112 Established in 2000, the HEBP comprises seven FECs, Cleveland College of Art and Design, and the University. It grew from the existing University of Teesside Partnership - a broader consortium with a remit for widening participation - and has a focus on collaborative academic provision. According to the SED, the purpose of the HEBP is to broaden individual opportunities, to address a deficit of educational opportunities, and to help embed education and training in the social and economic infrastructure of the region. From the University's perspective, it serves as 'a major vehicle for the successful delivery of part of the...widening participation and lifelong learning agenda'. Acknowledging ASC's overall responsibility for matters of quality and standards, the HEBP has a separate structure of committees with responsibility for its operation including an executive Partnership Board which has links to the University's Academic Board. Academic co-ordinators from all partner institutions of the HEBP also meet formally and there is a range of other cross-partnerships groups including those for library provision, marketing, recruitment and careers. A detailed Operational Manual was introduced in 2002 to cover all aspects of the management of the partnership and the academic programmes delivered through it.

113 The audit team noted that new programmes for delivery within the HEBP were approved according to the University's standard procedures and that the CPSC received those sections of school-level SPARM reports which related to collaborative provision. In discussion with staff from a range of partner institutions within the HEBP, the team heard that staff development and quality enhancement opportunities were routinely made available by the University. The University's approach to supporting students includes assisting partner institutions in the provision of student services, and permitting direct access to virtually all of the University's learning resource facilities. In some senses, the strength of

the HEBP can be measured by the internal Quality Audit of it which was undertaken in 2003. While the audit made a series of recommendations, some of which were believed necessary to secure fundamental and rapid improvements, the report was widely discussed and a detailed action plan promptly introduced and then actively monitored.

114 In the view of the University, the HEBP is 'a partnership of outstanding mutual respect and trust'. The audit team was able to confirm this perspective. The team met with staff involved with the development and delivery of a wide range of imaginative, innovative and successful initiatives, through its Discovering Higher Education strategy. While matters of quality assurance will always offer challenges in such a consortium, it appeared to the team that the partnership had developed an approach in which pragmatic management, effective staff development, and a demonstrable commitment to the support of students were combined. The team considers the contribution that HEBP is making to the University's own mission for widening participation, for the provision of regional opportunities for higher education, and for its potential for future development, is a feature of good practice.

115 The University's international collaborative provision is relatively limited and comprises the provision of undergraduate and postgraduate business programmes in Greece, health-related programmes in Malaysia and Ireland, and an articulation agreement with an institution in Germany. The audit team reviewed the partnership with Mediterranean College, Athens as a means of sampling this aspect of the University's collaborative provision. The partnership was established in 2002 with the approval of two undergraduate degrees and extended in 2003 with the addition of a MBA and a MSc Management programme. The team noted that there were well-established links between the partner college and the Teesside Business School (TBS) including exchange visits of staff. Comprehensive operational handbooks are in place for both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The team noted that, although external examining was undertaken by the same examiners appointed to the UK versions of each programme, an additional Greek-language examiner has been introduced to cover the first two years of the BA (Hons) Business Management where there is an option for delivery and assessment in Greek. The team also noted the very thorough annual programme review which covered all programmes delivered by Mediterranean College and included an appropriate action plan. Module-by-module

comparisons of the performance of students studying at the partner institution and those studying at TBS were a notable inclusion in this review. It is the practice of the University to include the location, institution, and language of instruction and assessment on a student transcript. The existence of this transcript is noted on the award parchment. In summary, the team found that the collaboration with Mediterranean College was operating effectively and, if taken as an example of the University's approach to overseas partnerships, would lead to confidence in its management of the quality and standards of programmes in running.

116 The audit team was not as reassured, however, by the initial approval of the partnership if, again, this were to be taken as an example of the University's common practice. An Institutional Approval visit was undertaken on 29 and 30 August 2002 which resulted in a recommendation to approve Mediterranean College as a partner although noting that a number of further documents were required. These included financial statements, a strategic plan, a library development plan, and a statement of the partner's organisational structure. It was not clear to which University body the visiting panel was making its recommendation. The approval event for the undergraduate programmes, in any case, took place a week later on 6 September 2002 with two of the three members of the visiting panel acting as members of the approval panel; the third member of the visiting panel, on this occasion, became a member of the programme team. The approval panel recommended 'to the Academic Standards Committee' that the programmes be approved with a number of conditions including the preparation of a Memorandum of Agreement, an Operations Manual, a Student Handbook, details of admissions requirements, and a staff development strategy and action plan. A further meeting to consider the response to these conditions was scheduled for late September or early October. The recommendation of the approval panel was not received or confirmed by ASC (it is not, in any event, the University's practice to seek this approval in its validation processes), and the scheduled meeting to consider the conditions did not take place. The team was informed that the meeting had been delayed by the proposal to approve the postgraduate programmes in January 2003, and that the conditions set for the undergraduate programmes had been either taken up at that event or had been dealt with by action of the chair of the initial approval panel. The team did not feel that this sequence of events, compressed over a short period, and with substantial conditions that were unlikely to have been met by the time of the first intake of students on 23

September 2002, represented best practice. The team also noted that there was no external representation at any point in the approval of the undergraduate programmes delivered by Mediterranean College. Given that the programmes were franchises of existing provision, such representation would not have strictly been required under the University's own guidelines. However, the University may wish to consider, in the light of its own comment in the SED that collaborative activity overseas 'requires special consideration and requires the addition of specific further elements to the standard processes', that additional confidence may have been gained from an appropriate external peer, especially in the case of the proposed delivery and assessment of parts of the programmes in Greek.

117 The 2001 Audit Report advised the University to give 'high priority...to the publication of comprehensive policies and procedures' relating to collaborative provision, and to ensure 'the earliest possible publication of detailed guidance for staff on the quality assurance of the University's collaborative provision, both in the UK and overseas'. As noted above, the University has comprehensive and effective operational handbooks for both the HEBP and for its international provision. In responding to the advice to develop more detailed guidelines for collaborative provision in general, the SED noted that the University had, in early 2003, 'developed specific guidelines to support the effective establishment and maintenance of collaborative arrangements'. However, it appeared to the audit team that the CPSC was still in the process of discussing these guidelines in February and May of 2004 with a proposed implementation date in June 2004. The Interim Quality Handbook published in November 2004 contains a section on collaborative provision together with related appendices. The section comprises some general notes on forms of collaboration, and guidance on approval processes including institutional approval and its periodic review. The appendices are a combination of templates, checklists, model memoranda, and extracted sections from the *Code of practice* and the CVU Handbook for Practitioners.

