University of Durham

FEBRUARY 2004

Institutional audit
Preface

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the Agency) exists to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education (HE) qualifications and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of HE. To do this the Agency carries out reviews of individual HE institutions (universities and colleges of HE). In England and Northern Ireland this process is known as institutional audit. The Agency operates similar but separate processes in Scotland and Wales.

The purpose of institutional audit

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

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

Judgements

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

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

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

Nationally agreed standards

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

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

The audit process

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

The main elements of institutional audit are:

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

The evidence for the audit

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

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

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

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

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the Agency) visited the University of Durham (the University) from 23 to 27 February 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 offered by the University.

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

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

Academic quality is a way of describing how well the learning opportunities available to students help them to achieve their award. It is about making sure that appropriate and effective 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 is that:

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

Features of good practice

The audit team identified the following as being good practice at the University:

- the work of the Teaching and Learning Committee as an engine of change in promoting a proactive and reflective culture in its work;
- the rigorous and well-written documentation in support of the management of quality and standards;
- the detailed and analytical process adopted in the development of programme specifications;
- the positive steps taken by the University to recognise excellence in teaching;

- action to evaluate the efficacy of the college experience and the introduction of a Dean of Colleges and Student Support;
- the high level of attendance by students where they have a representative role; and
- effective policy implementation for students studying by distance learning.

Recommendations for action

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

The University is advised to:

- accelerate the introduction of a strategy for quality enhancement including planned development of learning and teaching strategies at department level; and
- adopt a more systematic and visible form of annual review.

It is desirable that the University:

- institute a more systematic approach to recording appraisal to enable the University to maintain an oversight of the consistency of participation in the process;
- monitor more carefully the learning experience of postgraduate students, particularly on taught programmes;
- disseminate good practice to provide more timely feedback to students on their evaluation of the learning experience;
- recognise the good practice in partner colleges from which the University may benefit.

Summary outcomes of discipline audit trails

BA (Hons) Anthropology; BA (Hons) Archaeology and Anthropology; BA (Hons) Human Sciences; BSc (Hons) Human Sciences; BSc (Hons) Health and Human Sciences; MA in Research Methods; MA in Socio-Cultural Anthropology; MSc in Biological Anthropology (either Ecological or Evolutionary Anthropology); BSc programmes in Computer Science, Artificial Intelligence and Software Engineering; part-time Certificate and Diploma programmes in Information Technology; MSc in Internet Systems and e-Business; MSc in Internet and Distributed Systems; BA in Music; MA Composition; MA Electroacoustic Studies; MA Ethnomusicology; MA Musicology and Performance; joint honours programmes in English Literature and Music, Modern European Languages and Music, Music and Theology, Latin and Music, and the department's contribution to the BA Combined Honours in Arts; Certificate in Higher Education in Theology and Ministry; Diploma in Higher Education in Theology and Ministry.
To arrive at these conclusions the audit team spoke to staff and students, and was given information about the University as a whole. The team also looked in detail at the above programmes to find out how well the University's systems and procedures were working at that level. The University provided the team with documents, including student work and, here too, the team spoke to staff and students. As well as supporting the overall confidence statements given above, the team considered that the standard of student achievement in each of the awards above was appropriate to the title of that award, and its place in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), published by the Agency. The team considered that the quality of learning opportunities available to students studying for these awards was suitable in each case.

**National reference points**

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

From 2004, the institutional audit process will include a check on the reliability of the information set published by institutions in the format recommended in the Higher Education Funding Council for England’s (HEFCE) document 02/15, *Information on quality and standards in higher education*, and the *Final guidance* published in HEFCE 03/51. At the time of the audit the University was assessing the requirements set out in this document, and was moving to fulfil its responsibilities in this respect.
Main report
Main report

1 This is a report of an audit of the academic standards and quality of programmes of the University of Durham (the University). 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.

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

3 The audit checked the effectiveness of the University's procedures for establishing and maintaining the standards of its academic awards; for reviewing and enhancing the quality of the programmes of study leading to those awards; for publishing reliable information; and for the discharge of its responsibility for awarding degrees. 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 four discipline audit trails (DATs), together with examples of those processes operating at the level of the University as a whole. The scope of the audit encompassed all of the University's provision.

Section 1: Introduction: the University of Durham

The University and its mission

4 The University was founded in 1832. It developed in Durham and Newcastle until 1963, when the independent University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne came into being. The University is collegiate and is located in the city of Durham and the nearby town of Stockton. Queen's Campus, Stockton, opened in 1992 with a particular mission to widen participation and has developed a range of vocationally oriented interdisciplinary programmes. With effect from the academic year 2001-02 the University formally established two colleges, John Snow and George Stephenson, at the Queen's Campus. Across the University, student numbers continued to rise and applications and enrolments at the University are very robust today. The University of Durham is research-intensive and achieved high scores in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise with 14 units of assessment rated 5, six rated 5* and one subsequently rated 5**.

5 In 2002-03, the University had 14,400 students, including 1,800 taught postgraduates and just over 1,100 research postgraduates. About 73 per cent of students are undergraduates. Overseas student numbers have grown in the last few years; while these students represent only about 10 per cent of the student body they constitute a substantial proportion of postgraduates (36 per cent of research and 20 per cent of taught postgraduates). The majority of students are based in Durham with about 16 per cent of the student population at Queen's Campus. Distance-learning provision is significant, although not large, and there are few collaborative arrangements.

6 The University's departments are divided into three faculties of which Arts and Humanities is the smallest with around 3,000 students compared with Science circa 4,000, and Social Sciences and Health at about 6,400. The current faculty structure dates from October 2002 when the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Environment was integrated into a new Faculty of Social Sciences and Health, and the Department of History was transferred from Social Sciences to the renamed Faculty of Arts and Humanities. A newly established University Executive Committee (UEC), chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and including all the deans, pro-vice-chancellors and senior officers, is responsible for the strategic direction of the University. At faculty-level deans play a key role in prioritising the use of resources and act as a crucial link in the development of plans at university and departmental-levels. Deans are members of Senate as well as of UEC and are supported by deputy and associate deans.

7 The University's Purpose, Values and Aims within its Corporate Planning Statement emphasise its commitment to excellence in teaching and research, pursued within a collegiate environment and contributing to developments internationally, nationally and regionally. There are two main aims:

- the provision of educational opportunities to the highest international standards which inspire and enable individuals to develop their academic and other capabilities to their full potential, and help them to make an effective contribution to society; and
the conduct, dissemination and exploitation of internationally recognised research and scholarship.

Collaborative provision
8 The University has a small amount of collaborative provision that involves the validation of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes offered by six partner organisations. The University regards this as contributing primarily to its aims of supporting wider access to higher education (HE) and engaging in regional development of educational opportunities. The programmes are all set in the context of vocational or professional activity. They include bachelors and masters programmes, a Postgraduate Certificate in Education and awards that have target awards at diploma-level only (see below paragraphs 103 to 110).

Background information
9 The published information available for this audit included:

- the information on the University's web site and its undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses;
- the report of a quality audit of the University by the Agency, published in January 1999;
- 34 subject review reports of the University's provision published by the Agency.

Additionally, the audit team had access to two reports of developmental engagements undertaken by the Agency that are not within the public domain.

10 The University initially provided the Agency with:

- an institutional self-evaluation document (SED) and appendices that included a register of collaborative provision and the one-year follow-up report to the 1999 audit;
- discipline self-evaluation documents (DSEDs) for the provision selected for the DATs.

11 During the briefing and audit visits, the audit team was given ready access to a range of the University's internal documents, a number of which were provided electronically via the internet, and to a range of documentation relating to the selected DATs. The latter included examples of student work.

The audit process
12 Following a meeting at the University in August 2003, the Agency confirmed that four DATs would be conducted during the audit visit. The audit team's final selection of DATs included undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in anthropology, computer science, music, and theology and ministry.

13 The Agency received the institutional SED and supporting documentation in October 2003 and the DSEDs, accompanied by programme specifications, in December 2003. All four DSEDs were prepared from extant documentation and variously included documents prepared in connection with internal review of programmes, evaluative post-review updates as appropriate, validation reports, extracts from the minutes of various committees, for example, the University Review Panel, departmental boards of studies, the Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC) and Graduate School Committee (GSC).

14 The audit team visited the University from 13 to 15 January 2004 for the purpose of exploring, with the Vice-Chancellor, senior members of staff and student representatives, matters relating to the management of quality and standards raised by the SED and other documentation provided for the team. During this briefing visit, the team signalled a number of themes for the audit visit. At the close of the briefing visit, a programme of meetings for the audit visit was developed by the team and agreed with the University.

15 At the preliminary meeting for the audit, the students of the University were invited, through their Students' Union (DSU), to submit a separate document expressing views on the student experience at the University, and identifying any matters of concern or commendation with respect to the quality of programmes and the standard of awards. They were also invited to give their views on the level of representation afforded to them, and on the extent to which their views were taken into account. In October 2003, the student body submitted a detailed document to the Agency. The students' written submission (SWS) had been prepared on the basis of an analysis of 1,880 responses to an on-line questionnaire and eight focus groups representative of students from both campuses, postgraduate students and students with disabilities. Trend data from casework on academic appeals also contributed. Compilation of the SWS was led by the DSU Education and Welfare Officer. The final SWS was shared with the student population and with staff in the University, and there were no matters within it that would require the audit team to treat it with any level of confidentiality greater than that normally applying to the audit process. The team is grateful to the students for preparing this valuable document to support the audit.

16 The audit visit took place from 23 to 27 February 2004, and included further meetings with staff and students of the University, both at central level and in relation to the selected DATs. The audit team comprised Professor T Kemp, Dr P Campbell,
Professor P Luker, Professor J Baldock, Professor M Everist, auditors, and Ms M Pawley, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for the Agency by Ms A Christou, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

**Developments since the previous academic quality audit**

17 The previous academic quality audit team commended the University on the quality of analysis and insight reflected in the Analytical Account; the strengthened roles and responsibilities of the deans and deputy deans of the faculties; its understanding of the demands that the quality assurance of collaborative provision would make of it; and the work of its taskforce on standards and, in particular, the encouragement given by the latter to boards of examiners to formulate provisional definitions of the threshold standards for honours degrees. The previous team also drew the University’s attention to the advisability of reviewing how it might enable Senate and its committees to discharge their responsibilities more effectively; reviewing its arrangements for scrutinising the work of its boards of studies; taking advantage of opportunities for calibration and benchmarking between University College Stockton (UCS) and Durham; the early adoption of explicitly articulated grade criteria; revisiting the arguments for the provision for external peer participation in its faculty review process; reconsidering the operation of separate classification schemes in each of its faculties; reviewing the purposes for which it records and circulates the transactions of its committees and working groups, and whether the forms it presently uses renders these records fit for the purposes for which they are intended. The working group established in response to the quality audit focused on the fundamental point made by the team on the need for ‘the provision of a consistent institution-wide approach to quality management’ and the University’s response, included in the initial documentation for this audit, was thorough and carefully considered.

18 While there have been many new developments, among the major changes are the introduction of new validation and University approval procedures that include external peers, a new name, Queen’s Campus, for Stockton Campus (formerly UCS) and the establishment there of two new colleges, John Snow and George Stephenson, and integration of Queen’s Campus into Durham-based departmental and faculty structures, and the review of Senate and its committee structure. The University has also addressed and responded to changes in the external environment and the requirements of the academic infrastructure for HE.

19 Changes in the faculty structure and a review of the management of the University preceded the development, in the spring of 2003, of a Strategic Improvement Programme (SIP), designed to ‘enable the University of Durham to remain competitive and adaptable in a changing and challenging external environment’. The programme, published in June 2003, identified areas for investment, along with areas targeted for disinvestments and/or restructuring. Following a 90-day period of consultation, an action plan was produced to implement the SIP.

20 One of the main themes of the SIP was the need to improve the University’s strategic planning. To that end, informed by an away day of UEC in October 2003, facilitated by an external consultant, a paper on integrated strategic planning went to UEC in November 2003. UEC agreed to recommend to Senate and Council that the proposed integrated strategic planning scheme be implemented. One element of this is the establishment of a Strategic Planning and Change Unit. The recruitment process for the head of that unit was in train at the time of the audit.

**Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes**

The institution’s view as expressed in the SED

21 The SED outlined the ways in which the University sought to assure the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards. The main processes for ensuring that ‘degree programmes conform to the University’s defined standards are the programme approval and University Review procedures’. External examiners are also said to be ‘crucial to the maintenance of quality and standards, and the University has revised its external examiner’s report form to elicit more focused responses of good practice as well as areas which need to be addressed’.

22 The SED drew attention to the University’s engagement with external developments, particularly the academic infrastructure developed by the Agency. The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) has been addressed in detail at the institutional level, while a ‘gap analysis’ has been carried out by mapping University practice against the various sections of the Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), published by the Agency. University Review in its coverage of a department’s curriculum, modes of teaching,
learning and assessment, and their appropriateness to intended learning outcomes (ILOs), is seen to assess standards against subject benchmark statements, while qualification descriptors and generic assessment criteria are said to be 'in line with the FHEQ'.

23 Of note has been the University’s policy of securing a convergence between the 'missions and styles of its provision in Durham City and Stockton' with a closer integration of the curriculum, faculty structure, college system, learning support and academic year.

