

University of Hertfordshire

NOVEMBER 2004

Institutional audit

Preface

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

The purpose of institutional audit

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

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

Judgements

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

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

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

Nationally agreed standards

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

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

The audit process

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

The main elements of institutional audit are:

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

The evidence for the audit

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

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

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

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

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Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited the University of Hertfordshire (the University) from 22 to 26 November 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 awards.

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

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

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

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

Outcome of the audit

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

- broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University's current management of the academic quality of its programmes, and
- broad confidence can be placed in the institutional level capacity to manage effectively the security of its awards.

Features of good practice

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

- the strong student focus of the University's development plans, as demonstrated by a number of initiatives including the de Havilland Campus, the Learning Resource Centres and the Student Centre
- the design, development and utilisation of the University's managed learning environment, StudyNet, which offers outstanding potential for

the University's planned move towards a pedagogy of blended learning

- the arrangements for the annual appraisal of academic staff which integrate peer observation and student feedback into the appraisal process, and use the outcomes to inform staff development planning
- the quality, range and accessibility of the University's staff development programme which is well utilised by staff and includes specific training for quality assurance roles and activities
- the establishment of Genesis, a highly effective system which delivers timely and reliable management information to support institutional monitoring and planning.

Recommendations for action

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

It would be advisable for the University to:

- establish, in the full implementation of its Assessment Strategy, the consistent use of a single university-wide marking scale so as to provide clear information to students, staff and external examiners.

It would be desirable for the University to:

- clarify and strengthen its published regulatory guidance so as to include more detailed reference to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), published by QAA, or to other descriptors of levels and qualifications aligned with the FHEQ, as normative points of reference for programme and module development, validation and review.
- establish institutional criteria which enable the appropriate differentiation of programme and award titles
- develop and publish generic assessment criteria so as to clarify the University's broad expectations of student academic performance at different levels
- make the fullest use of its student data, particularly those relating to student progression and retention, and to reflect these in its ongoing management of student admissions policies.

Summary outcomes of the discipline audit trails

BA (Hons) Business Studies (Sandwich); BA (Hons) Business Administration; BSc (Hons) Business Information Systems (full-time and Sandwich awards); BEng (Hons) Aerospace Engineering; BEng (Hons) Aerospace Systems Engineering; Modular BSc (Hons) Computer Science; MSc Computer Science; BA (Hons) Applied Arts; MA Art Therapy

The audit team also looked at these specific areas of provision by undertaking audit trails to find out how well the University's systems and procedures were working at the discipline level. The University provided the team with documents, including student assessed work and, here too, the team met with staff and students. The findings of the team in the four discipline areas supported the overall confidence statements given above. The team considered that the standard of student achievement in each of the four discipline areas was appropriate to the title of the award and its location within the FHEQ, and that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for a programme of study leading to that award.

National reference points

To provide further evidence to support its findings the audit team also investigated the use made by the University of the Academic Infrastructure which QAA has developed on behalf of the whole of UK higher education. The Academic Infrastructure is a set of nationally agreed reference points that help to define both good practice and academic standards. The findings of the audit suggest that the University has embedded the majority of these developments into its management of quality and standards in a timely manner.

From the end of 2004, QAA's audit teams will comment on the reliability of the information about academic quality and standards that institutions will be required to publish, which is listed in the Higher Education Funding Council for England's document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance*. The institutional audit process has included a check on the reliability of the information sets published by institutions in the format recommended in document *HEFCE 03/51*. The University is alert to the publication requirements and the audit found that it had made substantial progress towards fulfilling its responsibilities in this regard.

Main report

Main report

1 An institutional audit of the University of Hertfordshire (the University) was undertaken during the week 22 to 26 November 2004. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the University's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility for its awards.

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

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

Section 1: Introduction: the University of Hertfordshire

The institution and its mission

4 The University of Hertfordshire was established as a technical college in 1952 on what is now known as the College Lane Campus. Its traditions in the fields of mechanical and aeronautical engineering, and the natural sciences, were established in its earliest years, and it was on the basis of these strengths that it became one of the first three polytechnics in the UK in 1969. Mergers with Balls Park College of Education, Hertford, and

the Hertfordshire College of Higher Education, Aldenham, near Watford, followed in 1978 and 1987 respectively, and the institution was designated a university with full degree-awarding powers in 1992. Further mergers followed, with the Hertfordshire College of Art and Design, St Albans, the Hertfordshire College of Health Care Studies, and the Barnet College of Nursing and Midwifery.