118 In the view of the audit team, the University has not been particularly prompt in publishing the guidelines recommended as a matter of high priority in the report of the 2001 Audit. As represented by the appropriate sections in the Interim Quality Handbook, neither are those guidelines as detailed or as comprehensive as might have been anticipated. In some cases, parts of them are still under development. Elsewhere, although the checklists for institutional and programme approval are in themselves comprehensive and require staff to check most areas of collaborative

provision, there is no indication of what the University's expectations are in many of those areas. The SED noted that the establishment of the International Co-ordination Sub-Committee was partly 'in anticipation of possible expansion of the University's limited overseas provision'. Although the current guidelines for collaborative provision are sufficient for the University's existing international partnerships they would not, in the view of the team, be adequate to support such an expansion. The University may find it desirable to continue to develop the guidelines for collaborative provision in order to ensure that they are comprehensive enough to meet any future expansion, particularly of international partnerships, and to review the arrangements for the approval of such partnerships.

Section 3: The audit investigations: discipline audit trails

Discipline audit trails

119 In each of the selected DATs, appropriate members of the audit team met staff and students to discuss the programmes, studied a sample of assessed student work, saw examples of learning resource materials, and studied annual module and programme reports and periodic school reviews relating to the programmes. Their findings in respect of the academic standards of awards are as follows.

Business and administration studies (taught postgraduate masters)

120 The DAT covered all full and part-time non-research postgraduate degree awards in business and administration studies offered by the Teesside Business School and comprised the following: MBA; MSc Management; MSc Marketing Management; MA Human Resource Management; MA Fraud Management; MBA (Public Management); MSc Leadership and Organisational Change; and MSc Small Business Development. All programmes have been approved since November 2001 and are therefore recent additions to the School's portfolio. A new MBA (Health and Social Care Management) and a new taught DBA have been approved and will be introduced in September 2005. The School has a memorandum of agreement with Mediterranean College in Athens for the MBA and MSc Management programmes. The School has been restructuring all of its programmes as part of the University's academic restructuring exercise and will implement the new arrangements from September 2005. Student enrolments to the audited programmes totalled 258 for 2003-04.

121 The School is structured into two multidisciplinary academic subject groups of similar size - business management and business strategy. The School has three specialist centres: the centre for entrepreneurship and SME development; the centre for leadership and organisational change; and the centre for public service management. These act as the focus for research and scholarly activity which underpin the programmes. Six professors have recently been appointed to bring specific expertise to the programmes and the school also has four visiting fellows who contribute to the school's postgraduate provision. Responsibilities for policies and procedures are identified in school documentation.

122 The DSED was written specifically for the audit. The document was largely descriptive, but the school identified its perceived strengths and actions identified for improvement. Programme specifications were included with the DSED. Both the DSED and programme specifications made clear reference to the relevant *Subject benchmark statements* and other external influences, such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Learning outcomes at programme and module levels have been informed by FHEQ requirements, the Programme Framework for Masters Awards in Business and Management and the guidelines of the Association of Business Schools. The DSED included helpful tables, which demonstrated how general and specific programme outcomes were covered at programme and module level. There was good evidence of involvement of external organisations in the design of programmes and approval panels. Good practice is evident in the MSc Marketing Management programme through the integration of modules with local business activity, leading to good quality, practical learning experiences. A School Advisory Council, comprising local business leaders, meets on a regular basis.

123 Data relating to entry profiles, progression and completion were included in the DSED with explanatory commentaries. The audit team explored with staff how these statistical data were prepared and utilised. It appeared that the data had not been made available to date by the University, but had been maintained locally by programme leaders. While staff indicated that the data was useful, particularly in relation to entry qualifications and completion rates, the team had some difficulty in identifying how the data was used in the monitoring of quality and standards, either through the documentation provided or through discussions with staff. This is a matter that the University will wish to address in the context of observations made elsewhere in this report.

124 The internal, monitoring and review processes were in line with the University's procedures. These are based, in the first instance, on module evaluation reports, which are completed by module leaders and are used to inform subject and programme annual reports, which are ultimately approved by SASC. The audit team found that the module evaluation reports were variable in terms of the quality of evaluation and analysis, thereby influencing the quality of subsequent annual reports. Action plans are included in all annual monitoring reports and generally, appropriate actions had been completed and reported in the following annual report. However, the team found examples where identified actions had not been addressed. Since the programmes had been approved in recent years, there was no requirement for periodic reviews to be carried out. The School is using the academic restructuring exercise as a means to review the provision and is devising a subsequent rolling programme of periodic review.

125 External examiner reports are considered within the school by the chair of SASC, and centrally by the CLQE. Formal and timely written responses are made to each external examiner by the chair of SASC, following discussion of the comments by the programme teams. The external examiner comments are also addressed as part of the annual review process in programme and subject annual review reports. The external examiner reports were generally supportive of the programmes, but the audit team found evidence of recurring issues which had been raised by some external examiners. Examples of assessed work seen by the team appeared to match the module learning outcomes and the team formed the view that the standards of student achievement were appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ. Exceptionally, the external examiner had identified that there was a tendency for TBS students to perform better than students at Mediterranean College. The school has carried out appropriate evaluation and comparison by module and has produced an appropriate action plan in order to ensure consistency of performance across programmes.

126 Student handbooks are clear and provide students with straightforward information on programme structure, content and general university issues. Assessment requirements and regulations are contained, together with detailed notes on referencing. Students expressed confidence that assessment requirements meet expectations based on learning outcomes and specific assessment criteria published in module handbooks. Programme specification expectations correlated well with the

types and modes of assessment presented. Different formats exist for assignment coversheets and this has been identified by an external examiner. The programme team aim to work towards a common format. Feedback to students on assessment was generally clear and linked back to the assessment brief. Students expressed the view that written feedback was generally supportive and constructive, with opportunities to obtain formative feedback on the submission of draft work prior to final submission.

127 Students expressed satisfaction with the learning resources available to them. The university is well furnished with IT facilities, with adequate opening times. Although some students complained of a lack of stock of texts for some core modules, the library is considered as an excellent learning resource. The VLE is viewed as a valuable source of learning support by students, although this facility is not yet utilised by all the programmes within the audit.

128 Students praised the availability and helpfulness of all staff associated with the programmes. The school operates a largely open-door policy with regard to student access to academic advice and personal tutoring. Experienced student advisors are appointed to assist students by giving advice to access to University support services. In the MSc Marketing Management programme, previous successful students are appointed as 'buddies' to offer academic support.

129 Generally, students felt that they were able to raise issues of concern directly with the programme leaders and gave examples of remedial actions taken. However, the University policy of Minimum Standards on student representation indicates that student representatives should attend all programme committees. Although student representatives have been elected or nominated for the programmes, the school has decided that it would be inappropriate for them to attend the postgraduate programmes committee. Instead, it receives summaries of minutes from the staff/student liaison boards which take place on a regular basis. The University SU takes responsibility for the training of student representatives, but no such training had taken place at the time of the audit.

130 Students considered the induction process, including the range of handbooks, to be good and confirmed that it provided the information which they required.

131 Overall, the audit team confirmed that the quality of learning opportunities was suitable for the range of programmes of study leading to the named awards and that these were appropriately located within the FHEQ.