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

24 While in respect of the management of teaching and learning, Senate has formal responsibility for all academic matters, it is the TLC of Senate that exercises 'overall responsibility for quality assurance and related issues associated with teaching and learning and with particular responsibility for undergraduate programmes'. Also a Senate committee, the GSC, has overall responsibility for all postgraduate programmes and, in the case of taught programmes, liaises with TLC to coordinate quality assurance (QA) policies and procedures across all levels of awards.

25 Deans or their deputies are members of TLC, and associate deans are members of GSC, so that all faculties are fully represented in these two key committees, reports of whose meetings, with a full set of minutes, go to Senate. The effect of the TLC remit, combining overall management of QA with responsibility for undergraduate programmes, has been that 'undergraduate issues have tended to lead in terms of the development of quality assurance policies and procedures', a feature attributed in the SED to the numerical predominance of undergraduates over taught postgraduate students.

26 The University seeks to maintain effective communication between the TLC and the GSC by having cross-memberships, including the new post of Postgraduate Dean, and by having joint representation on groups such as the Working Group on Learning Outcomes and the review group on the Code of practice relating to the assessment of students and external examining. The revised internal University Review process (see below, paragraph 43) was intended to require departments to give 'full consideration to postgraduate as well as undergraduate issues', a development seen as successful. The University regards liaison between TLC and GSC as 'being generally effective' but continues to 'review the procedures by which the two communicate'.

27 The University notes that its QA policy 'emphasises the responsibility of the department delivering the programme for the quality of the student experience' and that it 'recognises that this represents a difficult balance between central control and departmental autonomy'. This was a theme in the 1998 continuation audit which identified the risks which departmental autonomy posed to the University. The SED remarked that achievement of the correct balance makes communication between the 'centre' and departments particularly important. TLC 'communicates and consults through a structured series of Faculty TLC subcommittees chaired by the Dean or Deputy Dean, who is also a member of TLC, and on which the relevant departments are represented'. Faculty TLC Minutes are received by the TLC after each meeting, and it is stated that the role of faculty TLCs has been consciously enhanced over the last four years so that 'issues are referred to them by TLC, proposals are sent out for consultation, and faculties are asked to identify and share good practice'.

28 GSC communicates through a network of departmental postgraduate directors of studies led by the Postgraduate Dean whose remit 'covers the University as a whole', and an associate dean in each faculty with particular responsibility for postgraduate matters. Each faculty also has a Higher Degrees Committee (HDC) which 'has been primarily responsible for considering proposals for new programmes'. The SED evaluated that 'the approach taken at postgraduate level is less effective than the more structured approach taken at undergraduate level, because the status of the discussions and the relationship between them and the formal departmental processes and policies is less clear'. To remedy this, the University enhanced the faculty committee structure for postgraduate programmes based on the HDC's chaired by the associate deans.

29 Faculty TLCs act as the vital interface between the TLC and the departments, interpreting QA policy to the departments and presenting to TLC their deliberations on departmental initiatives.

30 The SED described the introduction of 'a wider framework for the assurance of standards' which came into force from October 2003. This embraces a credit policy, level descriptors, qualification descriptors, generic assessment criteria, revised
undergraduate core regulations, and revised core regulations for taught postgraduate and 'graduate' programmes. The framework is regarded as consistent with the HFEQ and took into account, in particular, the concerns of several accrediting bodies that the University students could be awarded an honours degree while falling up to 40 credits of modules thus avoiding, in some cases, the achievement of all the ILOs. The main processes for ensuring that degree programmes conform to the University’s defined standards are the programme approval and University Review procedures.

31 To further its understanding of the 'quality committee structure' of the University, the audit team examined minutes of the TLC, the GSC and the faculty TLCs. These confirmed the picture presented in the SED: the TLC is the key deliberative committee dealing with the formulation and review of policy relating to teaching and learning at the undergraduate level; GSC ensures the application of such policy to taught postgraduate courses and exercises principal responsibility for the learning experience of postgraduate students; and faculty TLCs apply University policy at the programme and modular levels.

32 The audit team viewed the overall committee structure as appropriate, particularly for managing the quality and standards of the undergraduate curriculum. The team regards the TLC as an engine for change in promoting a proactive and reflective culture in its work, supported by the provision of rigorous and well-written documentation. Noting the generally very positive remarks made in the SWS about the undergraduate experience at the University, the team was interested to explore the basis of the more critical tone applied to the postgraduate experience, particularly relating to taught programmes (see below, paragraph 95).

33 The audit team viewed the linkage between the TLC and GSC as well-established, particularly through the presence on both of the Postgraduate Dean. The minutes of the faculty TLCs revealed to the team their essential role in communicating issues upwards to the TLC, and downwards to the departments. The deans clearly exercise an important monitoring role in operational aspects of the University’s policies.

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

34 The SED identified the need to develop an ‘overarching provision for quality enhancement’ as ‘an area which requires major attention over the next three years’. The appointment of an Academic Staff Development Officer (ASDO) is seen as ‘crucial’ to the development of such a provision. The remit of the ASDO will ‘focus on staff development in relation to teaching, learning and assessment’ and he/she will be ‘charged with supporting departments in implementing…teaching and learning strategies and the strategic development of the Annual Review Process’. The SED further noted the strong local base for implementing quality enhancement: the Vice-Chancellor is Chair of the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education and this report refers elsewhere to the work of the Centre for Learning, Teaching and Research in Higher Education (CLTRHE) (see below, paragraph 78).

35 The audit team shared the view that the University is well-placed to formulate and implement its agenda for quality enhancement. The CLTRHE, which was described as fully integrated into the academic teaching of the University, is active in providing a range of staff development opportunities for both new and established academic staff, and there are numerous examples of quality enhancement at the departmental and programme-level (mentoring, away days, peer review, appraisal, student feedback, reports from external examiners, University Review), which were apparent to the team at the DAT level (see below, paragraphs 110 to 158). However, the pace of development has been reliant on the appointment of the ASDO. The team considered that the University could accelerate the introduction of a strategy for quality enhancement including planned provision of learning and teaching strategies at departmental level regardless of the delay in making an appointment.

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

Programme approval

36 The University’s current procedures for programme approval are now three-years old, and are firmly embedded in the culture of teaching and learning. New programmes are reviewed by a validation panel that receives a detailed programme specification, rationale for the programme and comments on the proposal from external examiners or external advisers. The panel, equipped with the relevant subject benchmark statement, and chaired by a member of TLC, meets with the department to address any concerns and to ensure that academic quality and standards are appropriate and can be resourced. The Library and Information Technology Service (ITS) approve resourcing for the new programme. The record of the validation panel’s deliberations is passed to either TLC or GSC for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes respectively. The audit team found evidence of this
process working well, with programme leaders frequently being asked to revisit elements in their proposals, and were satisfied that the mechanisms for approving programmes were robust.

37 The SED pointed to a robust system for the approval of modules while declaring some unhappiness about the mechanisms for module change and the disparity between the descriptions of modules on the forms and on information given to students. The audit team appreciated both these points and noted the agreement of a new module approval template as an important step in the resolution of this inconsistency. The new templates for both undergraduate and postgraduate modules are thorough documents designed to guarantee the quality of modules.

**Annual review**

38 Since 2001, annual review has consisted of a report that confirms coverage of a prescribed range of areas including curriculum design; teaching, learning and assessment; use of performance indicators; consideration of external examiners' reports; student feedback; committee management; and staff development. This report is supported by minutes of meetings or activities that underpinned the review. The guidelines which accompany the annual review report are not prescriptive but point departments towards means by which they can take a strategic overview of their provision. Performance indicators on each taught programme are sent out to departments in June for consideration within the annual review process. The report is passed either to the dean or deputy dean of the faculty who assembles a summary of her/his department's reviews and responds to each; the department is then invited to reply to the dean/deputy dean's requests for further information. Best practice in the University is identified in the School of Economics, Finance and Business, where the annual review in 2001 (agenda for 2003) took place over two full days; all programmes and constituent modules were reviewed, using available qualitative and statistical data and encompassed undergraduate, taught postgraduate and postgraduate research activity. The event included general presentations and a synthesis of the entire School's work at the end. The audit team considered that this was a good example of annual review.

39 The audit team found a range of practice with regard to the timing of the annual review events: from late June and early July to September or even October. The timing had a number of implications for the involvement of students in the process, the receipt of current performance indicators and of external examiners' reports, and the attendance of students. The team agreed with the statement in the SED that practice across the University was highly variable. Engagement with the process ranged widely from the comprehensive work of the School of Economics, Finance and Business to the Department of Anthropology where the event was attended by only five members of staff, and the Department of Computer Science where the initial review of 2003 was less than satisfactory, requiring a second review to be held.

40 There is currently no provision or requirement for the preparation of a formal annual report from departments. A report form, comprising a checklist of contributing features, and minutes of the relevant meeting at which the review was discussed, are considered by the dean, deputy dean or associate dean. An overview report is then made to faculty TLC subcommittees, TLC and GSC. In the view of the audit team, there is a missed opportunity here for the enhancement of quality by the dissemination of good practice across and within faculties.

41 The SED suggested that the development of teaching and learning strategies will provide a strategic context for the Annual Review process and stated that the (currently unfilled) ASDO post will give advice on good practice in operating annual reviews. The audit team questioned whether the Annual Review, intended to enable departments to take a strategic overview of their provision, was currently fit for purpose without the required reference point of a departmental teaching and learning strategy and the support of the ASDO.

**University review**

42 Since 2000, departments have been reviewed on a sexennial basis with a starting point based on the most recent external review. No member of the department is a member of the panel which includes cross-faculty membership and an external specialist. The report is received by the department which has six months to prepare an action plan and after eighteen months a final report to the University Review Panel. In practice, the action plan may be a formal response to the report and the final report, similarly, a further set of responses. The University recognises the absence of any form of departmental self-evaluation as a weakness, but sees the strengthening of annual review and the development of departmental teaching and learning strategies as a way of helping departments to become more strategic in their general approach to teaching and learning. Current practice involves the preparation and presentation of a range of material evidence for the review panel which includes programme specifications, the subject benchmark statement,
departmental teaching and learning strategy, handbooks, performance indicators, policies on admissions, responses to previous external reviews, external examiners' reports and the minutes of various departmental committees. This body of material is reviewed in a two-day review event during which the review team meets undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students, as well as selected members of staff.

43 The audit team examined the University Review of the Department of Music, and found that the submission of the preliminary material, the two-day review event, the six-month action plan and the 18-month follow-up functions were all discharged with great care, and assured the quality of the provision in great detail. Both phases of follow-up exhaustively interrogated the findings of the review itself, and all the recommendations were noted and discussed by the Department and reported to the University Review Panel.

44 Although the University does not see the absence of self-evaluation as problematic, and in its SED stated that the preferred response is to strengthen Annual Review, this remains contingent on the future appointment of the ASDO.

**External participation in internal review processes**

45 External participation in programme approval is usually via the use of an external examiner, unless the disciplinary nature of the new programme demands additional expertise, in which case a further external assessor is called in. Internal periodic review makes use of external assessors nominated by the department in order to ensure credibility. The SED made the case strongly for the use of external assessors who are not associated with the department's annual monitoring, but who have a national experience in learning and teaching, as a member of the subject benchmarking panel or as a trained Agency reviewer. The SED expressed the belief that the University makes robust use of external subject specialists and that it has struck a suitable balance between the use of existing external examiners and external specialists without a connection to the University. The arguments presented in the SED for the slightly closer relationship of the external examiner and the department in matters of programme approval are carefully considered, and evidence is provided of occasions where departments have gone beyond their external examiners in matters of programme approval where a greater degree of externality was required. The University will need to monitor practice to ensure that the role of the external examiner is not compromised. While the SED expressed concern about some aspects of its module approval process, it also points to the use of external examiners in the approval of new modules or major changes to existing ones.

46 The audit team analysed a range of University Reviews and programme approval events from the perspective of external participation. In terms of University Review, the composition of the panel is such that the external assessor is the only subject specialist on the panel, and no member from the department under review forms part of the team. Contact with the department is therefore via the meetings with staff during the course of the review process. The SED's description of external participation is entirely accurate, and the importance and functioning of external participation well-understood by senior staff. The arrangements for external participation in programme approval and University Review, whatever reservations the University might have about other aspects of the process, are entirely appropriate and are working well. The appointment of University Review panels by TLC and the careful policing of programme approval show that the process is carried out consistently across the University.

47 From its study of the documentation associated with programme approval and University review, and of a number of external examiners' reports, the audit team concluded that the operational processes of programme approval and review were rigorous and effective, and the associated documentation to be well-written and of a high quality. It was much less convinced of the consistency across the institution of the annual review process, a situation recognised by the University in its SED and where action has been taken.

**External examiners and their reports**

48 External examiners are consulted in the assessment processes leading to all awards offered by the University: first degrees, certificates, diplomas, taught postgraduate awards, and those achieved through research. Where other institutions are validated to make University of Durham awards, similar rules and procedures are followed. External examiners are used to ensure degrees awarded are comparable in standard to those awarded by other universities in the UK and that the assessment processes are conducted fairly. They are asked to confirm that standards are consistent with external reference points such as subject benchmark statements, the FHEQ and the requirements of
professional bodies. External examiners also comment on all draft examination papers and conduct any viva voce examinations. In October 2002 the University introduced a revised external examiners’ report form for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes to make certain the examiners commented fully on all appropriate issues. The form also sets out those judgements which are now required by HEFCE to be published in summary form.