5 Three campuses are now in use: the College Lane Campus, the St Alban's Campus, and the de Havilland Campus, which was opened in 2003. This latter estates initiative epitomises, in many ways, the University's commitment to putting the interests of students and the local community at the centre of its thinking and provision. The de Havilland Campus is described in the University Calendar as providing 'bespoke teaching accommodation, and new Learning Resources facilities...In addition the new campus has provision for 1600 residential places as well as recreational and leisure facilities which are available to staff and students and members of the public'. The College Lane Campus has also been enhanced in recent years with the building of an Innovation Centre, which houses the University's subsidiary companies and other businesses associated with the institution, and an art gallery attached to the Faculty of Art and Design. A recently established Student Centre brings together a range of interconnected support services in a 'one-stop shop' facility. Other university facilities include bus links and a park and ride arrangement.

6 In 2003-04 the University had on the roll 18,626 students. This total comprises 10,813 full-time and 2,148 part-time undergraduate students, 476 full-time and 1,367 part-time postgraduate students, and 500 full and part-time further education students. There were 113 full-time and 187 part-time postgraduate research students. All of these students were from the UK and the EU. In addition, there were 2,176 undergraduate and 846 postgraduate students from non-UK/EU countries.

7 The University is organised around six faculties: the Business School; Art and Design; Engineering and Information Sciences; Health and Human Sciences; Humanities, Law and Education; and Interdisciplinary Studies. Each faculty contains two or more departments. Some faculties and departments are also known as schools. In September 2004 the University had 1,957 staff (1,635.6 full-time equivalent) of whom 804 were academics in teaching roles.

8 A new Vice-Chancellor was appointed in September 2003 and, with the support of the Board of Governors, he has formulated and communicated

a fresh vision for the University. This encompasses learning and teaching, selective support for research, interaction with the business community, and widening participation, but it specifically envisages excellence in learning and teaching. A distinctive feature of the University's vision is its emphasis on the development of e-learning and blended learning, using its StudyNet managed learning environment (see paragraphs 157 to 165 below). A new Strategic Plan 2004 to 2007 focuses on partnership with business and market-led interactions with local and regional economies. Academic and administrative restructuring, driven by the Strategic Plan, was carried out in 2003-04.

9 The University's mission is:

'To provide a wide range of higher education with a commitment to excellence in teaching, learning and research and which is responsive to regional, national and international needs'.

Collaborative provision

10 In view of the size and complexity of the University's collaborative provision, it will be the subject of a separate, future audit and, therefore, does not form part of the present institutional audit or of this report.

Background information

11 The published information available for this audit included:

- the report of a continuation audit of the University, conducted by QAA in 2001
- reports of reviews by QAA of provision at subject level, published since October 1999
- the information on the University's website, including its undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses.

12 The University initially provided QAA with:

- an institutional self-evaluation document (SED), and appendices, with links to extensive documentation on a CD-ROM and on the University's website. This documentation included the University's Policies and Regulations (UPRs); the minutes of major committees; a range of policy and strategy documents; and various student statistics
- a discipline self-evaluation document (DSED) for each of the four subject areas selected for DATs.

13 During the briefing and audit visits, the audit team was given ready access to a range of the University's internal documents, both in hard copy

and through its intranet. During the audit visit the University gave the team access to a range of documentation relating to the selected DATs, and examples of students' assessed work. The University also provided the team with access to specified recent reports by professional and statutory bodies as well as access to internal documents, including working documents and committee minutes.

The audit process

14 A preliminary meeting was held at the University in February 2003. Matters discussed included the University's pattern of internal review, the range of provision and the distribution of students across programmes. Following the preliminary meeting QAA confirmed that four DATs would be conducted during the audit visit. QAA received the institutional SED in July 2004 and the DSEDs in October 2004.

15 On the basis of the SED and other published information, the audit team confirmed that the DATs would focus on the following discipline areas: Business, Engineering, Computing, and Art and Design. The University provided QAA with DSEDs and supporting documentation for these DATs in October 2004.

16 A briefing visit was conducted at the University on 11 to 13 October 2004. The purpose of this briefing visit was to explore with the Vice-Chancellor, senior members of staff of the University and student representatives, matters of institutional-level management of quality and standards, raised by the University's SED, the students' written submission (SWS) and published documentation. At the close of the briefing visit, a programme of meetings for the audit visit was agreed with the University. The audit team also determined at the briefing meeting that it would be appropriate to include within the audit a thematic enquiry. This was to focus on the management of blended learning and, in particular, the implementation of the University's managed learning environment, StudyNet.