English

132 The DAT focused on the BA honours degree programme in English Studies and the English component of the BA joint honours degree programme in English and Media Studies, which together account for the majority of student FTEs following modules within the area of English studies. Programmes are offered in both full and part-time modes, and transfer between modes is allowed. The DSED was prepared specifically for the visit, but was modelled on the University's own Periodic Evaluation Document (PED) used for internal review. All members of the subject group were consulted during the course of preparation of the document, which was also informed by student feedback on the learning experience obtained through a structured group feedback event.

133 As part of Academic Restructuring the programme specifications for all programmes offered by the Subject Group were revised to conform to the new credit structures. The programme specifications are aligned with the University's 'Undergraduate Learning Experience', which itself is developed from the FHEQ, and take account of the relevant Subject benchmark statements. The curriculum, which combines a number of core modules with a range of optional ones, is coherently and progressively structured. Its delivery is informed by the research and scholarly activity of members of the Subject Group, and is subject to an on-going process of discussion and reflection involving all members of the Subject Group who manifestly share a commitment to the enhancement of the provision in all its aspects. All full-time members of staff participate in Peer Observation, and the Group holds regular Learning and Teaching Forums, sometimes with the participation of colleagues from other Subject Groups or institutions, which focus on specific issues.

134 The system of internal annual review appeared to be effective. Members of the Subject Group demonstrated a clear understanding of the operational aspects of the process and a collective commitment to use it for the assurance of quality and the enhancement of the student learning experience. Module Review Reports are properly self-critical and contain summaries of qualitative feedback from student evaluations, although the team noted that the responsibility for compiling these summaries rested with the module tutors themselves. These reports form the basis of a summary by the Section Leader, part of a general report which is forwarded to the School ASC. The Section Leader Report is a comprehensive annual review of the activity of the section as a whole and includes a detailed action plan.

135 External Examiner Reports from both Award and Module Examiners were positive, and commended the quality of the teaching and the expertise of the staff. Examiners confirmed that the programmes were suitably challenging and that the standard of achievement by students as a whole was appropriate for the award. It was clear that any issues raised by examiners in their reports were responded to in a timely and appropriate manner and the responsiveness of the Subject Group as a whole was commended by examiners. The Subject Group takes the opportunity to meet examiners informally each year to discuss matters relating to teaching and assessment, and to the development of the curriculum in general.

136 Students are not offered an opportunity to meet the external examiners, but the student voice is captured through module evaluations and student forums organised by StARs, who also sit on Programme Boards. Students who met the team appeared to be satisfied with their ability to make known their views at Subject Group level, and confirmed that they received appropriate feedback on any issues raised by them or their representatives.

137 A range of assessment methods is designed not only to evaluate student achievement but also to support learning and consequently a key feature is the provision of timely and constructive feedback on both formative and summative assignments. Consistency of written feedback on assignments is promoted through the use of a pro forma and in all cases students are able to request further oral feedback from tutors. Examples of written feedback on summative assignments seen by the team appeared helpful and full, and students confirmed the effectiveness of the process as an integral part of their learning experience. Students are also able to seek advice and guidance during the preparation of assignments prior to submission, but this appeared to be of an informal and largely unstructured nature.

138 Information provided to students through Programme and Module Handbooks appeared to be clear and comprehensive. Considerable effort appeared to be devoted to the creation of Module Handbooks. Students were generally appreciative of the clarity and relevance of the information provided to them in this way and felt in particular that the handbook provided for the final-year dissertation project was an especially useful complement to the structured guidance and tutorial support they received.

139 The Subject Group maintains good links with the LRC through its SITL and through one of its members who sits on the LRC committee as Library Liaison Officer. Students were very satisfied with the

resources available to them both in terms of the book and periodical collections, and also in respect of the learning and study facilities provided. All students, and especially part-timers, appreciated the ability to access the LRC on the web, and they found the use of the VLE a positive enhancement to their learning experience, although they noted that it was not yet being exploited as fully as it might be in all English modules.

140 All students benefit from academic and personal support and guidance. Students are allocated a Personal Tutor for the duration of their programme and meetings with personal tutors are included in the induction activities for all new students. A common Personal Tutor is assigned to specific cohorts of joint honours students. The Subject Group has recently re-titled personal tutors as 'Progress Tutors' in order better to reflect their role in personal development and the Progress File System. Students, both full and part-time, were warm in their praise of the support they received and of the efforts made by individual members of staff to respond to their particular requests for advice and guidance. They clearly felt able to approach any member of staff, not only their designated personal tutor, for guidance on academic and personal matters and were confident that the quality of advice they received would be sound. They also recognised that some advice would appropriately be sought from outside the school and were fully aware of the sources of such advice. They valued the proactive approach taken by the Careers Service, not only in the final year of their programme, during which they received regular updates about career events and other relevant information, but also during Induction Week which included a session devoted to careers.

141 The audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named award.

Physical sciences

142 The Programme of Undergraduate Studies in Science comprises a number of award bearing pathways through a modular framework. The DAT concentrated on one such pathway, the BSc (Hons) Applied Science and Forensic Investigation, representing approximately 25 per cent of the Programme. In comparison with the University's overall recruitment pattern, the students are mostly full-time. The DSED was specifically written for the audit and was accompanied by programme specifications for all pathways through the Programme, a student data summary and sample student handbook.

143 The programme specifications are very detailed. Some date from April 2001, when the Programme was last reviewed, but others are more recent, reflecting modifications or the introduction of new pathways. They reflect the University's level descriptors and so are aligned with the FHEQ. As required by the university template, the appropriate subject benchmark statements are listed for each pathway. Although for some pathways several such benchmarks are listed, there are no benchmarks that are directly relevant to this subject pathway. Intended learning outcomes are specified in detail and linked directly to the teaching and assessment methods. There follows an overview of the pathway, a description of its distinctive features and a listing of the modules which form it. The Programme is due to be reviewed in 2005 as part of the process of academic restructuring, in respect of which the academic staff seen by the audit team were already considering the particular problems likely to be faced by part-time and major-minor students.

144 The student data contained in the DSED showed that the Programme has had an increase in student numbers of more than 50 per cent over the three years, mainly in the pathways which include Forensic Science topics. The conversion rate, at just below 30 per cent overall and significantly higher for some pathways, is good. The progression rates, which measure the proportion of students who pass or are referred, are slightly higher than those for the University as a whole. A detailed cohort analysis was not included. Staff explained to the audit team that they did now have a new data set provided by the Student Data Analysis section but that it needed to be more selective to be of maximum use.

145 Internal monitoring of the student experience of teaching is based upon reports written following the completion of each module. Although the DSED stated that 'the programme team seek to obtain feedback each time a module is delivered', the audit team was surprised to learn that the student feedback questionnaires about the module and its delivery are analysed and summarised solely by the teaching staff involved in the module. No member of staff or student who met the audit team expressed any concern about this procedure, which they believed to be carefully and fairly undertaken.

146 The module reports are used to prepare a pathway summary which is presented to the appropriate Programme Board which in turn reports to the School ASC (SASC), the major focus for the management of quality and standards within the School. The annual monitoring report, for scrutiny at institutional level, is prepared by SASC. Subject

groups, covering a number of related modules, also meet and prepare reports for SASC. The SASC has responsibility for considering and reacting to external examiners' reports. The DSED contained some examples of this process in action. External examiner reports seen by the audit team were all considered by the SASC, actions determined and the examiner informed, although it was not clear from the minutes where responsibility lay for confirming later that the action had been completed.