49 The procedures governing the appointment and use of external examiners are consistent with the precepts and guidance set out in the Code of practice, Section 4: External examining. The reports received from external examiners are considered first by the subject departments, who make a written response to the external, and then by the appropriate dean or, in the case of postgraduate awards, associate dean. Where the externals have raised concerns the deans require a response from the departments. Major issues arising from externals’ reports are considered by TLC and GSC. The view of the institution expressed in the SED is that these procedures are working well and the external examiners perform a valuable role in assuring the quality and standards of provision.

50 The audit team viewed external examiners’ reports across a wide range of subjects and levels. The questions they raised were satisfactorily answered in the departments’ responses and properly dealt with by the deans and the TLC. It was clear that externals found the methods used at the University, particularly the procedures requiring complete anonymity in the marking of work and the classification of degrees, were particularly rigorous. The documentation provided and the evidence heard allow the team to confirm that the use of external examiners is strong and scrupulous.

51 The audit team note that with effect from October 2003 three key changes to assessment procedures have been introduced that will particularly impinge on the work of external examiners. The introduction of the Credit Policy requires that students attain the minimum learning outcomes and credit in all the modules that are taken within a programme. This may lead to an increase in summer ‘resits’. The TLC has decided that it is not ‘necessary for all external examiners to attend resit boards, but that they should be fully consulted and their views recorded’. The precise procedures to be followed should be made explicit to boards of examiners. Secondly, all undergraduate examinations within the University are subject to published assessment criteria and, thirdly, a weighted mean system of degree classification will apply universally. The University recognises that internal and external examiners need to be fully briefed and informed about how these changes will operate in practice.

External reference points

52 The University has responded to the publication of the Code of practice, the FHEQ and the subject benchmark statements with careful deliberation, for example, by arranging ‘for an appropriate individual or a group to undertake a gap analysis mapping the current practice against the precepts of the Code’. The most significant of these analyses was undertaken by the Working Group on Learning Outcomes whose various recommendations were approved by the Senate in June and October 2002. In many cases the consequent changes to internal policies, codes and procedures had only recently come into effect or were still under consideration during the audit visit. The TLC recognised this, pointing out that with effect from October 2003 quality management in the University took place within the context of new policies and procedures in the following areas: a credit policy; level descriptors; qualification descriptors; generic assessment criteria; revised undergraduate core regulations; revised core regulations for taught postgraduate and ‘graduate’ programmes; and revised guidelines for placement learning. At the time of the audit, therefore, no students had graduated with all of these new arrangements in place. In addition, the University is currently engaged in a detailed and analytical process of agreeing and publishing programme specifications for all its programmes and does not plan for this process to be complete until the end of the academic year 2006-07. In some cases this may involve significant change where appropriate to obtain consistency across the University, for example, in the specification of volumes of work and levels of attainment expected within masters degrees. In a number of instances the SED indicated that the Agency audit would provide an opportunity for the University to seek an external opinion on the appropriateness of its adaptations to the academic infrastructure for HE, for example, in the case of approval and review procedures and ‘to welcome the views of the audit team on the approach we have taken’ in the case of resit assessments.

53 The audit team considered a large number of documents and heard much evidence that demonstrate the care with which the University has gone about adjusting its established procedures in order to align its processes with the external reference points that make up the academic infrastructure. It is evident that the time this has
taken reflects the University's tradition of relatively autonomous departments. In this particular context, the University's approach will provide a coherent and explicit foundation for the continuing management and enhancement of quality. The team was confident that the TLC is well placed to assess the outcomes of the significant number of changes that first came into operation in the academic year 2003-04. Areas where adjustments were not complete at the time of the audit include programme specifications and for recruitment and admissions, the Code of practice, Section 10: Recruitment and admissions.

Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

54 All Agency subject reviews have found the provision to be 'approved'. In the 11 subject reviews since the continuation audit in 1999, the University demonstrated particular strengths in student progression and achievement, learning resources, and student support and guidance. In the majority of these reviews, recommendations to address specific issues in Teaching, Learning and Assessment were made by review teams.

55 The qualitative comments of the reviewers support the judgements above. Consistently praised aspects of the provision were the curriculum; high demand; high student quality; progression and completion; student support and guidance; and learning resources. Areas identified for improvement in several reports included the consistent embedding of key and/or transferable skills; the need for greater consistency (particularly in assessment practice); and the development of a coherent learning and teaching strategy at departmental level.

56 A number of programmes are subjected to periodic accreditation by the appropriate professional, regulatory or statutory body. The audit team looked at several accreditation reports, which included that of the British Psychological Society (BPS) 2002, the British Computer Society (BCS) 2000, the Institute of Biomedical Sciences (IBMS) 2002, the Association of MBAs (AMBA) 2003, and Ofsted's inspection of Drama in 2003. Most accreditation reports were broadly positive, frequently reflecting the points of strength identified by subject review teams. The AMBA accreditation report was highly positive, stating that 'Durham Business School is clearly one of Europe's leading schools offering an MBA programme that has an excellent record of adding to students' work experience at entry and subsequent career and professional development'. IBMS accreditation was awarded following the receipt of additional documentation. The other accreditations, however, stipulated more stringent conditions. For the BPS, the most significant issue was the ability of a student to gain an honours degree while having failed the final-year project (as discussed in the University's SED). The BCS accreditation team initially raised three issues, deemed sufficiently serious for accreditation to be withheld. Two of these issues were addressed immediately following publication of the draft report. Accreditation was awarded retrospectively in 2003 following an appeal by the University. The secondary initial teacher training provision in drama was found to be 'unsatisfactory' by Ofsted. The programme was withdrawn with immediate effect.

57 The findings of all external reviews are discussed by an appropriate faculty-level panel, before being presented to TLC itself, thereby giving the University clear oversight of reviews and responses to them. Departments are required to submit to faculty TLCS an action plan to address any issues raised. Additionally, University Review panels are also required to ensure that all external programme-level reports have been followed up satisfactorily, which not only provides a safety net, but can reduce duplication.

58 The audit team found the response to external reviews to be thorough and, in most cases, timely. As noted in the University's SED, programme-level reviews have frequently led to significant changes at university level. For example, the BPS findings fed into the review undertaken by the University's Working Group on Learning Outcomes, which oversaw a number of significant changes to the regulations and engagement with the academic infrastructure. The team noted that programme specifications across the University have benefited from both the good practice and the weaknesses identified by external reviewers.

Student representation at operational and institutional level

59 Student representatives are to be found on almost all the decision-making committees of the University. The evidence of the minutes seen by the audit team and the meetings they had with students indicate that students both attend the meetings of these committees and play an active part. The three key areas of representation are: academic committees within the departments and faculties including the boards of studies, the TLC and staff-student consultative committees (SSCCs), to which representatives are elected or nominated from students studying the relevant subjects; within the colleges where Junior Common Room elected representatives play a key role in the management of the colleges; and on University management
committees such as Council, Senate, TLC, GSC, and the Committee for the Oversight of Student Support Services (COSSS) where students are represented by elected members of the DSU. It is also clear that where ad hoc committees or working parties are set up, for example, a steering group to develop plans for a new college, they will normally include students. Student representation within the six partner institutions providing University of Durham awards is also well established. There are no student members of the UEC, the senior management body that meets every fortnight or so. Members of the DSU executive are invited only to address specific issues. The DSU indicated to the team that they had been pressing the Vice-Chancellor for representation on the UEC. However, it is not clear to the team that this would be a practicable proposition or a good use of students’ time. The request itself indicated the high expectations of student involvement that are characteristic of the University.

60 The principal limitation to representation identified by both the SWS and the SED was the degree of feedback of the outcomes of student participation to those not directly involved. This is partly a reflection of the fact that significant outcomes at the academic or operational level tend to benefit subsequent cohorts of students rather than those who had played a part in the decision-making process. However, the University is aware of the need to make clear the fruits of student representation and the audit team observed or learnt of ways in which this was being achieved. The minutes of most committees are available on the internet and are fairly detailed. A number of boards of studies, English committees, and law, for example, published on their web pages the outcomes of student evaluations of modules and of the staff teaching them, and in history summaries of feedback and actions are provided. The survey evidence submitted as part of the SWS indicated small minorities who did not feel well-represented on academic or administrative issues. The team’s observations at the discipline level suggest that some of these may include the relatively rare part-time students. The University does not conduct a single university-wide survey of all those graduating each year and is awaiting the publication of the HEFCE Good Practice guide before developing one. However, student views are widely sought in other ways including annual colleges’ student experience surveys. Where subjects are scheduled for University Review, graduates of the three previous years are circulated with a questionnaire and the results provided to the Review Panel.

61 The degree of consultation and collaboration between departments, University management and the students at the University is particularly strong and well developed. The audit team was impressed by the knowledge and articulacy of the student representatives it met and their confidence that their voices were heard on most issues.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

62 The University takes student opinion seriously and arrangements for eliciting student feedback at Durham were clearly set out in the SED. Feedback from undergraduate students on their experience of the quality of their programme modules is very carefully garnered by the University through anonymous departmental questionnaires. Responsibility for the administration and analysis of student feedback surveys on modules rests with the heads of departments, who are charged with the scrutiny of student input and how issues are raised, resolved and how outcomes are reported back to the student body. Departmental SSCCs also offer opportunities for students to state their views in open forum. The University is satisfied the training which is provided by DSU for student representatives so that their views may be expressed effectively is working well. Feedback is also sought from postgraduates and a Graduate Standards Survey, focused on transferable skills, is conducted annually. There is no overarching arrangement for gathering and dealing with postgraduate feedback and, although this is rigorously attended to by some departments through a separate postgraduate committee, this is not consistently the case.

63 The University does not at present collate centrally the feedback from undergraduate or postgraduate surveys but it is reviewing the way it implements and monitors them so that comparable data can be extracted in order to inform institutional strategies for teaching and learning and student support. Some recent external commendation of the effectiveness of the University’s procedures for analysing student opinion and for listening and responding to the ‘student voice’ was noted in the reports of the Agency developmental engagements.

64 The audit team met DSU representatives at the briefing visit. A group of postgraduates was interviewed during the audit and mixed groups of undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students took part in meetings of all four DATs. Examples of student feedback forms were available from all DATs. Minutes of boards of studies, all with statutory student representation, were consulted. All minutes included student issues and sometimes oral student reports.
All groups of students met by the audit team felt that their views were taken seriously and acted on in a timely fashion whether expressed through questionnaires, SSCCs or informal contact. They confirmed that sometimes inducements were offered if they complete feedback forms on-line. The team heard of a number of examples of good practice in relation to student feedback.

The audit team considered all the documentation provided on feedback from students, what was heard in meetings with students and staff, and considered that the claims of the University SED are accurate in the main. However, there did not appear to be an overall strategy for student, graduate and employer feedback. Although no overarching method of informing students of the results of their representations was obvious, the team believed that student feedback made a positive contribution to the assurance of quality and standards, and that the University was beginning to evolve a more systematic approach. Although it was evident that the University regularly receives feedback from some professional bodies, the team were not given evidence of any overarching University system of collecting feedback from employers.

### Progression and completion statistics

The University provides statistical data from three sources: the statistics book, admissions and first-destination data. It acknowledges that the first-destination data are the least transparent to departments and faculties or are easily overlooked, and that the statistics book requires a significant amount of work for departments to extract and bring together data on any given programme. To address the difficulty with using the statistics book, the University now provides a programme-specific data set for annual review in departments, focused on applications, progression and degree classification. The information is used by departments to analyse trends in recruitment, student progression and the types of degrees awarded as part of the annual review of programmes. The data feed back into departmental admissions policies, but there was no evaluation in the SED of how this is undertaken on an institution-wide basis. The type of data for annual review is also provided to University Review panels, and also informs the implementation of HEFCE's requirements on information about teaching quality.

The SED noted that there is still work required on the central provision of data, especially the incorporation of admissions and first-destination data into the main data set. The University also acknowledged that departments may not be making as much use of the data as they might, and have therefore developed a set of prompts to assist them in searching for qualitative issues that arise out of the quantitative data.

The audit team found that the comments in the SED were largely accurate: there was clear evidence that the data described finds its way into departmental annual reviews, but its treatment is uneven in operation with a variety of responses across departments. The team encourages the University to continue with its review of centrally provided data, to make it more transparent to departments so that future strategies can be fully informed, and continue to assist departments in their use of statistical data by such means as the prompts they have already developed.

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

Staff appointments are made by panels chaired by senior academics that have been trained in the role. Candidates for lectureships are asked to make a presentation to the department concerned which allows their peers to assess their research and presentational skills. From the academic year 2003-04 the Dean of the Faculty will approve the appointment of all bought-in part-time staff, on the basis of each applicant's curriculum vitae.

Based on its Human Resources (HR) Strategy, the University has accepted a flexible and proactive recruitment strategy, particularly for senior academic posts. The audit team noted the conscious efforts made by the University in its Equal Opportunities policy to raise the female presence in the senior grades to levels at least as good as the UK average. The team learned that the particular gender imbalance in the science professoriate in 2001-02 had seen recent improvement.

During the three-year period of probation, which is served by all staff entering the profession and by more established staff who have not undergone a similar process elsewhere, support is given by the provision of departmental mentors. A reduced administrative and teaching load gives staff time to prepare teaching materials and undertake a Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGCLTHE) in CLTRHE. Probation is seen as a developmental-led process with regular reports to a central monitoring committee until probation is passed. Such reports are used as indicators of progress and to identify problems, such as inappropriate workload. Participation in the PGCLTHE is seen as a means of enhancing the quality of academic staff: the first module is a probationary
requirement for those who have not completed a comparable qualification; a second module has also been made compulsory. The latter involves undertaking a subject-specific project, which in a number of cases has led to educational developments within the participant's department.