17 At the preliminary meeting for the audit, the students of the University were invited, through their Students' Union, to submit a separate document, a SWS, 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 academic standards of awards. They were also invited to give their views on the level of representation afforded to them, and on the extent to which their views were noted and acted upon. In generating their SWS, the Students' Union conducted a questionnaire survey which

sought to engage a wide section of the student body. The survey received responses from approximately 25 per cent of the student population, with a profile similar in character to that of the whole student body. The SWS was submitted to QAA in July 2004. The audit team is grateful to the students for preparing this statement to support the audit.

18 The audit visit took place from 22 to 26 November 2004. Eight meetings were held during the visit with groups of staff and students from the University at institutional level. Meetings were also held with staff and students in the four DAT areas. The audit team is grateful to all those who made themselves available to discuss the University's arrangements for the management of academic quality and standards.

19 The audit team comprised Professor C Clare, Professor R d'Inverno, Mr A M Hunt, Mrs J E Lydon, Dr J P Campbell (auditors), and Ms S Plumeridge (audit secretary). The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr P J A Findlay, Assistant Director, Reviews Group.

Developments since the previous academic quality audit

20 The University was last audited in the autumn of 2000. The findings of the continuation audit report, published in 2001, supported general confidence in the University's oversight of academic quality and standards and in the way it discharges its function as a higher education awarding body. A number of areas of good practice worthy of commendation were also identified.

21 The report identified two advisable points for further consideration: to address the lack of a strategic institutional awareness of the consequences and outcomes of the quality assurance system that had been developed; and to reconsider its managerial and deliberative structures to ensure the efficient and effective use of the quality management tools it had developed. The University was also asked in the report to consider the desirability of reviewing the wording of its Graduate School Prospectus and any other material which promoted the Graduate School in a way which implied that it had a real rather than a virtual existence.

22 The University's Board of Governors, and the Academic Board, gave positive and careful consideration to the report of the last audit. The University had produced a summary of responses to the report which tracked action points in the period between the two audits and this indicated that the response had been thorough and far-reaching. The

two advisable points had been addressed principally through the development and adoption of an Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Strategy (AQAES) and its associated Implementation Plan (see paragraph 44 below). In an associated response to the 2001 audit report, the Learning and Teaching Committee and the Academic Quality Committee had been merged in 2002 to create a new Academic Quality Enhancement Committee (AQEC), which reports directly to the Academic Board. The University's intention here was 'to achieve a closer alignment between academic quality assurance and learning and teaching'.

23 The 2001 audit report had noted that the quality systems currently in place in the University were complex and might lead to 'quality fatigue'. The University's requirements for annual reports at both programme and department levels were particularly noted in this connection. The University took the view, expressed in the SED, that this complexity might have been more apparent than real, because the continuation audit visit took place at a time of transition between old and new systems. The University reported that further changes had been put in place since 2001 to address potential over-complexity, particularly in the structures and workings of its committees (see also paragraph 32 below), and in annual monitoring (see paragraph 51). It appeared to the audit team that improvements had indeed been made, and that the University would wish to keep both areas under review.

24 The 2001 audit report recommended a review of the wording of the Graduate School Prospectus. The University has removed any potentially confusing references from the prospectus, where the Graduate School is now described, more appropriately, as 'a framework for bringing together the extensive experience and expertise gained over many years of postgraduate teaching and research'.

25 The audit team formed the view that the University had given full and appropriate consideration to the issues previously raised in the 2001 continuation audit report.

Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes

The institution's view as expressed in the SED

26 The SED claimed that the University had 'a clearly articulated framework for monitoring quality and standards', and a 'purposeful and deliberate shared responsibility...between central structures

and faculty responsibilities'. Within this shared pattern of responsibility the most significant deliberative bodies are the Academic Board, the AQEC, and the Faculty Academic Quality Enhancement Committees (FAQECs), and the key management roles are those of the Vice-Chancellor, the pro vice-chancellors, the directors of academic quality, deans of faculties, faculty registrars, and the Academic Quality Office (AQO).