147 StARS on the Programme Boards provide an additional opportunity for feedback on quality issues. Among the students who met the audit team were two StARS who commented positively on the responsiveness of the Programme Board to their comments. StARS receive feedback on actions prompted by student comments, but to their knowledge there was no automatic feedback to the whole student body. Contrary to the claims of the University and the SU, neither of the StARS had received any training or were aware that it was available. Other students were satisfied with their opportunities to make comments to StARS or to staff about their course and the manner in which staff responded.

148 The Programme uses assessment strategies which are entirely consistent with institutional policies. Students commented positively on the value of feedback from formative assessment and the flexible but firm approach to deadlines in the early part of their course. Also, they were familiar with learning outcomes given in the module handbooks. External examiners have commented favourably on assessed work which they have seen and the standard of that seen by the audit team was entirely consistent with the programme specifications and with the level descriptors.

149 The students were satisfied with the accuracy of the information about the course received prior to registration and noted particularly the helpfulness of personal contacts which they were readily able to establish. The student handbook which they receive at the start of their course is helpful and concise, including such information as an assessment map to guide their studies.

150 The learning resources available for this course are generally satisfactory. Students noted particularly the existence of the Crime Scene House, a unique specialised facility which was one of the reasons why several of them chose the course. The library has an adequate range and number of books, the book stock being overseen by the school SITL who maintains close contact with academic staff. The IT resources are suitable and readily accessible and students find the use of the VLE especially helpful.

The maths and drop-in centres have also been found to be valuable. Academic support is provided primarily by module tutors, although students explained to the audit team that all staff are easily accessible and willing to help, providing e-mail and mobile phone numbers for this purpose.

151 Overall, the audit team was satisfied that the quality of learning opportunities available to the students was suitable for the programme leading to the named award.

Sociology

152 The DAT for Sociology focused on the single honours BSc Sociology degree as well as a suite of other programmes delivered by the Sociology Subject Group which is part of the School of Social Sciences and Law. Other Sociology provision includes HND Social Sciences taught in collaboration with staff from Middlesbrough College; BSc Social Studies; BSc Sociology major/minor programmes with Criminology, Media Studies, Psychology, Youth Studies; and MSc Social Research Methods. All programmes form part of an ongoing Academic Restructuring process. The DSED was produced specifically for the purpose of the audit by the Sociology Subject Group, and was supported by programme specifications, sample programme handbooks and a summary of student data.

153 The programme specifications which had been through the Academic Restructuring process were clear and comprehensive. The others, due for re-approval in 2004-05, will be produced in a similar format. The programme specifications for BSc Sociology were fully referenced against the *Subject benchmark statement* for sociology. There was no explicit reference to the FHEQ but it was clear from the documentation that they had informed the curricula and were set at the appropriate level of award.

154 Progression, completion and degree class profile data, together with entry profile data are presented in the annual monitoring process. Particular attention is paid to the retention of year 1 students and the Sociology section operates a procedure for monitoring student withdrawal. The data provided by the University is rather perfunctory in its content and has prevented a more thorough analysis of student progression and completions. Detailed monitoring of the data on Sociology progression/completion has of necessity, therefore, been limited.

155 Internal monitoring processes adhered to the expectations of the University. All modules are annually reviewed and form part of annual programme reviews. These are scrutinised by the Sociology Subject Group Report which produces an

action plan for the forthcoming year and a review of resulting action from the previous year. Such processes were generally evaluative and effected positive changes to the programmes for example by the introduction of new modules. Periodic review has been undertaken as part of the Academic Restructuring process. This incorporated a critical review of existing provision informed by staff, students and external evaluation. The review commended the contemporary and innovatory nature of the curriculum informed by relevant research. The Sociology team had adopted a student centred approach to the design of its programme.

156 The reports of the external examiners were generally positive about the standards set for awards, about the achievements of students and about the methods of assessment. External examiners' reports are considered as part of annual monitoring and the Sociology Subject Group Leader coordinates a written response to all external examiners reports. There was evidence that suggestions from external examiners have been appropriately actioned by the Sociology Subject Group.

157 The audit team received examples of students' assessed work from across the range of achievement. A good range of assessment tasks were clearly related to learning outcomes. Students are provided with the generic University assessment criteria in the School Student Guide. Work had been marked in accordance with these criteria but there was still scope for greater use of the upper range of marks. The audit team concluded that the standard of achievement on the named awards was appropriate to the title of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

158 Feedback to students on assessed work is provided in a variety of forms. A pro forma is used to provide feedback on written assignments. Formative feedback on draft assignments is available on request and much appreciated by the students met by the audit team. However this could lead to variability in feedback received by students and the Sociology subject group was considering a more universal formal system for such feedback. The Sociology Subject Group plan to improve provision of generic feedback to students on seen and unseen time - constrained examinations.

159 Students who met the audit team indicated that they were satisfied with the information provided for them in the Programme guides and School handbook. Students had a clear understanding of what was expected from them in assessments and the criteria for marking. They were appreciative of the enrolment packs and the way induction activities

helped them to settle into their programmes. Students valued access to a Personal Tutor to discuss academic and general personal matters and felt that the system for contacting staff worked well. Progress was being made in respect of a Progress File system which will enable students to better reflect on their learning. The general view expressed to the audit team by students about learning resources, including library provision and IT access, was positive. The Sociology Subject Group makes high use of the VLE resource both to support teaching and learning and increasingly to communicate with students.

160 Student representation is well developed within the School of Social Sciences and Law. Students sit on programme boards and the Social Science Field Board as well as having the opportunity to complete module evaluation forms. The process is supplemented by close relationships between the staff and the student body. Students expressed their view to the audit team that they were content with their involvement in their programmes and they felt their views were both listened to and acted upon, for example in effecting change to modules and the curricula. Students on the HND Social Sciences indicated that formal time was set aside in their study skills module to engage with StARs and that Middlesbrough College staff were as easily accessed as other Sociology staff.

161 The support for teaching and learning is enhanced by recognition of the importance of staff development by the Sociology Subject Group. The final year of the BSc Sociology programme is strengthened by curricula enriched by the research activities of the staff. Two subject Group members have recently undertaken University funded Learning and Teaching sabbaticals, on key skills and on-line resources for key skills. The electronic support of teaching is progressing while Peer Observation of Teaching is soundly established within the Subject Group. Staff are involved in research on developments in the widening participation agenda for higher education. All such activities indicate a healthy regard for the enhancement of the student learning experience.

162 Overall the audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students is appropriate to the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

Section 4: The audit investigations: published information

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

163 Prospective students gain information on programmes through the use of the annual prospectus, the Internet and through material produced locally by schools. The students viewed the prospectus to be an informative publication covering everything that could be expected and with valuable additional information. The University also produces guides, for example for mature students, new applicants and postgraduate students. The audit team saw examples of these guides and considered them to cover a range of useful information in an accessible and informative way and found these to be helpful additions to the range of information produced by the University. Students who met the team expressed the view that there had been no cases of incomplete or inaccurate information in relation to courses and that their expectations of what a course would provide had been fully met.