73 Appraisal is undertaken every two years for all staff but a performance review process will replace this. The audit team learned that the University monitors the operation of the appraisal system through the annual report checklist and through informal meetings between the deans and the heads of department. The team took the view that this was insufficiently rigorous to enable the University to be aware of the effectiveness of operation of its policy and that a simple record of the numbers of appraisals undertaken each year could be maintained.

74 The SED expressed the view that the University's procedures 'make appropriate provision for the quality of teaching to be taken into account in recruiting and promoting staff'. Awards for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, funded with Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund money, recognise excellence in teaching. These form part of the HR Strategy that aims to promote the status of teaching at the University. A further element of the HR Strategy has been the introduction of a new approach to senior lecturer promotions, the main component of which is to recognise Senior Lecturer as the 'career grade' by removing the notion of an annual quota. The effectiveness of this was evident to the audit team from its meeting with staff and heads of department. A further element is the increased allocation of funds to departments from 2002-03 to enable the Chair of the Board of Studies to provide accelerated movements for key staff according to well-defined criteria.

75 The audit team judges the procedures and practices in recruitment to be appropriate, noting in particular the University's commitment to 'Embracing Diversity as stated in the HR Strategy'. It also endorses the recent move to enhance the recognition of teaching by incorporating this factor more explicitly into its criteria for promotion to Senior Lecturer.

Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development

76 Institutionally-led activity for established staff falls into two categories: training for management for heads of department and others; and more general training related to quality assurance, teaching and learning. The former has been strengthened by the appointment of a new Training and Development Officer in the Personnel Section, while the latter is designated as the responsibility of the Academic Staff Development Officer. The latter post has been vacant since 2001, a situation which the SED noted frankly has led to a relative decline in the associated provision. The SED also noted the additional lecturer post in the CLTRHE to support its activity. At departmental level, staff development is achieved in several ways, including appraisal, peer review of teaching and away days. Each year, the Personnel Office allocates funding for departments on a university-wide basis. In 2003-04, the theme was the development of departmental Learning and Teaching Strategies. There is also a Teaching and Learning Forum which meets to discuss teaching and learning issues, and a Good Practice web site: the latter was cited as the principal means of disseminating good practice across the institution.

77 The HR Strategy reiterates its HR principles, namely:

- 'create and maintain a stimulating working environment making clear the University's Commitment to Excellence in Teaching and Research;
- help to define the University's staffing needs at all levels and ensure that those needs are met in recruitment, career development and recognition of performance; and
- help staff provide for themselves time and opportunity for thought, reflection and creativity despite the increasing pressures under which they are required to work'.

A set of reinforcing priorities includes to 'develop comprehensive staff development and training strategies in support of these aims'.

78 In respect of the use of postgraduate students in teaching or demonstrating, from October 2002, there has been a compulsory induction programme for all postgraduates. This consists of two half-day seminars organised by the CLTRHE 'to introduce postgraduates to a range of pedagogical issues and principles and to make them aware of student support, health and safety, and diversity policy and requirements'. This leads to more detailed subject-specific support for postgraduates at departmental level. The latter aspect of the provision was confirmed at a meeting with postgraduate students. The quality assurance of the programme was achieved by student feedback, which indicated it did not relate sufficiently to departmental circumstances. The audit team confirmed that each department is required to have a policy for the support and monitoring of postgraduates engaged in teaching and demonstrating 'to ensure that subject-specific issues are given proper attention'; such policies became effective from October 2003.
79 The audit team concluded that the progress in providing training for management roles and for postgraduates engaged in teaching is completely satisfactory. The core principles of the HR Strategy are seen by the team as wholly appropriate for a research university such as the University of Durham, but it could not offer an opinion on the implementation of the staff development component during the interregnum in the post of ASDO. The University is exercised by the continuing vacancy in the position of ASDO, which has delayed the implementation of parts of its HR Strategy. The team views this difficulty in making the appointment as serious, and recommends that despite three concerted attempts to appoint, the University continues to develop alternative means of delivering the appropriate staff development relating to learning and teaching strategies until the ASDO is in post.

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

80 In its SED, the University noted its 'small amount' of distance-learning provision, which comprised 783 students in 2002-03. This figure relates to students who were pursuing the MBA by distance learning, a programme which has been running for some 15 years. Over half of the distance-learning students on the MBA are based in the UK. The University also has several 'distance-taught' programmes, where University staff teach and support learning at a centre remote from the University itself. The MBA (Caribbean) is an example of such a programme, as is the Doctorate in Education.

81 The University’s distance-learning and distance-teaching provision is subject to the same management and quality assurance structures as campus-based provision. The audit team was told that all provision at a distance is developed in accordance with the Guidelines on the quality assurance of distance learning, published by the Agency. For example, as part of the validation of the MBA (Caribbean) in 2003, the team saw a detailed mapping against the guidelines.

82 The audit team learned from staff responsible for provision at a distance that there is no distinction in terms of learning outcomes as a result of place and mode of study. All variants of the MBA had converged so that, theoretically, it would be possible for a student on the distance-learning MBA to transfer at an appropriate point to the full-time, campus-based equivalent. The team also learned that MBA module leaders have a responsibility across all programmes, and that the external examiner team has oversight of all programmes, through common examination boards.

Learning support resources

83 The audit team considered that support for student learning is both rich and complex. The collegiate and multisite character of the University multiplies the number of points from which students can obtain support and necessitates a clear overall strategy for the management and allocation of learning resources. The colleges, while mainly concerned with the social lives of students and their pastoral support through the personal tutor system, also play a part in their academic success. College libraries, study space and networked PC provision to student rooms are important supports for learning. College tutors, who are academics or postgraduates, have close links with academic departments. For example, it is not possible for students to obtain concessions in terms of assessment requirements without the support of both the Senior Tutor of the college and their academic department. Students' attendance and progress records are monitored by both departments and senior tutors in the colleges.

84 While it is the explicit aim of the University to provide similar levels of support to all students, the provision available at the Queen's Campus at Stockton is less mature. The two colleges, John Snow and George Stephenson, were until recently essentially halls of residence. The new college for postgraduate students, Ustinov College, at the time of the audit consisted of facilities spread across a number of separate buildings, and so had a significantly different character from other colleges at the University. However, the University has made a distinct commitment to establishing the college system as fully and appropriately as possible on Queen's Campus and for postgraduates at Ustinov and, at the time of the audit, all the key components of the college experience were developing for both.

85 Beyond the colleges and the departments, the key sources of learning support are the University Library, the ITS, the Careers Advisory Service (CAS), the Counselling Service, the Durham University Service for Students with Disabilities (DUSSD), and the welfare and advice services provided by DSU. The audit team saw clear evidence that each of these services regularly and appropriately monitored its performance and users’ views.

86 In its SED, the University recognised the need to integrate the planning of learning resources with the planning of teaching and learning in a single strategy. The University Librarian has developed an overarching strategy that encompasses Queen's Campus and will eventually involve the independent library resources at the various colleges scattered across the two campuses. The University Library is the major academic
resource, on five sites, with extensive holdings of printed items, current periodicals, audiovisual and microform materials, electronic resources, documents and excellent archival collections.

87 Both the Library and ITS have invested in clear strategies to ensure the availability of their provision to all types of student, including part-time and mature students, and those with disabilities, wherever they may be based. It is the goal of the Library to offer a single library service and, to this end, provision on the Queen’s Campus has been steadily upgraded and is supported by a daily system of book transfer from the main library in Durham. The Library Committee has oversight of the all the college libraries and is working with the Committee of College Librarians to ensure complementarity of provision. The audit team heard from students that library services were working well on both campuses and that complaints are heard and addressed. A distinctive aspect of the networked information technology (IT) support for student learning is Durham University On-line (DUO), an internet-based e-learning environment. While the use of this varies from department to department, it is clearly playing an increasingly important part in communicating with students and in their access to interactive learning and key learning resources. These developments are consistent with the University’s strategy for developing IT-based support for independent learning.

88 Overall learning support provision is coordinated by COSSS which reports to the TLC. COSSS is chaired by the Dean of the Colleges and Student Support Services who is able to direct resources across the whole support system. The audit team confirms the view that COSSS has moved from a focus mainly on operational issues to a strategic role in ensuring and developing the quality of student support services across the whole University. The University recognises the importance of a coordinated approach to the management and development of learning resources that is consistent with its teaching and learning strategy. A learning resources strategy group has been formed to assist the development of an overall strategy for learning resources, including priorities for the improvement of lecture theatres and teaching rooms, and the team commends this approach. The range and quantity of support for learning at the University is excellent and clearly makes a substantial contribution to the high levels of student retention and achievement.

Academic guidance, support and supervision

89 The SED set out the University’s dedication to high-quality teaching informed by research and its commitment to providing taught programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels that draw on the research expertise of the staff. It was evident to the audit team that staff themselves form the most valuable academic resource in the provision of fundamental academic guidance, support and supervision. The main source of student guidance, support and supervision in academic matters is therefore provided in the departments, especially by the course or module tutor. The year coordinator or programme leader, Head of Department, Deputy/Associate Dean or Director of the Combined Honours or Natural Sciences degree offer further support. Where problems arise that cannot be dealt with by these staff members, the College Tutor or Dean of the Faculty can be consulted.

90 In both their SWS and in meetings with the audit team, students constantly expressed appreciation of the approachability and helpfulness of academic staff. ‘The outstanding teaching and support of many staff that provide a high quality and motivational learning environment’ enables students to achieve their own academic potential. The Department was seen as offering a broad range of support, often in an informal and unrecorded manner. Students appreciated the research-led mission of the University and discussed examples of the benefits of the ‘cutting-edge’ ethos and of research-led teaching at all levels, not just postgraduate. The team was particularly impressed by the high level of PhD completion rates in departments in the Faculty of Science, 100 per cent in some cases. The team noted the effective management of the student experience in these departments.

91 Academic support within the Library is to be extended by programmes that will teach students the relevance and use of information literacy in problem-solving, research skills and independent learning directly linked to their subject area of study. Measures to offer specific support to disabled students, distance learners and students with special needs are underway.

92 Part of the learning and teaching strategy at the University is to provide opportunities for students to identify the skills they will require after graduation and to devise appropriate personal plans to develop these within the academic programmes of study. the University is developing a model Personal Development Plan (PDP), linked with academic departments, colleges and DSU as well as the CAS. The intention is to maintain a broad-based reflection on students’ academic and extra-curricula experiences while looking forward to employment, thus enabling students to consider their total learning experience and identify further development needs.
93 The ITS runs a regular training programme for students and staff which is free of charge and covers all aspects of IT literacy. All students and departments are encouraged to make full use of the University of Durham e-learning environment, DUO, which has proved a popular and useful tool for furthering academic support. Students living out of college, those taking a year abroad and students on distance-learning programmes find DUO particularly useful. The audit team learned that uses of DUO are being explored by the Schools Liaison team and local further education (FE) colleges, to support the transition of non-traditional students to the University.

94 The SWS complimented the Library as a user service (rather than just a collection) and appreciated the extended opening hours. More communication between departments and the Library on provision of course texts was considered necessary. The management of some college libraries was criticised, although they were much valued as a resource. Students were happy with the IT facilities on the whole and considered that DUO had potential to improve the academic learning environment.

95 Postgraduate opinion in the SWS and meetings was mixed and sometimes strongly negative about support from departments, especially in regard to facilities in departments, and Ustinov College. The negative nature of some postgraduate student comments on academic and personal support in their SWS came as a surprise to the University which has plans to integrate, although not co-locate, administrative and pastoral support for postgraduates. In spite of this, the SWS concludes that student support is one of the strengths of the University.

96 The audit team acknowledged that the University was constantly reviewing its provision for student academic support and considered that the role of the new Dean of Colleges and Student Support Services and the introduction of an overarching strategy on resources would both help these deliberations. The team encourages the University to continue to monitor provision for all categories of students in Durham city, to ensure that students on Queen’s Campus, international students, part-time, distance-learning, validated, mature, research, postgraduate students and those with special needs all receive the academic support they need. The team formed the view that the University is putting in place the structures, procedures and facilities to provide an integrated support system to meet the needs of its varied student population.

Personal support and guidance

97 The University noted the very high student completion rates of 96 per cent in 2001-02 in its Student Experience Data (SED) and attributes this in large part to its support service, especially the college system. In the 2002 Review of Academic Organisation of the University, one concern noted was the ‘drifting apart of college and departments’ and recommendations were made about how the relationship could be improved.

98 In addition to the personal tutor, some colleges operate a student mentor or parenting programme for new students which helps students to adapt to the change from home to University. A major concern of the University is to ensure that staffing levels can identify and cope with the needs of the increasingly diverse student body. Workshops have been held to raise awareness among academic and support staff of the need to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students, and TLC has approved a policy on equal opportunities in teaching and learning to be incorporated into the main University policy. This resulted from the mapping of the University’s practices to the Code of practice, Section 3: Students with disabilities.

99 An International Office deals with the needs of overseas students. It produces The International Students’ Handbook and runs a special induction weekend for new overseas students, in addition to acting as a regular source of advice on practical and cultural issues. The CAS advises undergraduates and postgraduates and produces its own graduate surveys. An employability strategy has been developed and integrated with that for teaching and
learning, in line with the Code of practice, Section 8: Career education, information and guidance.