27 The University summarised the key tools underpinning the arrangements for monitoring quality and standards as including:

- appointment of key staff with specific responsibilities in this area who understand what is expected from them and are properly supported through staff development and appraisal
- a comprehensive set of policies and regulations
- robust arrangements for ongoing monitoring and evaluation
- peer observation of teaching
- effective mechanisms for student feedback.

28 The University stated that it has a 'clear and unambiguous set of regulatory documents' in the form of the UPRs. The UPRs, which have been revised to ensure that they take account of the Academic Infrastructure and recent legislation, are supported by procedural and guidance documents known as Academic Quality Policies and Regulations and Standard Procedures and Practices (SPPs). In the implementation of these quality assurance policies and procedures the University aims to balance the necessity of compliance with a strong emphasis on quality enhancement. It seeks to foster a culture which is self-evaluative and reflective, and which 'promotes openness and is not threatening'. The UPRs and their supporting documents are published in electronic and hard copy formats and confirmed or amended annually as required. The audit team found them to be broadly clear and helpful. The University has proposed to enhance the UPRs through the addition of an index or search engine, and has noted a need for greater clarity and consistency in some areas. The team believed that these developments would enhance the usefulness of these documents. In addition, the provision of clear, valid and reliable management information has been accorded a high priority in the University and this is provided through the GENESIS database

29 The SED was clear and accurate, generally thorough, and comprehensive in its discussion of quality and standards. Although mainly descriptive in style and approach, it included evaluative passages

and provided a sound basis for the audit. In some of its meetings with members of the University, the audit team found evidence of a considerable capacity for self-evaluation, and noted that the SED could have provided more evidence of this strength.

The institution's framework for managing quality and standards

30 The University's Academic Board, supported and informed by an elaborate framework of committees and working groups, is responsible for quality and standards across the institution. Among these committees AQEC has 'key' responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement. AQEC's subcommittees include an Academic Quality Audit Committee and a Staff Development Committee (SDC). Other committees, such as the Recruitment and Admissions Committee, the Research Degrees Committee and the Standing Working Party on UPRs, report directly to Academic Board. The Academic Development Committee (ADC) has a very significant and recently enhanced role in the approval of new academic programmes (see paragraphs 46 to 48 below).

31 Senior management at institutional level resides with the Office of the Vice-Chancellor (OVC). The OVC receives regular reports relating to key areas of quality assurance, such as external examining, and programme validation. The Vice-Chancellor also receives extensive monthly statistical reports with indicators relating to the performance of key institutional functions such as StudyNet. The OVC's proactive and energetic strategic leadership of the University is reflected in its close involvement with the initial stages of programme development, particularly in the matching of programmes to business needs, recruitment markets and resources. A Pro Vice-Chancellor has particular responsibility for quality and standards at institutional level, and is supported by two directors of academic quality, one of whom is responsible for quality assurance and the other for learning and teaching (including management responsibility for the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching, or CELT). A number of small advisory and task groups have recently been replaced by a new forum, the Senior Managers' Conference. This body includes deans of faculties and other senior institutional managers, advises the OVC and provides a basis for concerted and collegiate planning and action at strategic level. The AQO, located in the Registry and headed by a Deputy Registrar (Academic Quality), coordinates key quality assurance procedures including validation and review of programmes, and supports the directors of academic quality and CELT.

32 The audit team found that the University's deliberative and management structures work as intended, and that effective interconnections are maintained through the chairing and membership of Academic Board and its committees (for example, the Pro Vice-Chancellor with responsibility for quality and standards at institutional level chairs AQEC). The team was told that the institution's management structures work together closely and harmoniously, and there was evidence that the success of major developments such as the de Havilland Campus, and the introduction of StudyNet, owed much to clear and strong management direction, particularly from the OVC. Management decision-making is centralised, particularly in matters of finance, staffing and resources, but the University is moving towards a more devolved approach, particularly through the increasingly important roles of faculties in responding to market needs. The University reviewed its committee structure in 2002, partly in response to the previous audit, and the present committee arrangements are reported to be simpler, clearer and more efficient than before the review. The team nevertheless found the range of committees and working groups in the University still constituted a relatively complex deliberative structure. The team believed that the University could, with benefit, continue its review of committees and working groups, and in doing so might wish to consider whether AQEC might usefully assume a wider role and subsume the work of other committees or groups.