164 The SED described the processes whereby the information provided in prospectuses and similar centrally-produced material are checked for reliability and accuracy at both school level and by the centre at the time of going to print. The audit team concluded that mechanisms for assuring the accuracy and reliability of published information were in place for all programmes, including those delivered in partnership with other institutions.

165 A new student handbook has been revised and issued to students from September 2004 and this provides a general level of information to students which contextualises and complements the more specific information provided by schools. The student handbook contains the Student Protocol, which sets out the obligations of the student to the University and vice-versa. It also contains the revised regulations following academic restructuring. The University has developed a Minimum Standard: Informing Students, which provides schools with guidelines on minimum requirements on the coverage and completeness of information made available to students in programme and module handbooks. The programme-level documentation considered during the DATs was clear in setting out programmes of study, learning outcomes, aims and objectives and assessment requirements. Bibliographies were often supplemented by reference to useful Internet links and students were

provided with other information in support of teaching and learning, including intranet-based material. Information relating to most modules was also posted to the VLE. The students who met the team acknowledged the value and utility of the full range of information available to them. They were confident that they understood what was required of them and how assessments at the module level enabled them to meet specific learning outcomes. They also pointed out that the University's communication channels were open and that staff were readily available to provide extra information in clarification. This informal information system acted not only as a supplement to the formal documentation but also enhanced the overall student experience.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information

166 The University has acknowledged some difficulties with the management of information and this was evidenced through the DATs and institutional level documents and meetings with staff. A new Student Data Analysis section has been established within the academic registry to oversee the management and development of applicant/student statistical reports, trend analysis and the provision of market intelligence to support the academic development strategy. The University has recently agreed to expand the provision of student information data and this will be made available to schools in order to inform the annual monitoring process.

167 The audit team established the University's current position in terms of HEFCE's document 03/51 *Information on quality and standards in higher education*, and was able to confirm that considerable progress had been made. The University has established a working party on TQI which will oversee the final developments to ensure the availability of the complete dataset by December 2004.

168 The audit team was able to review a wide range of University, school and programme publications as well as the institution's website. The University has established protocols for checking the accuracy of its publications and information sets. Overall, the information provided to students appeared to be appropriate and accurate and there was wide support from students who met the team and in the SWS for the quality of institutional and programme handbooks and guides. Programme specifications were generally full and accurate, although there were occasional minor discrepancies between their content.

169 The audit team considered that the University was alert to the requirements set out in HEFCE 02/15 and 03/51 and was taking steps to fulfil its responsibilities in respect of the requirements. It also considered that the information published by the University about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards was reliable.

Findings

Findings

170 An institutional audit of the University of Teesside was undertaken during the week 6 to 10 December 2004. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility as a UK degree-awarding body. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with HEFCE, SCOP and UUK, four audit trails were selected for scrutiny at the level of an academic discipline. This section of the report of the audit summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged from the audit, and recommendations to the University for enhancing current practice.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes

171 The SED described the governance, management and committee structure and responsibilities for the University. The audit team noted that the schools have a deliberative structure which matches that of the University. In the view of the team, the University has a comprehensive, if complex, committee structure to support its quality strategy. The team noted that in many cases the working parties or working groups supporting the work of these committees had longer life spans and more diverse responsibilities than their remits suggested. While the team observed that the volume of sub-committees and working groups is not in itself of particular note, there is the potential for some duplication, overlap or misplacement of responsibility. The University may find it desirable to review the structure of committees and working groups to ensure its efficiency, and to satisfy itself that key aspects of quality and standards management are not being placed inappropriately with working groups of limited membership. The team also discussed with the University the issue of officer membership of committee within the deliberative structure, and note the common presence of CLQE staff as committee members and chairs. While considering the large amount of work which CLQE undertakes with commendable efficiency, the University may wish to consider the desirability of reviewing the chairing arrangements for some of its committees and to consider whether the role of CLQE is to give professional support and advice to committees rather than to chair or be members of them.

172 The University sees its quality strategy as being derived from its mission and based on a number of key components including an institution-wide planning cycle, a broad regulatory framework, the support of other strategies, and appropriate

management and committee structures. In developing its quality strategy, it is also the University's view that it has focused more clearly on enhancement processes, has attempted to minimise the burden on staff, and has ensured the ownership of quality at appropriate levels. In respect of its approach to the management of standards, the University cited the use of internal and external reference points, the rigour of the institution's approval, monitoring and review processes, its arrangements for staff appointment and development, and its admissions, progression, and conferment procedures. In the view of the University, its quality system is fit for purpose and its approach to the establishment, maintenance and enhancement of its awards is robust.

173 The University has an established structure for the development and approval of academic programmes which begins with the consent of the Academic Policy Committee for the establishment of new awards. Once approval has been given, a proposed programme will typically be subjected to a two-stage process, the first at School level and the second at University level. The whole process is informed by a number of principles including a strong external presence. These procedures are rigorous and thorough although the University may wish to consider publishing more formal guidelines on the chairing and membership of approval panels. The University should also consider its practice in respect of the final approval of academic programmes against the precepts of the *Code of Practice Section 7: Programme approval, monitoring and review*, published by QAA, and consider whether there should be more formal involvement by the key committees in its deliberative structure.

174 The University's process for annual review begins with Module Review Reports which are used as the foundation for both Subject Summary Reports and Annual Programme Reports. Having considered these reports, the SASC is responsible for compiling an overview report which, having passed through the School Policy Committee, is submitted to the Monitoring Sub-Committee of ASC. In the final stages of the process, an Annual Monitoring Report from the Monitoring Sub-Committee is submitted to ASC and Academic Board. This annual cycle begins four weeks after the end of the second semester and is completed by December. This process, SPARM, has been established for some time and is considered by the University to be an effective framework for annual review. In the view of the audit team, the SPARM process has clearly been effective in the past but, currently, there are

elements of it which may warrant some refreshment. As examples, the team found that review at the module level was inconsistent; the subject and programme level reports also varied according to the part of the institution from which they originated. The effectiveness of the review and reporting systems were hampered by the limitations of the statistical data sets provided by the University. At the institutional level, the final stages of the SPARM process for reviews conducted in 2002-03 was constrained as a result of reports not having been submitted or formally considered at school level. These constraints and delays in reporting through the committee structure meant that ASC and Academic Board were, in effect, not actively involved in the review cycle.

175 The University operates a Periodic Programme Review process on a five-year cycle with procedures based on those used for programme approval. At the time of the audit, the periodic review process was in abeyance because of the restructuring process. As a practical move, periodic review as a universal process has been replaced by events which consider and approve the major reconfiguration of modules and programmes caused by restructuring. The level of scrutiny of these events, and the nature of external representation, has been dictated by the closeness of the scheduled periodic review for any given area. The audit team considered this to be a pragmatic and effective exercise but would support the University's intention to reinstate periodic programme review when restructuring has been completed.