100 These support services appeared to be working well for the majority of undergraduates. Students considered that the personal tutors varied in commitment, and there was ‘huge scope for improving the college tutor system’. Taught postgraduates, other than international students, are not assigned a personal tutor, and it became increasingly evident during the audit visit that colleges vary in their level of facilities and support. Ustinov College, where postgraduates are members, is currently a distributed rather than a physical resource. Currently, the highest numbers and percentages of part-time, Access and mature students, who clearly require particular support, study at Queen’s Campus. The audit team learnt that the Campus is in the process of building up its support systems but some students there registered a sense of isolation. The percentage of students with disabilities at each site is similar (12 to 13 per cent). The SWS commended the DUSSD for its excellent work and it found the International Office helpful in spite of being overworked.

101 Nevertheless, the audit team considered that the University was aware of these difficulties and, with its new Colleges Board under the new Dean of Colleges and Student Support, the integration of student support services would be addressed. The University recognises the need to integrate the student support strategy more fully into its structures for evaluating and enhancing the student experience: surveys of student satisfaction conducted by DUSSD, the CAS and the Counselling Service have not been part of an overarching institutional QA process so far.

102 Student support facilities at the Queen’s Campus were described by students as considerably less well developed. The audit team noted that this was already in the process of being rectified and the problems of taught postgraduate students were under consideration. Overall, the team was impressed by the commitment of the University to the welfare of its students, at all levels, and by the efforts that have gone into serving and developing students’ needs at Queen’s Campus.

Collaborative provision

103 The University’s collaborative provision centres on the validation of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes that are delivered by six partner organisations. The SED stated that such provision involves around 420 students. The University is clear that validation contributes primarily to the University’s aims of supporting wider access to HE in the north-east. The comprehensive Validation Handbook states that the two principles of validation that must be satisfied are achieving academic excellence and enhancing educational provision within the north-east region. For historical reasons, one long-standing partnership with the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) was established outside the north-east, but that partnership is now coming to an end.

104 The main collaborative programmes include: two BA programmes with the RAD; a BA and MA in Theology and Ministry; the Certificate and Diploma in Higher Education in Theology and Ministry (the North East Institute for Theological Education (NEITE)); two diplomas with a local training centre to support forensic crime scene investigation; and a Postgraduate Diploma in Cognitive Therapy with a centre in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

105 TLC is responsible for the quality assurance of the validated provision as it is for campus-based undergraduate provision, with the Validation Sub-committee (VSC) having responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the University’s policies for collaborative provision. Policies are elaborated in the Validation Handbook, an adjunct to the University’s Teaching and Learning Handbook. The Validation Handbook includes sections on admission; monitoring student progress; curriculum development; programme review and monitoring; examinations and assessment and the memorandum of association. Some of its sections, such as those on student feedback and the teaching and learning strategy are no more than references to the corresponding sections of the Teaching and Learning Handbook, for there is no difference for validated programmes.

106 TLC, which routinely receives the minutes of VSC, is concerned with any matters of principle and considers major issues such as the validation of new programmes and the renewal of existing validation agreements. There is a Management Committee for the programmes in each partner institution to oversee the management of the partnership. The Management Committee, chaired by a Deputy Dean, acts as a conduit between the University and its partners. Management committees report to VSC.

107 External examiners are appointed to validated programmes in accordance with the University’s standard practice. A University Assessor is assigned to each validated programme. The Assessor, who is a member of the Board of Examiners (and any close equivalent for campus-based programmes), has
primary responsibility for assuring the equivalence of standards. The Assessor visits the partner organisation regularly, typically once a term, is the main academic point of contact and reports annually. Programme leaders, based in the partner institution, are responsible for preparing the annual monitoring report for the Management Committee. This report incorporates feedback from students and external examiners. The Validation Office is proactive in working with collaborative partners to help them discharge their responsibilities. Partner organisations are responsible for the day-to-day management and operation of the provision.

108 The *Code of practice* prompted the University to review its processes with respect to collaborative provision. The Validation Handbook includes the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision*, extensively annotated to show how the University's collaborative provision is aligned with the precepts. The audit team was told that the annotated section of the *Code* is shared with prospective partners at an early stage in the dialogue. Another outcome of the review was that the University found that management committees were not operating as effectively as it would wish; therefore, it decided to take over the servicing of these committees by staff from the University's Validation Office, rather than rely on staff in the partner organisation. Simultaneously, the Periodic Review of validated programmes was aligned with University Review.

109 By mutual consent, the partnership with the RAD is coming to an end, with responsibility for the awards being transferred to the University of Surrey from 2004-05. In order to ensure continuity of experience for students, the University is actively involved in discussion with the RAD and the University of Surrey to harmonise quality assurance requirements during any teach-out period. Also by mutual consent, the nursing programmes with New College, Durham, are migrating to the University of Sunderland for 2004-05. VSC is monitoring the financial impact of these moves and was to discuss the implications at its meeting in March 2004.

110 From its discussions with University staff, the audit team learned that staff in partner organisations do not have access to the University's staff development programme, although specific staff development sessions, for example, on annual review, appeals and diversity training, are arranged for partners. Until the successful appointment to the post of Academic Staff Development Officer, teaching and learning strategies in partner organisations will not be reviewed. Students on validated programmes, although studying for a University of Durham award, do not have access to the University's Library and other learning resources, unless the partner pays for such access. The University might wish to consider how it could develop a more inclusive approach with its partners in order to help students feel more part of the University, and so that partners feel closer to the University and its culture. It would also help the University identify and propagate good practice identified in partner organisations, for example, staff training in NEITE.

Section 3: The audit investigations: discipline audit trails

Discipline audit trails

111 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, read external examiners' reports and studied annual reports and periodic evaluation reports, where available, relating to the programmes. Their findings in respect of the academic standards of awards are as follows.

Anthropology

112 The scope of the DAT was designed to investigate programmes of study followed by students reading for degrees in anthropology and in the health and human sciences. The awards included:

- BA (Hons) Anthropology;
- BA (Hons) Archaeology and Anthropology;
- BA (Hons) Human Sciences;
- BSc (Hons) Human Sciences;
- BSc (Hons) Health and Human Sciences;
- MA in Research Methods;
- MA in Socio-Cultural Anthropology; and
- MSc in Biological Anthropology (with either Ecological or Evolutionary Anthropology).

113 In addition, the Anthropology Department contributes to the BA Anthropology and Sociology, a degree programme managed by the Department of Sociology, to the BA Combined Honours in the Social Sciences and to the BSc Natural Sciences. It also provides a significant contribution to the Medicine in the Community strand of the MBBS phase 1 and has also introduced the BSc in Medicine and the Human Sciences, an intercalated programme for medical students. The programmes
in anthropology are delivered on the City of Durham Campus and those in health and human Sciences on Queen’s Campus, although students from each campus may elect to take one or two modules at the other. This is most likely to occur in the third year of an undergraduate degree. At the time of this audit some 75 undergraduates were admitted to the Durham Campus and 60 to the Queen’s Campus each year. Until 2002, programmes on the Queen’s Campus had been organised within a two-semester academic year. However, by the academic year 2003-04, all the programmes and modules delivered by the Department had been harmonised within the Durham three-term system. The Department also supervises research students for degrees at MA, MSc and PhD levels.

114 The documentation submitted was that prepared in connection with the March 2000 internal review of programmes delivered on the Queen’s Campus and for the review in December 2000 of programmes delivered on the City of Durham Campus using the newer and more extended method of University Review. A brief updating report on developments since these two internal reviews was also included. The audit team also reviewed external examiners’ reports and the documentation reporting the first year’s experience of applying the new and more comprehensive procedures for Annual Review of taught programmes. Taken together, these documents provided a comprehensive picture of the department’s quality management processes at work. While in June 2003 the new system of annual review had been less comprehensive than required, mainly because progression data and external examiners’ reports were not initially to hand, these had become available later and the issues that arose were being addressed at subsequent meetings of the department’s Teaching and Learning Committee and at staff away days.

115 The Department had yet to develop a fully articulated Teaching and Learning Strategy, required from October 2003 in order ‘to provide a strategic context for the Annual Review Process and subsequently for University Review’. There was also a lack of widespread awareness among both staff and students of the University’s published generic assessment criteria and their uses. The assessment criteria were set out in the handbooks for programmes in health and human sciences but not in those for anthropology degrees. It is possible that these omissions reflect the relative newness of many of the University’s explicit procedures for the assurance of quality and standards, and the time it takes for these to become well-understood by staff and students.

116 Programme specifications were clearly and appropriately related to the Subject benchmark statement for anthropology. It was also evident that the processes through which the specifications had been designed and approved had ensured they were consistent with the FHEQ. The staff reported that the writing of the specifications had presented opportunities to review the undergraduate curriculum and to take a more holistic approach to teaching. This coincided with the move to the three-term year on the Queen’s Campus and a restructuring of the three human sciences degrees there around a common spine of core modules covering fundamental knowledge and key research skills. The University anthropology curriculum had also been reconsidered and increasingly used DUO to encourage students to work directly with fieldwork notes and so engage more directly with research practices and the application of theory in their subject. An optional double-weighted dissertation now comprised a substantial part of the third year of undergraduate degrees, although students may opt to take a single-weighted dissertation. Both undergraduate and postgraduate students reported that they felt the benefit of studying in a department with a high research reputation and of teaching by staff involved in fieldwork and writing in the subject.

117 The audit team examined a selection of assessed student work. Much of this demonstrated considerable knowledge and originality and reflected significant engagement on the part of the students with their subject. The standard of student achievement on the programmes investigated was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

118 Students are provided with a variety of clear and comprehensive handbooks and guidance covering each of the programmes taught. There are also arrangements for induction for new undergraduate and postgraduate students. Students told the audit team that they used the handbooks mainly as back up for the detailed information they received directly from staff at induction and at lectures and tutorials. Students, particularly those studying at the Queen’s Campus, praised the accessibility of staff and the academic help that was readily available. Students were also very aware of the personal help and support that was available through the college system. The excellence of library and IT services available to students at the University was reflected in interviews with students. The University and college libraries worked well in terms of both opening hours and the availability of books and journals, although on the newer Queen’s
Campus there had been a problem of insufficient numbers of key texts; this was currently being addressed after being raised by student representatives. Students' representation and participation on departmental committees was vigorous and they reported that their views were taken into account. Students were less aware of the outcomes of the module feedback questionnaires and the Department might consider following the example of other subjects in the University and publishing the results on DUO.

119 The degree programmes in anthropology and in health and human sciences attract able and highly motivated students, the great majority of whom progress well academically in the context of a rich variety of learning support services and under the guidance of accessible and helpful staff, many of whom are also leading figures in their discipline. The quality of the learning experiences of students is suitable for programmes of study leading to the named awards of the BA, BSc, MA and MSc degrees.

**Computer Science**

120 At the time of the audit, the computer science provision comprised BSc programmes in Computer Science, Artificial Intelligence and Software Engineering, part-time Certificate and Diploma programmes in Information Technology at the Queen's Campus, and two taught postgraduate programmes: MSc in Internet Systems and e-Business, and MSc in Internet and Distributed Systems. The Department also participates in the BSc Natural Sciences scheme, which offers combined degrees with Archaeology, Chemistry, Geology, Mathematics, Physics, Philosophy and Psychology. The part-time IT programmes are in their final year of being phased out, as recruitment stopped in 2002, and students were given two years' notice to complete the award for which they were registered.

121 The DSED consisted of four main sections. The bulk of the document comprised the last internal review (Faculty Review of Computer Science, January 2001) and the subsequent audit trail to the final sign off by TLC in October 2003. There is a brief, evaluative post-review update, followed by documents centred on the validation of the two MSc programmes in October 2002 for 2003 entry. In a separate volume, the Department provided programme specifications for all extant programmes.

122 The discipline documentation provided the audit team with excellent illustrations of the internal review process and validation process in action. The internal review also encompassed the BCS accreditation visit and partially documents the Department's and University's response. The review demonstrated that the University's processes are thorough, and show how omissions or delays in responses at Department level are picked up and dealt with.

123 Programme specifications were very informative and conformed to the University's pro forma, although the approaches taken were varied. For BSc programmes, which share a large common core, the Department provides a core specification which includes a comprehensive mapping of learning outcomes for each module, a mapping against the Subject benchmark statement for computing, a statement of how the award matches the FHEQ specification for an honours-level award, and an account of assessment and learning and teaching strategies. Each individual programme has its own programme specification to supplement the core specification. For the sub-degree and MSc programmes, the appropriate FHEQ level descriptors are reproduced in an appendix, but there is no explicit mapping against them, nor are the assessment and learning and teaching strategies as clearly articulated.

124 The departmental evaluation and update report that formed part of the DSED began with the University's Strategic Improvement Programme and its implications for the Department of Computer Science. The SIP recommended a refocusing of the Department, already instigated by the new Head of Department, towards e-science, with a 'net loss of five academic posts by 2004/2005'. While this was broadly seen as a positive redirection of energies, many of the staff perceived this as a threat. 'As a consequence, the Department has lost over 50 per cent of its academic staff since the SIP proposals were made.' Although the report goes on to explain how the impact of these resignations on taught and research students was ameliorated, the audit team felt it important to gauge the impact for itself (see below, paragraphs 131; 133).

125 The Annual Programme Review for 2002-03, based on a teaching away day held in June 2003, displayed some problems. For the MSc in Internet and Distributed Systems, only four of the nine module leaders were present. It was also clear that there had been no formal system for appraisal and peer observation in 2002-03. Staff confirmed that the data circulated by the University in May/June for annual review (based on the December census) are supplemented by departmental progression data for the end of the academic year.