33 The University's six faculties have considerable responsibility for managing quality and standards, and the institution-level deliberative and management structures are broadly mirrored in faculty arrangements. Each has a FAQEC, a Faculty Research Degree Board (FRDB) and an Ethics Committee with Delegated Authority. Programme committees are subcommittees of FAQECs. Dean's Advisory Groups (DAG) coordinate the management of faculties and their resources. The University has noted that the terms of reference of the DAGs 'may be too ambitious and do not take account of the role of formal faculty committees', and they are currently being reviewed. Faculty boards have been replaced by faculty forums, which are said to be valuable as channels of communication and discussion between staff and managers.

34 The deans of faculties (each of whom also has an area of corporate responsibility) are assisted by associate deans (academic quality) (ADAQs), who chair FAQECs. ADAQs are members of AQEC and the University claims that they 'work very closely

with central academic quality staff' and that this ensures 'a shared approach to quality assurance across the University'. The audit team found that the ADAQs' collaborative role worked effectively, particularly in the operation of validation and review procedures. The team also noted that faculty registrars play very significant roles in the administration of quality systems, and in the management of administrative staff. For quality management purposes, programmes are 'owned' by faculties while modules are associated with departments, which are subdivisions of faculties. Staff met by the team reported that this dual 'ownership' did not give rise to difficulties. Faculty management of programmes is seen as an advantage in providing checks on compliance with institutional quality assurance systems. Heads of departments are members of DAGs.

35 Deans have clearly defined performance targets set by the Vice-Chancellor, many of which focus on compliance with institutional quality assurance systems. The University's emphasis on compliance with its quality assurance procedures was evident in much of the institutional documentation, and was also reflected in the audit team's discussions with staff at senior levels. Reports on compliance were taken to the highest levels, including the Board of Governors. Local diversities of approach and practice in quality assurance were noted by the 2001 audit report, and the University has evidently made strenuous (and increasingly successful) efforts to address this broad issue. However, the team believed that this emphasis on consistency in the area of quality assurance could usefully be matched by the development of institutional frameworks of policy and practice in some aspects of the management of academic standards (see paragraphs 40 to 43 below).

36 Admission regulations 'are designed to ensure that successful applicants have the potential for satisfactorily completing the programmes of study for which they have applied', and the University expressed confidence in the standards it requires for admission to its programmes. The Recruitment and Admissions Committee reports to Academic Board on policy, regulations and procedures for admission. The audit team was told that this committee had called for vigilance in the management of entry standards, in view of attrition rates, although it did not appear to have discussed this matter in 2003-04. Analysis of student achievement had found uneven standards of English among international students and, in response, one Faculty had decided to raise the English language entry requirements for international students from 6.0 to 6.5 from the

International English Language Testing System. However, the team found little evidence that the University had reviewed, at institutional level, its admission requirements, particularly for direct entry. This would be appropriate in the light of what seem to be high rates of post-referral failure in some areas, and with the possible transfer of students from honours to non-honours programmes on grounds of underperformance. Indeed, the University's Attrition Task Group had drawn attention to the lack of a 'University-wide procedure for analysis of retention or success...related to entry qualifications'. The team would support the view that the University should give higher priority to this matter. It would be well served in this, at institutional level, by using its notably effective GENESIS database and information system to analyse student performance, progression and attrition in relation to entry profiles, and to reflect upon these analyses in its ongoing management of student admissions policies and procedures.

37 Programmes and awards are defined in programme specifications, which are written in the University's standard format, guided by a template. Modules are specified in Definitive Module Documents (DMD), also following a standard format, and held in the GENESIS database. Award titles are determined through the validation process. In the course of the audit, it appeared that programmes that were very similar in their curriculum design and content could lead to differently named awards, and it was not clear to the audit team that there was a rationale for such differences. The team was told that the University did not have a policy framework for the differentiation of award and programme titles. Such titles were determined independently by validation or review panels and approved by Academic Board on the basis of panels' recommendations. The team believed that the University would benefit from greater clarity of policy and expectation in this area, and recommended that it should establish criteria which enable a consistent basis for differentiation of programme and award titles.

38 Until recently, assessment policy and strategy has been addressed through the University's Learning and Teaching Policy and Strategy. As an addition to this, an Assessment Strategy, accompanied by notes for guidance of staff, was approved by Academic Board for partial implementation in 2004-05 and full implementation in 2005-06. This strategy was formulated through a sometimes 'lively' consultation across the University, supported by CELT and overseen by AQEC. The audit team believed that the introduction of this comprehensive strategy, and its

accompanying guidance notes, was helpful and timely. Some departments have already addressed and partly implemented the strategy; for example, the team saw an example of clear and detailed explanation of assessment policy and practice in a departmental handbook.