176 The University also maintains two other major processes which contribute to the review and evaluation of its work. As a means of monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of Minimum Standards, the University required each school to submit a Quality Management and Enhancement Report (QMER) for the first time in 2004. The audit team was able to consider the reports made to ASC which, although they varied in their length and coverage, were for the most part informative and fit for purpose. The opportunity had also been taken to ask schools to report within their QMER on the progress of academic restructuring. In discussion with staff, the audit team heard that QMER, as a process, was already being seen as a quality enhancement rather than a quality assurance or management mechanism. Originally conceived as operating over a six-year cycle, the University is considering that it may have more value as an annual exercise. The team would concur with this view especially if the concept of Minimum Standards is to assume growing importance in the University's

quality strategy, and if QMER is to be further informed by standard review processes. There is also a process of internal Quality Audit which was established in 2000. Overseen by the Institutional Audit Committee, this is a process based on the selection and auditing of more general cross-institutional areas including, as past examples, aspects of approval and review, assessment practice, and the student complaints procedure. The audit team concurred with the University's view of this process as rigorous and robust.

177 The University requires feedback from students to be considered during the SPARM process. Schools have developed their own processes for collecting such evaluations which are predominantly at the module level. Feedback from students is also collected by other units across the University, for example by the Retention Team and by Library and Information Services. Representatives of the Students' Union and the StARs provide student input on many working groups and committees. However there is no systematic process for reviewing student feedback on the overall student learning experience, and programme and University level student evaluation has yet to be fully developed. The principle of student evaluation being included in Minimum Standards has been accepted by Academic Board. The audit team did not consider that the University had yet developed as strong and systematic feedback from its students in respect of its programmes, student services and learning resources as might have been expected.

178 The University claims to place significant emphasis on the involvement of employers and professional bodies as part of ensuring an external perspective in design, approval and review of academic programmes. The University receives some feedback from employers of recent graduates. The University's wider commitment to the development of the Tees Valley has led to localised networks and established relationships with employers through placements, collaborative centres and more informal contacts. Employer feedback is not always formalised in committees although schools do incorporate feedback in various ways. The audit team found much evidence to support the University's view that it had developed strong relationships with employers and the wider community.

179 From meetings with staff and students and documentary evidence, the audit team concluded that the SED provided an accurate account of the University's practice in the areas of distributed and distance learning. Although the University currently has no overarching policy for this element of its

provision, the advisory role of ELU and the requirement for it formally to sign-off modules and programmes to be delivered through distance learning provide assurance of the quality of the provision. Ongoing monitoring of programmes and modules through APE and periodic review processes allow institutional overview of the operation of the provision. The planned development and implementation of an institutional policy specific to distributed and distance learning, drawing on the revised section of the *Code of practice* on collaborative provision, will strengthen central oversight of this area identified by the University for further development.

180 The University's collaborative provision falls into two categories: the regional Higher Education Business Partnership (HEBP) and some international collaborations. All matters related to quality and standards are the responsibility of ASC through its Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee (CPSC). The University has also recently established an International Co-ordination Sub-Committee with responsibility for the approval of prospective partners and reviewing existing agreements although, at the time of the audit, this committee had yet to meet.

181 Established in 2000, the HEBP comprises seven further education colleges, Cleveland College of Art and Design, and the University, and has a focus on collaborative academic provision. The purpose of the HEBP is to broaden individual opportunities, to address a deficit of educational opportunities, and to help embed education and training in the social and economic infrastructure of the region. Acknowledging ASC's overall responsibility for matters of quality and standards, the HEBP has a separate structure of committees with responsibility for its operation including an executive Partnership Board which has links to the University's Academic Board. Academic co-ordinators from all partner institutions of the HEBP also meet formally and there is a range of other cross-partnerships groups. A detailed Operational Manual was introduced in 2002 to cover all aspects of the management of the partnership and the academic programmes delivered through it.

182 New programmes for delivery within the HEBP are approved according to the University's standard procedures and that the CPSC receive those sections of school-level SPARM reports which related to collaborative provision. Staff development and quality enhancement opportunities are routinely made available by the University and its approach to supporting students includes assisting partner institutions in the provision of student services, and permitting direct access to virtually all of the

University's learning resource facilities. The report of a recent internal Quality Audit of the HEBP was widely discussed and a detailed action plan promptly was introduced and then actively monitored. It appeared to the audit team that the partnership had developed an approach in which pragmatic management, effective staff development, and a demonstrable commitment to the support of students were combined. The HEBP is commended for the contribution which it is making to the University's own mission for widening participation, for the provision of regional opportunities for higher education, and for its potential for future development.

183 The University's international collaborative provision is relatively limited and the audit team reviewed the partnership with Mediterranean College, Athens as a means of sampling this aspect of the University's collaborative provision. The partnership was established in 2002 with the approval of two undergraduate degrees and extended in 2003 with the addition of an MBA and a MSc Management programme. There are well-established links between the partner college and the Teesside Business School including exchange visits of staff. Comprehensive operational handbooks are in place for both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Standard external examining arrangements have been enhanced by an additional Greek-language examiner and thorough annual programme reviews are compiled. It is the practice of the University to include the location, institution, and language of instruction and assessment on a student transcript. The existence of this transcript is noted on the award parchment. In summary, the team found that the collaboration with Mediterranean College was operating effectively and, if taken as an example of the University's approach to overseas partnerships, would lead to confidence in its management of the quality and standards of programmes in its provision. The audit team was not as reassured, however, by the initial approval of the partnership if, again, this were to be taken as an example of the University's common practice. Less than a month separated the first intake of students from the Institutional Approval visit and an approval panel visit, both of which produced substantial conditions or requests for further information. It was not clear that such conditions had been met at the time of the first intake.

184 The 2001 Audit Report advised the University to give high priority to the publication of comprehensive policies and procedures, and detailed guidance for staff, relating to the quality assurance of its collaborative provision. The Interim Quality Handbook published in November 2004

contained a section on collaborative provision together with related appendices. The section comprised some general notes on forms of collaboration, and guidance on approval processes including institutional approval and its periodic review. The appendices are a combination of templates, checklists, model memoranda, and extracted sections from the *Code of practice* and the CVU Handbook for Practitioners. In the view of the audit team, the University has not been particularly prompt in publishing the guidelines recommended as a matter of high priority in the report of the 2001 Audit. As represented by the appropriate sections in the Interim Quality Handbook, neither are those guidelines as detailed or as comprehensive as might have been anticipated. Although the current guidelines for collaborative provision are sufficient for the University's existing international partnerships they would not, in the view of the team, be adequate to support such an expansion. The University may find it desirable to continue to develop the guidelines for collaborative provision in order to ensure that they are comprehensive enough to meet any future expansion, particularly of international partnerships, and to review the arrangements for the approval of such partnerships.