126 External examiners' reports are dealt with at departmental level, with close oversight being taken by the Faculty, to ensure that appropriate action is
taken and that a response is sent to the external examiner(s). All reports that the audit team saw were broadly complimentary. A recurrent issue has been the relatively poor performance at Intermediate level (year two) on undergraduate programmes. This was being addressed through a change to the curriculum currently being carried out, which will secure a better foundation at certificate level (year one).

127 The examples of assessed work provided confirmed the attainment of outcomes detailed in the programme specifications and that student achievement is appropriate for the level of the award concerned.

128 The student voice is heard through the extensive use of questionnaires and through the SSCC. On the BSc programme, modules are divided into sub-modules, with different staff taking responsibility for each component. Questionnaires are not only issued at module level, but also at the level of the sub-module in order to capture more specific information. The questionnaires are available on-line through DUO. Students are awarded printer credits for completing questionnaires and the return rate is high. Student attendance at SSCC in 2002-03 was not as high as the Department would have liked. This had improved noticeably during 2003-04. Issues raised in October and November 2003 include the late return of student work, and a variety of concerns with respect to Artificial Intelligence modules, where staff expertise had been lost.

129 The audit team met a cross-section of students that included full and part-time undergraduates, postgraduate taught and research students. All students confirmed that the documentation they had been given was excellent. All material was available on-line and had improved this year. It is clear that students understand what is expected of them. All students expressed satisfaction with learning resources. Undergraduate and postgraduate representatives confirmed that issues with book availability are addressed. Some college libraries are excellent, while others are not as well stocked with computer science texts. Access to computers is good with 24-hour and remote access. The team did not consider that the concerns about IT resources raised by the BCS accreditation panel were an issue at the time of the audit visit. Undergraduate students reiterated the problems with an Artificial Intelligence module, following the loss of staff, but confirmed that this had been resolved through SSCC which appears to resolve issues efficiently.

130 All students are clear about their main points of contact for help. College tutors and Department tutors liaise effectively. The Departmental Administrator plays a key role in both the academic and pastoral support of students. Undergraduate students were asked about the view expressed in the SWS that First class degrees are difficult to attain. The Natural Sciences students felt that Firsts were 'much more common in other subjects'. All taught students stated that the Department had a two-week policy on the return of student work. This meant that some feedback, although not necessarily fully-marked work, will be given within that period. Staff confirmed the two-week return period for student work and that this policy was introduced, for taught postgraduate programmes at least, during 2003-04.

131 Staff explained how the Department had worked hard to minimise the impact of the loss of staff on the student experience. Around eight new staff will arrive during summer 2004. In what is seen as a transitional year in 2003-04, research has had to take second place. Additional teaching assistants have been appointed, and have been given appropriate staff development and assigned a mentor. Staff new to teaching were positive about the PGCLTHE. Although no appraisals had been carried out in 2002-03, the mentoring scheme continued. Appraisers have now been trained.

132 The November 2003 minutes of SSCC indicate that MSc students are required to have their own computer. This was confirmed by students and staff. Although applicants are notified of this before a formal offer is made, there is no mention of the requirement in the Prospectus, or on the web site. The audit team felt that this was an oversight that goes against the spirit of accurate and reliable information.

133 Although the Department is currently going through a challenging time, it is clear that the quality of learning opportunities for students has remained high. If the audit team have a concern, it is that the burden for maintaining that quality, while also responding to reviews and preparing for audit, has fallen on one or two key individuals. The team was satisfied that the quality of learning opportunities is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards

Music

134 The DAT in music was based on the submission of the University Review of Music, initiated in May 2002 and concluded in December 2003, its supporting papers and extracts from the minutes of the University Review Panel, the departmental Board of Studies, TLC and GSC. The awards within scope were the BA in Music, MA in Composition, Electroacoustic Studies, Ethnomusicology, Musicology and Performance,
together with joint honours programmes in English Literature and Music, Modern European Languages and Music, Music and Theology, Latin and Music, and the department's contribution to the BA Combined Honours in Arts. Programme specifications were appended; their different versions reflected ongoing development and evolution. The audit team noted that the programme specifications included in the music DSED were for new programmes and represented a significant revision to the existing undergraduate provision. The Department had used the University Review constructively as both a springboard and a test bed for this revision.

135 The programme specifications make clear links to the academic infrastructure with explicit reference made to the Subject benchmark statement for music, the FHEQ and, where appropriate, the Code of practice. Discussions with staff confirmed that the Department had engaged beneficially with all parts of the academic infrastructure in a subject where the Subject benchmark statement appropriately allows significant scope for interpretation.

136 Progression and completion data are made available for the annual review of programmes. The data set provided, dated January 2004 for annual review in 2004, consisted of information concerning applications, entrants, progression and attainment. In all cases these data extended over the previous five years and there was evidence that the set of prompts provided centrally for the interpretation of this data were used, although the audit team would encourage the department to make greater use of these prompts.

137 The DSED and its supporting documentation gave a clear view of how University Review, Annual Review, programme and module approval function at departmental level. The audit team noted that all University policies were clearly understood and fully implemented. Staff expressed a desire for an annual report, rather than the current check-box document and minutes of meetings. The team was satisfied that monitoring and review at all levels were working well.

138 The audit team saw a range of external examiners' reports and the follow-up they received. Because of the timing of Annual Review with an October deadline, the external examiners' reports did not form part of the first tranche of review but were assessed separately during the first part of the following year through the departmental TLC. The team detected a wish on the part of staff to be able to review the provision slightly later in the year so that external examiners' reports could be combined with internal reflection, but found that the reports were, nevertheless, carefully scrutinised with responses clearly documented.

139 The audit team was provided with assessed work from all levels of the provision, and confirmed that it matched the expectations of the programme specifications. The standard of student achievement is appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ.

140 Assessment strategies are an essential component of University Review and were therefore included in the DAT documentation. Discipline-specific grade criteria have been developed for composition, performance and musicology at all levels, and these have been mapped onto the University's generic criteria. Staff explained that the Department's criteria predated the University's.

141 Copies of the undergraduate and postgraduate students' handbooks describe the work of the department well. Students agreed that the documents were helpful and accurate, and were consequently familiar with the language of learning outcomes, level descriptors and grade criteria.

142 Learning resources were of a high quality. Students who met with the audit team spoke with enthusiasm of the University Library, were unvarying in their view that the IT provision was more than adequate, and that discipline-specific resources were similarly well provided. Concerns of an academic nature were restricted to the soundproofing of the Queen's Court practice rooms, which would have a significant implication for resourcing. The locus of discussion of concerns within the Department was the SSCC, undergraduate and postgraduate, which then fed through into the Board of Studies.

143 Student feedback is achieved via the University's module questionnaire which is in place across the department, although the annual review for 2003 showed that five postgraduate taught modules had not been evaluated in this way. Results are fed back through the SSCC, the Board of Studies and eventually onto DUO, resulting in a delay of several months between student commentary and response.

144 The audit team saw abundant evidence of the business of the SSCCs. In addition to routine business, the committee was the focus of the Department's consultation with students on the new degree that forms the basis of the music DAT programme specifications. Students were well versed in the philosophy of quality management seeking, for example, further formative assessment in individual units.

145 The audit team was satisfied that the quality of learning opportunities is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.
Theology and ministry

146 The DAT was based on the two programmes that had been validated by the University of Sunderland from 1998 to 2002. In 2001, Sunderland closed its Religious Studies Department and the theological consortium of five members offering the programmes was required to find a new validating institution with effect from September 2003. The awards included the Certificate of Higher Education in Theology and Ministry and the Diploma of Higher Education in Theology and Ministry from NEITE. Since, at the time of the audit, the two programmes had not run through a full annual cycle, the DAT centred on the University's validation regulations and processes relating to collaborative provision.

147 Documentation provided for the DAT comprised the validation report and related documentation and programme specifications. Additional documentation relating to validation processes at the University was provided at the time of the audit. A large amount of information on validation was available to the audit team on the University web site.

148 The audit team considered that some of the full range of programme specifications were exemplary in their scope, reflection and level of detail. Programmes had been designed using the Subject benchmark statement for theology and religious studies, the HFEQ and Code of practice; the University's teaching and learning strategy; wider University strategies; The Churches' Validation Framework for Theological Education; North East Ordination Course (NEOC) Council and Board of Trustees representing churches in the region and staff research as reference points; and had engaged professional external monitors. All programme module specifications were mapped onto University assessment criteria.

149 The audit team met with representatives of the partner institutions of NEITE and with staff of the University with specific responsibilities in the context of collaborative arrangements. Because responsibilities had been assumed from another University, there was no rationale for change or upgrading of levels of the qualifications at that stage. The smooth transition had taken two years to effect and, the team was told, had been both helpful to staff and thorough, facilitated by the University Assessor. Having made the transition, several changes had been made to align the new qualifications with University regulations and practice. Consideration of non-traditional academic qualifications for admission to the programmes was rigorous and all churches have a policy that the benchmark standard is FHEQ Intermediate level. For positions of responsibility, a degree is required for entry to training.

150 The five NEITE partners acknowledged the need to align practices in the delivery of modules across the consortium and were constantly striving to achieve more consistency. It was acknowledged, both in the literature and at the meetings with staff, that it was difficult to maintain a system of anonymous, blind-marking in the particular circumstances of these two programmes. However, effective methods were being investigated. Double-marking and external monitoring were now fully operational over all modules in the consortium. Mature students met by the audit team were fully conversant with relevant criteria, standards, expectations and appeal procedures. Students receive prompt feedback from tutors on all written assignments, although some disquiet was expressed by the students about making the personal spiritual development diaries available for scrutiny of examiners.

151 The NEITE Programme Committee meets regularly and is charged with monitoring quality and standards. Staff provided examples of ongoing enhancement in their first year of operation, for example, the move to share modules across the consortium and plans to establish an MA route via the Diploma of Higher Education in Theology and Ministry. The consortium expressed the hope that links with the Department of Theology will develop, but it is too early to say how this will be supported.

152 The audit team learnt that plans for an annual report are evolving to accommodate the complex task of correlating the work of the five members of the consortium. The Programme Committee has identified a member of staff to produce an annual report, initially to be submitted as a draft report to the Joint Management Committee, for subsequent consideration by the VSC and then the TLC. Progression and completion data will be used to monitor quality and standards by both the NEITE Programme Committee and the Joint Management Committee, to which the Programme Committee reports. External examiners' reports will form part of the annual monitoring system. The audit team had confidence that these matters were well in hand as issues raised during the validation process had been addressed by the Consortium.

153 Under the current arrangements, students are limited in their access to resources at Durham and cannot use the University Library. Students have good ecclesiastical resources, including access to the Cathedral library. Tutors supplement reading material where necessary. Staff do not have access to the University's staff development programme but the consortium has its own well-developed, rigorous training programme. Mutual benefit could
be gained by dissemination of practice between the consortium and the University.

154 Examples of assessed work from each active module of the programme were made available and demonstrated that the expectations of the programme specifications were met and that the full range of marks was being used by the markers.

155 The audit team was provided with the information supplied to students, including the complete range of NEITE students’ handbooks. Students confirmed that the information they receive on application, induction and during each course is accurate, informative and highly useful. Varying arrangements for personal support are made available in different sectors of the consortium. Typically NEOC arranges for each student to have a personal tutor and a personal support group in his/her own working context.

156 Students had been involved in the validation process and NEITE students were very well represented at all levels on NEITE committees. Student concerns include the balance of personal duties and academic work commitments, ‘being heard’, the formality of the Student Meeting and the sub-degree level of the Certificate and Diploma programme qualifications.

157 Recent examples of student feedback were available to auditors on module evaluation forms from the autumn term. Students commented on the appropriateness of the depth, pace and level of the courses, and the crucial role of the tutor in steering the module effectively. Students at the meeting with the audit team also confirmed that informal direct reporting to tutors is commonplace, and action is taken, although not always recorded. The team were impressed by the use of progressive methods of teaching and learning, such as self-assessment and reflective criticism, employed in these programme courses.

158 The audit team noted the quality and commitment of the students they met. Most were already graduates and some had postgraduate qualifications. The team confirmed that the quality of learning opportunities available to students are well suited for programmes of study leading to the Certificate and Diploma of Higher Education in Theology and Ministry.

Section 4: The audit investigations: published information

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

159 The University publishes a range of information in both hard copy and on its web site for prospective and current students, and monitors it for completeness and accuracy. The University Prospectus forms the principal source of general information about degree programmes. Until 2003-04, a separate section in the prospectus was published for programmes at Stockton. The prospectus contains information about the Campus: its accommodation, nightlife and welfare services, the working context including library and IT facilities, and careers prospects for graduates. It also sets out the entry requirements and procedures for applications and admissions, including details about fees and financial assistance. An internet-based Admissions Enquiry Service and the development of Admissions Profiles are two recent innovations. The responsibility for the accuracy of the information lies ultimately with the Vice-Chancellor of the University, but the material is checked and maintained by individual staff who have responsibility for specific areas of provision.