39 Alongside the new strategy, AQEC has led extensive work on the issue of academic misconduct, and the University's positive responsive measures in this context have included the appointment of faculty academic misconduct officers. Their roles include the clarification of issues and procedures for students, and guidance to staff on the design of assessments to minimise possibilities of plagiarism.

40 The Assessment Strategy enunciates a series of Principles, one of which states that 'Assessment and marking criteria that are consistent, clear and match the learning outcomes, must be identified and applied'. The University has chosen not to establish institution-wide generic assessment criteria, and the audit team was told that programme teams were expected to develop grading criteria consistent with the expectations of their discipline, and to specify these criteria at module or assignment level. It was reported that CELT would support departments which wished to develop assessment criteria and that 'examples of level-specific grading criteria and a new discussion document on the issue' were available on the CELT website, but the team found that this source of guidance was not yet available.

41 The audit team established that among these locally devised sets of grading criteria there is considerable variability of practice and understanding. One department has developed and published generic characteristics of each award classification. Grading criteria were made very clear to staff and students in many programmes, but other areas offered much less satisfactory guidance to students about academic expectations. For example, some module DMDs demonstrated grading expectations by reproducing the basic level descriptors included in the University's UPRs (see paragraph 63 below). The audit team believed that students were not well served by such wide variations of practice. It seemed possible to take modules from different departments with differing expectations of performance, and with variable and inconsistent guidance about academic expectations and grading criteria. The team recommended that the implementation of the Assessment Strategy would be assisted and strengthened by the development and publication of generic assessment criteria, so as to clarify the University's broad

expectations of student academic performance at different academic levels. In so doing the University could more objectively reinforce its confidence in the consistent standards of its awards, and provide clear guidance to staff for the framing of consistent assessment criteria in programme handbooks and module documentation.

42 The University uses an algorithm to calculate award classifications. In some departments, students' work is assessed using grades; in others, marks are used and, where this is so, they are converted into grades for use by subject boards of examiners. The audit team found evidence of variable practice in the use and conversion of marks and grades. The University has defined a model for conversion or 'mapping' of marks to grades, and the team was told that this is used as a 'default' position, or 'loosely as a standard model'. In one area, the team was told by staff that the method of mapping marks to grades was decided at module level, but that normally the University standard model was used. However, enquiries in other areas found no evidence that this model was used, or even that its existence was recognised. The conversion of marks into grades was also a source of confusion to some external examiners, and seemed to account for a substantial part of the 'complexity' of procedure to which some of them had referred in their reports. This external view of complexity was acknowledged by the University in the SED, which also recognised some of the issues arising out of the current assessment arrangements, and indicated that the University was committed to reviewing its practice in this area.

43 The audit team also found that the information provided within the University relating to pass marks or grades was not always sufficiently transparent. The team was told by the University that the grade required for a pass was equivalent to a mark of 40 per cent. The University also uses a threshold pass mark of 35 per cent as the basis for receiving credit, and to contribute to non-honours awards. However, one DMD simply stated that the pass mark for a dissertation was 35 per cent. Some module front sheets seen by the team also stated that the pass mark was 35 per cent, and the team learned that students then had to refer to their programme handbook for more complete information. On the basis of its discussions with staff, the team therefore considered that there was a potential for confusion with regard to the information given to students concerning pass mark expectations. Students taking the same module may be unclear about the mark required to pass that module in order to contribute to their award. The team noted that the University

had established a Working Party on Simplification, which had recently recommended a move from this 'unwieldy' process to a 'marks-based system'. The team concluded that in view of the various matters relevant to the definition and communication of standards that have been identified in the above paragraphs, the University should move rapidly to implement this recommendation, together with other aspects of its Assessment Strategy. The team encourages the University, in its review, to ensure the consistent use of a single, institution-wide marking scale, so as to provide clear information to students, staff and external examiners.

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

44 In the SED the University drew attention to its 'purposeful and deliberate shared responsibility for academic quality assurance and enhancement' and a strategic institutional approach is expressed in the AQAES and its Implementation Plan. These documents outline features of the University's commitment to excellence in learning and teaching, a commitment which was described as 'non-negotiable'. The audit team found extensive evidence of widespread involvement in enhancement at all levels of staff, although the AQAES was not yet familiar to all those met by the team during the audit visit. Intentions for the enhancement of assessment strategy and practice are focused in the Assessment Strategy, which was found to be helpful, appropriate and timely, although discussions with some members of staff led the team to conclude that the University should extend and reinforce awareness of this strategy across the institution.