185 The findings of this audit confirm that broad confidence can be placed in the University's current and likely future management of the quality of its academic programmes, including those which are delivered by distance learning and by collaborative partners.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

186 The University monitors student progression at a number of levels - module, programme, School and University - using information produced by the University's Student Record System. It is evident that the University has faced difficulties with progression and completion statistics for some time. The University has acknowledged that data for module, programme and school levels requires attention in respect of both the timing and detail of the data. In part it is the flexibility of the programmes and multiple pathways they allow which makes the collection of good statistics difficult. A new Student Data Analysis section has been established within the academic registry to resolve these difficulties. There are currently two pilot projects in place which are to be reviewed by MSC. The audit team commented on the importance of maintaining progress towards the provision to schools of high quality data for progression and cohort analysis so

that the data can be used effectively in support of enhancing the quality of learning opportunities.

187 The University operates a well documented and effective two tier external examiner system with carefully applied appointment and reporting procedures. Module external examiners play a full role in summative assessment and Award external examiners monitor the application of progression and award regulations. All external examiners are required to submit annual reports using a university pro forma. Reports seen by the audit team indicated that, in general, external examiners are satisfied with the standards achieved by students and with the University's procedures.

188 At school level it is the responsibility of the SASC to consider the report and feedback to examiners about the responses to their comments is provided through the chair of the SASC, for which purpose a standard pro forma has recently been introduced. At university level, the reports are monitored by the CLQE and there is a specific meeting of the MSC to consider feedback and comments from schools. Although actions are proposed and discussed at this stage, it is necessary that there should be put in place a systematic process by which the University can assure itself that all the agreed actions have been taken.

189 The SED listed the university's external examiner system as one of its strengths, which the audit team can confirm. The University is currently implementing the changes which will be required to engage fully with TQI and to take account of academic restructuring.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

190 Feedback to students on both formative and summative assignments is provided and written feedback can be supplemented by oral feedback in one-to-one meetings with tutors. Students that the audit team met with during the course of the DATs felt that they had benefited from helpful and supportive guidance. They noted, however, that the nature and amount of formative feedback appeared to be subject to considerable variation both within and across Schools. It was the view of the team that such variation could be confusing to students and could potentially give rise to inequality.

191 The University claims to support student learning through a well-resourced and well-managed learning resource centre; an institution-wide VLE; targeted support for special groups of students, including disabled students; and effective

systems of academic advice and guidance delivered by professionally committed academic staff.

192 The LRC is located on campus near to the other major facilities and its accessibility for part-time, home-based and HEBP students is enhanced by a well-developed web presence. The LRC has good links with Schools and partner colleges, and is able to respond effectively and in a timely manner to changing demands of learners. Students expressed general satisfaction with the level of support available from the LRC. They appreciated the ability to access the facilities on the web and they clearly felt a strong sense of ownership of the provision.

193 The use of the VLE is being developed across the institution, supported by training and information provided through CLQE. Students were generally warm in their praise of the use of the VLE, which they found easy to use, both as a means of communication and as an enhancement to taught modules.

194 Students experiencing difficulties with learning are able to seek support from specialist units (DISSC and the Maths Centre) and the web (DISSC Live), and disabled students receive special support from the LRC and from school-based disability co-ordinators. Students confirmed the University's view of the effectiveness of this provision. DISSC and the Maths Centre in particular were regarded as effective means for delivering targeted academic support.

195 All students receive academic advice and guidance through the student support system, although the precise manner of delivery of such advice and guidance is subject to some variation across the institution as a whole. It was apparent to the team that the variation evident in no way undermined the effectiveness of the support provided. Students felt able to approach virtually any member of academic staff for appropriate advice and guidance and were appreciative of the general availability of members of staff.

196 Staff are both encouraged and enabled to develop their professional skills in the enhancement of teaching and the promotion of learning by being given access to a range of staff development opportunities and university awards to support teaching sabbaticals and fellowships. Peer observation is practised throughout the University which promotes the enhancement of teaching through the sharing of good practice between colleagues. It was clear to the team the academic staff, both full- and part-time, were wholly committed to enhancing the learning experience for their students and actively embraced the range of opportunities for professional development and the

sharing of good practice that were provided through the institution.

197 Overall the audit team formed the view that these various aspects each contribute to the effective support of learning and that in combination they ensure a high quality experience for learners.

Outcomes of discipline audit trails

198 The DATs followed the format of the University's model of internal periodic review, which is based on programmes within the Schools. The audit team decided to refine the scope of some of the DATs to focus on particular programmes within the unit of review.

Business and Administration Studies (taught postgraduate masters)

199 The DAT covered all full and part-time taught postgraduate degree awards in business and administration studies.

200 From its discussions with both staff and students, its consideration of external examiner reports and its review of students' assessed work, the audit team was of the opinion that the standard of student achievement in the programmes covered by the DAT was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their positioning within the FHEQ. All programmes have an appropriately constructed programme specification, and due regard is paid to relevant subject benchmark statements.

201 Assessments are varied and challenging and closely related to the needs of the workplace and the expertise of staff.

202 Student evaluation of the provision was positive, and students were satisfied with the extent and quality of the support they received from academic, administrative and other staff. The information provided for students by the School was accurate, comprehensive and helpful. ICT and library services were also considered to be of a high standard.

203 Overall, the audit team confirmed that the quality of learning opportunities available to students is suitable for the range of programmes of study leading to the named awards.

English

204 The DAT focused on the BA honours degree programme in English Studies and the English component of the BA joint honours degree programme in English and Media Studies, which together account for the majority of student FTEs following modules within the area of English studies. From the study of students' assessed work and from

discussions with students and staff, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the programmes was appropriate. Programme specifications relate clearly to the relevant subject benchmark statement while the learning outcomes appropriately reflect their location in the FHEQ.

205 Students are effective contributors to the quality of the programmes through student forums and Programme Boards. They were positive about the quality of information they received and they were very satisfied with the resources available to them. They also found staff very supportive of their learning. It was clear to the team that students following these programmes enjoy a positive learning experience.

206 The curriculum is supported by the subject-specific scholarship of members of the English Subject Group and its delivery is underpinned and enhanced both by the Group's active links with the LTSN and a collective on-going engagement with a range of teaching and learning issues, which has seen one member of the Group becoming a National Teaching Fellow and others being granted University teaching awards and sabbaticals in recent years.

207 External examiners' reports were positive and commended the quality of teaching and expertise of staff. The programmes comprise a distinctive suite of suitably challenging core and optional modules that require students to make a clear progression from level to level, acquiring in the process both a range of transferable skills as well as significant subject specific knowledge and understanding appropriate to the level of the award.

Physical sciences

208 The programme specifications for the pathway in Applied Science and Forensic Investigation set out appropriate educational aims and outcomes, linked to the teaching learning and assessment methods. There are no relevant subject benchmarks for this pathway. There is a clear statement of the module structure, and learning outcomes are linked to learning methods and strategies and to assessments. From its study of students' assessed work, from external examiners' reports and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the programme was appropriate to the title of the award and its location within the FHEQ.