160 On arrival at the University, undergraduate students receive a variety of handbooks. The faculty handbooks include details of the regulations and module summaries. Students in subsequent years are, in addition, directed to module information on the web site. From October 2003 all students receive a copy of the Student Survival Guide. This gives a condensed summary of student life: what is required of students, what they can expect and where and how to get help, for example, in the case of an appeal or an emergency. It indicates where to find further information on the web site and in handbooks. The role of the college as a social focus is explained, health and safety issues are outlined, student organisations and support services are introduced and an appendix on data protection is included. International students are provided with a special guidebook in hard copy and on the web site. Students receive detailed academic information in the form of programme-specific or departmental handbooks which may be supplemented by module handbooks where appropriate. Each college produces its own Freshers’ Handbook which introduces students to the facilities available in that particular college and which gives information of a generally useful nature.
161 Both in their SWS and during meetings with the audit team, most students expressed overall satisfaction with the availability, accuracy and completeness of the information provided to them in the University Prospectus at the start of the year. Staff accepted that, because of unforeseen changes in staffing, the student assertion that the Prospectus was sometimes out of date in respect of significant course changes was fair comment. Postgraduates were more critical about the accuracy of the Prospectus. For entry in 2005, programmes at Queen’s Campus will be integrated alongside Durham City programmes. The team noted that the claim made on the College web site that Ustinov is the ‘largest postgraduate college in the country and probably in Europe’ is open to misinterpretation.

162 Students considered the University web site to be of the highest importance in attracting new students and informing those on courses, but considered that departmental information too often became outdated, especially on the Queen’s Campus section. Students were more uniformly positive about module handbooks, college handbooks, and handbooks and information provided on the web site by the support services, in particular, information from the International Office.

163 The audit team concluded that the University provides appropriate information to prospective and current students, in hard copy and on the web site. The University may wish to establish some systems for regularly checking the consistency and currency of information in the Prospectus and departmental handbooks. It may also wish to symbolise its continuing integration of the Queen’s Campus with Durham by uniting the information about both in a single University Prospectus. The team heard, at its final meeting with staff, that the timetable for developing full programme specifications through the process of University Review and placing them on the web site would not be complete until considerably later than December 2004. However, programme-specific information to meet the requirements of HEFCE 03/51, can be compiled for publication.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information

164 In its SED the University expressed its intention to comply with HEFCE 02/15 in respect of the publication of teaching quality information (TQI) through its ongoing redevelopment of the web site, using a database to provide information on taught programmes, but acknowledged it would face challenges. Programme specifications are still being developed as a valuable, systematic part of the teaching and learning strategy and were rather complex and insufficiently user-friendly as a result. The institutional plan is to display ‘virtual programme specifications’ on the University web site that would be more comprehensible and relevant to the needs of prospective students and employers. These virtual specifications would consist of an extract of core information, such as aims and learning outcomes, together with admissions profiles, module summaries and regulations.

165 The University has concerns about the possible adverse effect on the candid, robust quality of future external examiners’ reports when these have to be published on the web site. With regard to publication of student feedback, the University is awaiting the publication of the HEFCE Good Practice guide to inform an overarching strategy for eliciting feedback. The audit team recognised that the University is considering how best to make more public use of the outcomes of student satisfaction surveys to inform strategies for teaching and student support. The team was encouraged to hear that several departments had promptly displayed the findings of their own surveys on the web site. The team also heard that external examiners had already been consulted by the University about the publication of their reports on the web site.

166 The audit team wishes to encourage the University to continue to develop its systems for providing public information as part of a routine, central collection, collation and use of feedback from all sources - students, graduates, employers, external examiners etc. An integrated approach, as described in the SED could be to the advantage of the institution in informing and directing strategies for enhancement of teaching and learning and student support.
Findings
Findings

167 An institutional audit of the University was undertaken during the week commencing 23 February 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 DATs were selected for scrutiny. This section of the report summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged from the audit, and recommendations to the University for enhancing current practice.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes

168 Programme approval processes, through the composition of validation panels, encourage a collegial approach while maintaining authority centrally through the TLC and GSC. Validation panels, chaired by a member of TLC or GSC, engage in dialogue with departments and take appropriate account of resource availability. A detailed programme specification and a statement of the rationale for the programme, availability of resources and external comment from examiner(s) or assessors support consideration of proposals. The process is iterative and developmental, leading to robust outcomes. Effective use is made of the academic infrastructure, reflected in the careful attention paid to the development of the programme specification. A new module approval template is designed to eliminate previous inconsistency in module descriptions arising from changes to modules.

169 Annual review is undertaken at a specific review meeting or through a range of activities and confirms consideration of a range of evidence. A record of the meeting, or equivalent, is forwarded to the dean, deputy dean or associate dean who responds to the course team and engages in discussion with the department regarding the outcomes of the review. Deans, deputy deans and associate deans assemble summaries of departments’ reviews to identify common themes. The report form and guidance provided centrally cross-refers where appropriate to the University’s policy in the Teaching and Learning Handbook to promote good practice. However, the University is itself concerned that engagement with annual review processes is variable and requires improvement. The approach taken by the University to address shortcomings in the annual review process are appropriate to secure continued local ownership of quality and standards, but its implementation will require careful monitoring by TLC and GSC.

170 Internal review of quality and standards, known as University Review, takes place every six years. The review panel includes cross-faculty membership and an external specialist but does not include members of the relevant department. External participation in internal review processes is robust and independent. An appropriate range of material evidence is presented to the panel over a two-day period to enable the panel to evaluate the quality of learning opportunities, the standard of student achievement and the rigour of assessment processes. The review panel meets with staff and students. Follow-up reporting is at six months and 18 months. Programme specifications are developed, reviewed and approved through the vehicle of University Review and the University states that this has been a valuable exercise in supporting departments to focus debate on the core academic provision as the basis for discussion of other matters such as admission or student support. At the end of the review a decision is made whether to revalidate provision for a further six years. Follow-up action is reported at six months and 18 months after the review.

171 The absence of a SED in the process is recognised by the University as a weakness. It plans to support the development of departmental processes that are themselves more evaluative. To that end, the development of teaching and learning strategies at department level will provide a strategic context for annual review. The DATs enabled the audit team to test and evaluate the University’s processes through the extent documentation provided.

172 The University has recognised the need to integrate procedures associated with teaching and learning with those associated with student support and learning resources. From October 2003, University Review was extended to the colleges, and will subsequently be developed to address other areas of support.

173 Representation of students is well-established, comprehensive and active in the colleges, partner institutions and at University level. Representatives are trained by DSU and confirm that their input is valued and acted upon. Feedback to constituencies on the outcomes of student participation is an area for improvement and good practice in some departments is being disseminated. The University is waiting for the publication of the HEFCE Good Practice guide before embarking on the development of graduate surveys, although graduates from the previous three years are surveyed in the context of University Review.

174 Undergraduate students evaluate their experience of the quality of their programme at module level and the results are sometimes posted on the web site in a very timely fashion. A Graduate
Standards Survey, focused on transferable skills, is conducted annually but there is currently no overarching arrangement for gathering and dealing with postgraduate feedback. The University is reviewing the way it implements undergraduate and postgraduate surveys so that comparable data can be extracted in order to inform institutional strategies for teaching and learning and student support.

175 Professional accreditation provides a further opportunity for programme teams to seek feedback from relevant stakeholders, and points raised are dealt with in a thorough and considered way, generally, in a timely fashion and at University level.

176 Responsibility for the quality assurance of collaborative and distance-learning programmes lies with TLC as it does for campus-based undergraduate provision, with VSC having responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the University’s policies for collaborative provision. Management committees for the programmes in each partner institution oversee the management of the partnership. These are chaired by a deputy dean acting as a conduit between the University and its partners. Management committees report to VSC and a University Assessor is assigned to each validated programme. The Assessor is a member of the Board of Examiners for comparable internal programmes, and has primary responsibility for assuring the equivalence of standards. The University’s systems were correctly evaluated in the SED as robust but a greater degree of inclusivity in its approach to partner institutions would enable students and partners to feel closer to the University and its culture.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

177 Senate has formal responsibility for all academic matters. The main processes for ensuring that degree programmes conform to Durham’s defined standards are those for programme approval and University Review. With explicit reference to the academic infrastructure, the University’s regulatory framework with its associated level and qualification descriptors, provide a sound basis for the assurance of standards. Overall responsibility for quality assurance and related issues associated with teaching and learning is vested in TLC and GSC and effective communication between the two committees is maintained through cross-membership. GSC communicates through a network of departmental postgraduate directors of studies led by the Postgraduate Dean, while TLC communicates and consults through a structured series of Faculty TLC subcommittees chaired by the Dean or deputy dean, who is also a member of TLC, and on which the relevant departments are represented.

178 The SED evaluated the approach taken at postgraduate level as less effective than the more structured approach taken by TLC at undergraduate level. The status of GSC’s discussions and deliberations together with the formal departmental processes and policies is not as clear. To remedy this, the University has sought to enhance the faculty committee structure for postgraduate programmes based on the HDCs chaired by the associate deans.

179 The overall committee structure is appropriate and the University’s deliberative structures are supported by a suite of integrated university-level strategies that continue to be developed and extended. TLC promotes a proactive and reflective culture in its work, supported by the provision of rigorous and well-written documentation.

180 External examiners are used to good effect to secure standards of awards. They confirm that standards are consistent with external reference points such as subject benchmark statements, the FHEQ and the requirements of professional bodies. External examiners moderate assessment design and conduct viva voce examinations where applicable. The revised external examiners’ report form, introduced in October 2002 for undergraduate degrees, promotes comprehensive coverage on all appropriate issues and is designed to meet the requirements for information to be made publicly available.

181 The procedures governing the appointment and use of external examiners are consistent with the precepts and guidance set out in the Code of practice, Section 4: External examining. External examiners’ reports are considered at appropriate levels within departments and faculties and procedures for managing responses and identification of matters to be addressed are considered by the University to be working well. The University’s view is confirmed by the audit team and by external examiners themselves who reflected in their reports the belief that the procedures requiring complete anonymity in the marking of work and the classification of degrees were particularly rigorous. The use of external examiners is strong and scrupulous. Changes to assessment procedures introduced this academic year will have an impact on the work of external examiners, so it is clearly important that internal and external examiners are completely clear as to how these changes will operate in practice.

182 The University provides a programme-specific data set for University Review and annual review in departments, focused on applications, progression
and degree classification. A set of prompts assists programme teams to search for qualitative issues that arise out of the quantitative data. Further work is still to be done on the incorporation of admissions and first destination data into the main data set. Although the data inform departmental admissions policies, the SED made no mention of attempts to undertake this on an institution-wide basis. The audit team's review of annual reporting concluded that there was clear evidence that the data described find their way into departmental annual reviews, but their treatment is uneven in operation.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

183 Support for student learning is both rich and complex and colleges play a part in the academic success of their students. There are many points at which a student can obtain support given the collegiate and multisite character of the University. This necessitates a clear overall strategy for the management and allocation of learning resources that includes libraries, study space and networked PC provision to student rooms. College tutors have close links with academic departments and students’ attendance and progress records are monitored by departments and by senior tutors in the colleges. The provision available at the Queen's Campus at Stockton is less mature. The University has made a distinct commitment to establishing the college system as fully and appropriately as possible on Queen's Campus and for postgraduates at Ustinov and, at the time of the audit, all the key components of the college experience were developing for both.

184 The audit team confirmed that the performance of, and users' views of, student services are regularly and appropriately monitored. These include the University library, ITS, CAS, Counselling Service, DUSSD and the welfare and advice services provided by DSU. Appropriate action is taken on matters raised.

185 The University library is the major academic resource, on five sites, with extensive holdings of printed items, current periodicals, audiovisual and microform materials, electronic resources, documents and excellent archival collections. Clear strategies for both the library and ITS ensure the availability of their provision to all types of student, including part-time, and mature students, and those with disabilities, wherever they may be based. The library is seeking to offer a single library service and Queen's Campus provision has been steadily upgraded and is supported by a daily system of book transfer. Students were satisfied that library services were working well on both campuses and that complaints are heard and addressed.

186 DUO is an internet-based e-learning environment which is playing an increasingly important part in communicating with students and in their access to key learning resources. These developments are consistent with the University's strategy for developing IT-based support for independent learning.

187 Overall learning support provision is coordinated by COSSS which reports to TLC. Chaired by the Dean of Colleges and Student Support Services, who is able to direct resources across the whole support system, COSSS has moved from an operational to a strategic role in ensuring and developing the quality of student support services across the whole University. The University recognises the importance of a coordinated approach to the management and development of learning resources that is consistent with the teaching and learning strategy. A learning resources strategy group has been formed to assist the development of an overall strategy for learning resources, including priorities for the improvement of lecture theatres and teaching rooms, and the audit team commends this approach. The range and quantity of support for learning at the University is excellent and makes a substantial contribution to the high levels of student retention and achievement.

188 The main source of student guidance, support and supervision in academic matters is provided in the departments, especially by the course or module tutor. The year coordinator or programme leader, head of department or Director of the Combined Honours or Natural Sciences degree offer further support. Where problems arise that cannot be dealt with by these staff, members of the college or dean of the faculty can be consulted.

189 In their SWS and in meetings with the audit team, students constantly expressed appreciation of the approachability and helpfulness of academic staff. Students recognise the staff as a considerable resource in support of their learning and appreciated the research-led mission of the University. Academic support within the library is to be extended by programmes that will teach students the relevance and use of information literacy in problem-solving, research skills and independent learning directly linked to their subject area of study. Measures to offer specific support to disabled students, distance learners and students with special needs are underway. A model PDP is being developed linked with academic departments, colleges and DSU as well as the CAS. The intention is to maintain a broad-based reflection on students’ academic and extra curricula experiences while looking forward to employment, thus enabling students to consider their total learning experience and identify further development needs.
190 Regular, free training programmes for students and staff cover all aspects of IT literacy. All students and departments are encouraged to make full use of DUO, and it has proved a popular and useful tool furthering academic support. Students living out of college, those taking a year abroad and students on distance-learning programmes find DUO particularly useful. The audit team learned that uses of DUO are being explored by the Schools Liaison team and local FE colleges, to support the transition of non-traditional students to Durham.