45 Many developments for the enhancement of the student experience are in progress. Of these, the establishment of StudyNet and the continuing development of blended learning are the most widespread and visible. However, the audit team noted numerous ways in which the University facilitates and encourages the sharing and adoption of good practice in all areas of the institution. Notable among these are the work of CELT, whose many contributions to enhancement include an annual Learning and Teaching Conference. Teaching fellows also play a significant role in enhancement at faculty, department and programme levels. Many opportunities for staff development are available, and the level of engagement, among staff met by the team, is impressive. The institution's corporate commitment to enhancement was constantly evident, for example, in the targets set for deans, and in the close engagement of the OVC with

quality management and monitoring. Its capacity to achieve ambitious developmental goals was amply demonstrated by the success of the new de Havilland Campus, and other student focused projects such as the Student Centre. The team concluded that the University's intentions for the enhancement of quality and standards were carefully planned, appropriate in the context of its mission and vision, effectively communicated, and supported by a strong management commitment.

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

46 The University's procedures for the validation and approval of new programmes are defined in UPRs and SPPs. The institution has confirmed, through a 'gap analysis', that its validation and review procedures are aligned appropriately with relevant section of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)*, published by QAA, and it cites evidence from validation reports, subject reviews and external examiners' reports to support its claim that these procedures are 'robust and sound'. Proposals for new programmes normally come from faculties to ADC for initial approval. Occasionally the OVC may propose new programmes in strategically very significant areas, but such proposals must also have faculty support. The membership and terms of reference of ADC were changed in 2003-04 to strengthen its scrutiny and decision-making procedures for new programmes and, particularly, of market and resource issues.

47 Most validation events are managed by faculties, but a few (mainly in new areas of academic development) are managed centrally by the AQO. Following initial approval by ADC the rest of the validation process is planned at a planning meeting chaired by the relevant ADAQ and including a member of the AQO. Validation panels must be chaired by a senior academic from a faculty not associated with the programme. The University provides a programme of training to its staff taking part in validation events and periodic review and chairs of validation (and periodic review) panels, and administrators who write reports of these events must be trained before they undertake these roles. Panel membership always includes one or more independent external members, at least one of whom is from academia, with appropriate subject expertise. Their appointment is approved by one of the DAQs. Other panel members may also be drawn from professional, business or industrial backgrounds. Validation panels are asked to make use of *The framework for higher education*

qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and subject benchmark statements in their deliberations, although this use was not always explicitly evident in validation reports. They make recommendations for approval to the Academic Board, via AQEC. Each stage in this process is recorded using standard forms. At the conclusion of the validation event a report is produced, again using a University standard template. The result of the validation is noted by AQEC, and an extract of the report, with its conclusions and recommendations, is sent to the Academic Board. Ratification of the validation is signed off by the Vice-Chancellor as Chair of the Academic Board.

48 The audit team found that the validation process worked as intended and was thorough and effective. Evidence of 'top-down' as well as faculty-driven programme initiation was observed. The new procedures managed by ADC were well documented and rigorous in their implementation; the Committee was evidently ready to send proposals back to faculties for further work if they did not meet the requirements for initial approval. The team noted the University's commitment to further strengthening the process through more rigorous evaluations of the validation events.

49 The University stated in the SED that its monitoring processes 'are rigorous and...make a significant contribution to the maintenance of quality and standards', and that they inform and stimulate enhancement. The University requires each programme committee to produce an Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report (AMER) using a common University template, with some allowable local variations for different types of programme. The University keeps this process, and the documentation used, under review, and has noted that the AMER template could be made easier to use. In some cases the monitoring of large and complex programmes, or groups of programmes, is reported through Subject Monitoring and Evaluation Reports (SMERs). Heads of departments also produce annual reports for their FAQECs, taking a broader subject-based view of the department's work. AMERs, SMERs and departmental reports are considered by FAQECs, which produce Annual Reports to AQEC on matters arising from the monitoring reports across the faculty. On the basis of an AMER the dean of a faculty or a head of a department 'may require a review of a programme'. Academic Board and the OVC also receive annual summaries, produced by the DAQs, of university-level issues arising from the Annual Reports of FAQECs, and the OVC comments and responds to these summaries in written reports to AQEC.