209 Students have opportunities, through module evaluations and through their representatives on programme boards, to contribute to the quality enhancement of programmes. Students who met

the audit team were very positive about their learning experience and the learning resources available. They were very appreciative of the support provided by the staff teaching the modules of the pathway. The team concluded that the quality of learning resources available to students was suitable to the programme of study leading to the award.

Sociology

210 The DAT for sociology concentrated on the BSc Sociology but it also covered other programmes delivered by the Sociology Subject Group. The programme specifications were clear and comprehensive and where appropriate fully referenced against the *Subject benchmark statement* for sociology. Assessment tasks were varied and related well to learning outcomes. External examiners were positive regarding the achievements of students. The audit team concluded that the standard of achievement on the named awards was appropriate to the title of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

211 Students indicated that they had ample opportunities to express their views regarding their programmes. The information provided for students was clear and feedback on their work was much appreciated. The provision of formative feedback, while welcomed by students, needed to be placed on a more systematic basis to ensure its availability to all students. The systems for providing academic and pastoral care worked well. The audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was appropriate to the programmes of study.

The use made by the institution of the Academic Infrastructure

212 The University, acting through its senior committee structure, uses working groups to study in detail external reference points such as the CoP and the FHEQ. Those working groups then propose changes to internal processes which are designed take full account of the external reference points and in doing so to enhance current practice. Detailed documents are then prepared to advise academic units of the university procedures following from the analyses. The precepts of the CoP have been mapped onto university procedures in a table which is regularly updated and the consideration of the FHEQ has led to a set of level descriptors now extending from level 0 to doctorates. Subject benchmarks are also taken fully into account by incorporation into the programme specifications. New award or review panels are required to confirm that the subject benchmarks

have been properly incorporated into the programme design.

213 The audit team observed during the DATs that schools make appropriate use of the documentation and that external examiners report positively about it. It is therefore assured that the University has taken full account of external reference points and has ensured, through its internal guidance, that current and future programmes are consistent with them.

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

214 The SED prepared for this audit by the University gave a clear description of the main committees, processes and key personnel as they apply to the management and enhancement of provision and the assurance of quality and standards, and it included the University's reflection on its framework for managing quality and standards which has been strategically developed since 2001. In doing so, the SED had identified areas of perceived strength and also areas for potential improvement. However, the SED did not fully engage with an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Institute's procedures for the management of its quality and standards.

215 The SED helpfully cross-referenced to a comprehensive set of key documents that were made available during the audit visit. The audit team's meetings with staff at all levels were characterised by an open exchange of views and it became clear that the University had identified some of the team's concerns about the lack of critical evaluation. The team concluded that the University could have used the SED more effectively to evaluate its quality assurance and enhancement process.

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

216 The SED drew attention to a number of initiatives which the University intended to address as part of its agenda for enhancement. These included the continued evolution and implementation of its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy; the more systematic production and use of data for quality assurance and enhancement in a number of areas including student evaluation, performance monitoring, the evaluation of employers' views, and research student completion rates; the capturing of good practice from the implementation of Minimum Standards; the development of the Quality Audit process; the strengthening of the infrastructure for

the establishment of international collaborative provision and regular review of the relevant guidelines; and the establishment of a standard procedure to ensure a systematic approach to the initial recording of responses to external examiners reports. The audit team noted that good progress was being made in some of these areas, in particular, the University's purposeful and co-ordinated investment in matters of learning and teaching. While some progress has been made in respect of the more systematic production and use of data for the purposes of quality assurance and enhancement, the team would suggest that this is an area of high priority for the University.

Reliability of information

217 The audit process involved meeting with the University's students, who commented positively on the accuracy and supportive nature of the published and other information available to them, both prior to entry and while studying on their programmes. In addition, students commented favourably about the ease of communication with staff, both formally and informally, which augmented the information at their disposal.

218 The audit process included a check on the progress made by the University towards production of the information set out in the format recommended in HEFCE's document 02/15. A process for presenting this information has been implemented and the audit team was able to see the current state of progress, with the University making use of the revised guidance in HEFCE's document 03/51.

Features of good practice

219 The following features of good practice were noted:

- i the ways in which staff development is aligned with the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy to provide opportunities for all staff, including part-time staff and those in partner institutions, and the promotion of learning and teaching through a comprehensive programme for the induction and reward of staff (paragraphs 77, 79, 82, 84, 85 and 88)
- ii the range, accessibility and utility of the learning resources provided to students, including those in partner institutions (paragraph 97)
- iii the professional commitment of academic staff in providing a high level of support for students (paragraphs 100, 128 and 140)

- iv the strength of the Higher Education Business Partnership, its value in respect of the provision of regional opportunities for higher education, and its potential for future development (paragraph 114)
- v the range, nature, and effectiveness of the University's access and widening participation activities and their clear link to its mission and strategic plan (paragraph 114).

Recommendations for action

220 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- i to consider the University's position on the final approval mechanism for academic programmes, and its practice in appointing chairs and members to approval panels (paragraphs 38 and 40)
- ii to make more precise and consistent the methods by which issues arising from the reports of external examiners are recorded, considered and subsequently actioned (paragraphs 52 and 53)
- iii to ensure that appropriate use is made of the wider data set now being made available to Schools for the purposes of quality assurance (paragraphs 75, 123 and 154)
- iv to develop a consistent policy on the level and availability of formative feedback prior to the final submission of assessed work (paragraphs 102 and 158).

221 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- i to review the current structure of committees and working groups with a view to reducing its apparent complexity, and to consider the issue of officer membership of committees within the University's deliberative structure (paragraphs 32 and 33)
- ii to review the nature, consistency, and timeliness of the annual review process to ensure that it contributes fully to the University's framework for quality management and assurance (paragraphs 43 and 124)
- iii to consider developing a University-wide systematic feedback through student evaluation and satisfaction surveys (paragraph 68)
- iv to continue to develop the guidelines for collaborative provision in order to ensure that they are comprehensive enough to meet any future expansion, particularly of international partnerships, and to review the arrangements for the approval of such partnerships (paragraphs 116 to 118).

Appendix

The University of Teesside's response to the audit report

The University is delighted with the positive judgement from the QAA audit team on its provision and welcomes the recognition of areas of good practice in a number of key aspects of our work.

In particular, the University notes the auditors' recognition of:

- the professional commitment of staff in providing a high level of student support
- the contribution made, both in the University and in partner institutions, to the accessibility, range and value of the learning resources provided for students
- the range, nature and effectiveness of access and widening participation activities
- the critical role of, and support for, staff development for the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy
- and more widely, the University and partner colleges very much welcome the recognition and confirmation given to the Higher Education Business Partnership as 'a partnership of outstanding mutual respect and trust'.

The University welcomes the comments in the report with reference to the discipline audit trails selected and is pleased to note the comments on standards achieved and the overall quality of the student experience.

The University has noted and appreciates the recommendations for action and has put in place an action plan which relates either to the continued development of its established initiatives, or a review of existing practices. The University is confident that the implementation of its responses to the recommendations will strengthen and enhance aspects of its operation.