191 Completion rates in 2001-02 of 96 per cent were attributed largely to the University's support service, especially the college system. All students belong to a college and all undergraduates have a personal tutor. The college tutors are central to student support and guidance and provide a link between the personal and academic aspects of the student experience, offering an informal opportunity for students to discuss their adjustment to university life. In addition to the personal tutor, some colleges operate a student mentor or parenting programme for new students which helps them to accommodate to the change from home to University.

192 A major concern of the University is to ensure that staffing levels can identify and cope with the needs of the increasing number of students with disabilities. Workshops to raise awareness among academic and support staff of the need to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students have been held, and TLC has approved a policy on equal opportunities in teaching and learning to be incorporated into the main University policy in order to map Durham practices to the Code of practice, Section 3: Students with disabilities.

193 Support services appeared to be working well for the majority of undergraduates. Students considered that the personal tutors varied in commitment, and there was 'huge scope for improving the college tutor system'. Taught postgraduates, other than international students, are not assigned a personal tutor, and it became increasingly evident during the audit visit that colleges vary in their level of facilities and support. Ustinov College, where postgraduates are members, is currently a distributed rather than a physical resource. Currently, the highest numbers and percentages of part-time, Access and mature students, who clearly require particular support, study at Queen's Campus. The audit team learnt that the Campus is in the process of building up its support systems but some students there registered a sense of isolation. The University was aware of these difficulties and with its new Board of Colleges under the new Dean of Colleges and Student Support, the perceived drift between the colleges and academic departments would be addressed.

194 The appointment of a new Training and Development Officer has strengthened provision of management training, while training related to quality assurance, teaching and learning has been subject to a relative decline with the absence of the ASDO. The University is exercised by the continuing vacancy in the position of ASDO, which has delayed the implementation of parts of its HR Strategy. Even with this significant hindrance, staff development and dissemination of practice takes place at department level through peer review, appraisal, the Good Practice web site and a Teaching and Learning Forum.

195 The University's HR Strategy explicitly supports the links between teaching and research and values the contribution of staff to teaching excellence. University-wide support for postgraduate students in teaching or demonstrating has been strengthened and the University is committed to extending this at departmental level for more subject-specific assistance. The audit team sees the core principles of the HR Strategy as wholly appropriate for a 'research university' such as Durham. The difficulty in making the appointment is serious, and the team recommends that the University continues to develop alternative means of delivering the appropriate staff development relating to learning and teaching strategies until the ADSO is in post.

The outcomes of the discipline audit trails

Anthropology

196 The scope of the DAT was bachelors and masters degrees in anthropology, biological anthropology, health and human sciences, and archaeology and anthropology. From its study of students' assessed work, and from its discussions with students and staff, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement is appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ. Programme specifications set out appropriate learning outcomes and link these clearly to teaching, learning and assessment. The undergraduate programme specifications are formulated using relevant subject benchmark statements. The writing of the specifications had been used as an opportunity to review the curriculum.

197 Student evaluation of the provision was very positive and there was considerable praise for the accessibility of academic staff and the support available through the college system. The audit team concluded that the quality of the learning
opportunities available to students on both the Durham and Queen's campuses is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

**Computer science**

198 The scope of the computer science DAT was BSc programmes in Computer Science, Artificial Intelligence and Software Engineering, part-time Certificate and Diploma programmes in Information Technology at the Stockton Campus, and two taught postgraduate programmes: MSc in Internet Systems and e-Business, and MSc in Internet and Distributed Systems. The audit team found that the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ. Programme specifications for all the extant programmes were very informative and conformed to the University's pro forma.

199 Students speak very favourably about their experiences, expressing their appreciation of the quality of information provided to them, the learning resources available, the support they receive and the responsiveness of the Department.

200 Despite the loss of the majority of its academic staff as a result of the University's Strategic Improvement Programme, the Computer Science Department has focused on its taught provision, a result of which the quality of learning opportunities for students has remained high.

**Music**

201 The degrees covered in the DAT were the BA in Music, MA in Composition, Electroacoustic Studies, Ethnomusicology, Musicology and Performance, together with joint honours programmes in English Literature and Music, Modern European Languages and Music, Music and Theology, Latin and Music, and the department’s contribution to the BA Combined Honours in Arts. The audit team found that the standard of student achievement was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ. Programme specifications for all the extant programmes were more than adequate, and that discipline-specific resources were similarly well provided. Students were well-versed in the philosophy of quality management and were confident that their voice was heard. The audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students is suitable for the programmes of study leading to the named awards.

**Theology and ministry**

204 The scope of the DAT included both the Certificate and Diploma in Higher Education in Theology and Ministry. The audit team considered that the complex admission procedure had worked well in practice, producing a cohort of impressive students. The validation process itself had worked well, promoting several improvements in practices of teaching and assessment, in addition to increasing consistency across modules offered by different members of the NEITE consortium. The team considered the programmes of study, methods of teaching and processes of assessment offered in the Certificate in Higher Education in Theology and Ministry and Diploma in Higher Education in Theology and Ministry to be appropriate for the level of qualification. The high quality of programme specifications for several NEITE courses, and rigorous staff training programmes, provide models of good practice which could benefit the wider University.

**The institution's use of the academic infrastructure**

205 The University has responded to the publication of the *Code of practice*, the FHEQ and the subject benchmark statements with careful deliberation, but at a relatively slow pace. It has undertaken a gap analysis mapping the current practice against the precepts of the *Code*. In many cases the consequent changes to internal policies, codes and procedures had only recently come into effect or were still under consideration during the audit visit. The SED recognises this, pointing out that with effect from October 2003, quality management within the University took place within the context of new policies and procedures in the following areas: a credit policy; level descriptors; qualification descriptors; generic assessment criteria; revised undergraduate core regulations; revised core regulations for taught postgraduate and 'graduate' programmes; and revised guidelines for placement learning.

206 The audit team considered a large number of documents and heard much evidence that demonstrate the care with which the University has gone about adjusting its established procedures in order to align its processes with the external
reference points that make up the academic infrastructure. It is evident that the time this has taken reflects both the University’s tradition of relatively autonomous departments and the high academic standards those departments have sustained. When the externally stimulated changes to the University’s procedures are completed, they will provide a coherent and explicit foundation for the continuing management and enhancement of quality. The TLC is well-placed to assess the outcomes of the significant number of changes that first came into operation in the academic year 2003-04. In those areas where adjustments were not complete at the time of the audit, particularly those involving programme specifications and the Code of practice, Section 10: Recruitment and admissions the audit team would encourage the University to progress the work more speedily.

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

207 The institutional SED provided an acceptable level of reflection on the University’s quality assurance processes, identifying areas of strength and weakness. In a number of instances the SED indicated that the Agency audit would provide an opportunity for the University to seek an external opinion on the appropriateness of its adaptations to the academic infrastructure for HE, for example, in the context of approval and review procedures. Many matters raised in the SED had already begun to be acted upon. The audit team was, however, able to identify further areas for consideration by the University and the SWS confirmed that the University had not reflected sufficiently on the experience of its postgraduate students.

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

208 The SED identified the need to develop an ‘overarching provision for quality enhancement’ as ‘an area which requires major attention over the next three years’. The appointment of an ASDO who will focus on staff development in relation to teaching, learning and assessment is seen as ‘crucial’ to the development of such a provision. The ASDO is also a critical appointment to facilitate the development of departmental-level teaching and learning strategies. These are intended to promote more evaluative processes and the strategic development of the Annual Review process.

209 The audit team shares the view that the University is well-placed to formulate and implement its agenda for quality enhancement: the CLTRHE, which was described as fully integrated into the academic teaching of the University, is active in providing a range of staff development activities for both new and established academic staff, and there are numerous examples of quality enhancement at the departmental and programme level that were apparent to the team at the DAT level. However, the team advises the University to accelerate the introduction of a strategy for quality enhancement including planned provision of learning and teaching strategies at departmental level.

Reliability of information

210 At the time of the audit, HEFCE 03/51 had only recently been published, although the University had been making preparations on the basis of the earlier report, HEFCE 02/15. The University believes that it will have no difficulty in providing the necessary data to inform the quantitative information set, drawn from data held by the Higher Education Statistics Agency. With respect to the qualitative information set, the University has reviewed and amended the external examiners’ report format and has consulted its external examiners on the publication of their reports. The summary of overall student satisfaction is on hold, pending the issue of national guidelines.

211 The audit team reviewed a variety of University and department publications as well as the web site. Overall, the information provided to students appeared to be appropriate and effective, and no significant problem areas were identified. The team, therefore, finds the University’s currently published information to be accurate and reliable. Moreover, the University was alert to the requirements of TQI and to the implications of HEFCE 03/51, and appears to be on course to fulfil its responsibilities in this respect.

Features of good practice

212 The audit team identified the following as being good practice at the University:

- the work of the TLC as an engine of change in promoting a proactive and reflective culture in its work (paragraphs 24 to 27; 29 to 32);
- the rigorous and well-written documentation in support of the management of quality and standards (paragraph 32);
- the detailed and analytical process adopted in the development of programme specifications (paragraphs 52 to 53, 116; 123; 134 and 148);
• the high level of attendance by students where they have a representative role (paragraph 59);
• the positive steps taken by the University to recognise excellence in teaching (paragraph 74);
• action to evaluate the efficacy of the college experience and the introduction of a Dean of Colleges and Student Support (paragraphs 96 to 97 and 101); and
• effective policy implementation for students studying by distance learning (paragraphs 80 to 82).

Recommendations for action
213 The audit team also recommends that the University should consider taking further action in a number of areas to ensure that the quality of its provision and the academic standards of the awards are maintained.

The University is advised to:
• accelerate the introduction of a strategy for quality enhancement including planned development of learning and teaching strategies at department-level (paragraphs 35; 76 and 79); and
• adopt a more systematic and visible form of annual review (paragraphs 39 to 41).

It is desirable that the University:
• monitor more carefully the learning experience of postgraduate students, particularly on taught programmes (paragraphs 25; 62 and 95);
• disseminate good practice to provide more timely feedback to students on their evaluation of the learning experience (paragraphs 60; 118 and 143);
• institute a more systematic approach to recording appraisal to enable the University to maintain an oversight of the consistency of participation in the process (paragraphs 73; 125 and 131); and
• recognise the good practice in partner colleges from which the University may benefit (paragraphs 151, 153 and 157).
Appendix

The University of Durham's response to the audit report

The University of Durham is pleased with the strongly positive report of the audit team. We are gratified that several major aspects of our provision have been singled out as exemplifying good practice and that the considerable progress which we have made since our previous audit in developing our quality assurance mechanisms has been recognised. We endorse the report’s tribute to our students whose positive involvement in committees and in responding to opportunities for feedback makes a major contribution to institutional discussions on many aspects of teaching and learning. We especially welcome the comments of the report on the effectiveness of our support for student learning, which the auditors linked with our high levels of retention and student achievement; student appreciation of the impact of staff research on their learning experience; and the steps we are taking to promote and recognise excellence in teaching.

We were not surprised that development of the annual review procedure was the main recommendation of the audit team. The University had already recognised the need to promote a strategy for quality enhancement, and we were aware that in the changing context of quality assurance and enhancement - and in particular the cessation of subject review - the annual review of teaching needed to be more consistent. We made this explicit in the SED and explained that we had already put in train plans to appoint an Academic Staff Development Officer to lead the necessary developments. Since the Audit visit we are pleased to report that an Academic Staff Development Officer has taken up post, and is working with departments on a more strategic approach to teaching and learning in general, including the development of teaching and learning strategies as such. This will form the basis for an enhanced annual review process.

Other developments since the Audit visit which will further contribute to the enhancement of teaching and learning include:

- a new appointment in the Personnel Section dedicated to developing a performance management system to replace the existing appraisal process. This will embrace teaching as well as research activity and will articulate with our developing strategy for quality enhancement;
- postgraduate student support is being enhanced by restructuring the Graduate School Office to focus more on this area of activity, and work is under way to develop further graduate facilities at Ustinov College including the building of additional residential accommodation and social amenities which will provide an enhanced focus for the college;
- restructuring of the Graduate School Office and Undergraduate Section into the Academic Support Office will result in undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes being managed alongside each other, so ensuring a consistent degree of quality management across programmes. This will include procedures for monitoring the student experience, which will be made comparable with those for undergraduate programmes. In addition, now that the HEFCE Good Practice Guide to Collecting and Using Student Feedback has been published, TLC has established a working group to undertake a full, strategic review of all the mechanisms for feedback across the full range of the student experience. This will feed in directly to the quality enhancement agenda;
- a new Director has been appointed to the International Office, and enhanced support for International students has been provided through the Dean of Colleges and Student Support Services division;
- a Director has been appointed to establish a Strategic Planning and Change Unit;
- a coordinated Learning Resources Strategy. This will ensure the effective integration of the University's strategies for Teaching and Learning, Library, IT and Learning Technologies, and Estates.

In addition a working group of senior colleagues has been established by TLC to ensure that all the issues raised in the Audit report are addressed.