50 The audit team saw examples of substantial and thorough monitoring in the AMERs and SMERs, and were given examples of enhancements effected through the monitoring process. Through its hierarchy of committees, and through the management roles of Pro Vice-Chancellor responsible for quality and the directors of academic quality, the University was able to maintain an effective oversight of the monitoring process and its outcomes. Having reviewed the available evidence, the audit team concluded that the institution's positive evaluation of the procedures was broadly justified. However, the team considered that more analytical and evaluative attention could be given to monitoring student statistical data and, in particular, that it would assist the University in its monitoring to include in the AMERs an evaluation of trends in student cohort data.

51 The 2001 audit report drew attention to the parallel reporting lines in the annual monitoring process, and the University, having debated whether to continue this practice, has concluded that AMERs/SMERs and departmental reports serve useful purposes and resolved to continue to use both approaches. A measure of simplification was introduced by requiring that the reports be produced to a common deadline date, and the University reported that this had improved the process. AQO and chairs of FAQECs annually review the effectiveness of monitoring arrangements. The audit team believed that the University would wish to keep the pattern of parallel reporting under review, so as to satisfy itself that the reports continue to serve useful and distinctive purposes.

52 All students on postgraduate research programmes are monitored annually by their faculties. FRDBs, which include independent members from other faculties, provide an annual report to the University's Research Degrees Board (RDB). The audit team was told that, in signing off this report, the chair of the FRDB confirmed that all postgraduate research students had been appropriately monitored. This process appeared to be thorough and effective. The RDB had set up a working group to review the University's quality assurance procedures for postgraduate degrees in the light of the recently revised *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*, published by QAA.

53 Periodic review, which includes reapproval of programmes and modules, is carried out at six-year intervals on a programme or subject basis, according to the nature of the provision concerned. It follows a process similar to that for initial programme validation (with the exception of the initial scrutiny and approval by ADC), and includes a

meeting between the review panel and students. Evidence seen by the audit team showed that periodic reviews were carried out thoroughly and comprehensively. Some documentation produced by programme teams for review was reflective and self-critical, although some was lacking in the evaluative dimension. The use made of appropriate sections of the Academic Infrastructure was variable: some periodic review documentation showed that both the FHEQ and subject benchmarks had been used as frames of reference, but not all review reports referred explicitly to the FHEQ.

54 In the interval between validation and periodic review of programmes, modules may be modified through programme committees and FAQECs. External examiners are also asked to comment on proposed changes to modules. The audit team was told that programme committees would be able to consider what effect a proposed module change might have on a programme, and that revalidation could be requested if necessary. However, the team would encourage the University, as it continues to develop its policy and procedures for minor changes to programmes, to consider how the cumulative effects of changes to modules can be managed in the interval between periodic reviews.

External participation in internal review processes

55 The University stated in the SED that it places a heavy reliance on peer review in support of standards and quality, recognising the 'essential role' of independent external consultants and review panel members in its internal review processes. It uses informal input from professional advisory groups, external examiners, colleagues from other universities and professional bodies in preparing proposals for courses. The important role of external involvement with the approval and review of all programmes is guided by the UPR procedures. Formal participation in presenting a course for acceptance includes at least one external academic specialist and may also include professional/industry representatives independent of the programme. The validity of the external status of all contributors is vetted by one of the DAQs. For validation events, there is again a strong emphasis on peer review, with the participation of one or more independent external members (see above, paragraph 47). For internal periodic review, review panels are chaired by a member of a separate faculty, and must include at least one, and more usually two, external members together with at least one external from another University, approved by a DAQ. Inspection of course

resources is open to external panel members. The team saw evidence that external members had commended the University on the excellence of its regulations and procedures. The University continues to introduce improvements in the guidance notes to staff regarding external participation.

56 The audit team considered a range of University periodic reviews, validation and programme approval events from the perspective of external participation. On the basis of the evidence, the team found the claims relating to external participation to be accurate (but because of the cycle of review the adoption of procedures was fairly recent in some areas). Evidence from the DATs also demonstrated that external professional participation is in place. The team noted with approval that a clear separation is maintained between the membership of development teams who support the establishment of new programmes, and that of the validation panel. Careful and consistent monitoring of the use of external professional participation, so central to a university with vocational relevance at the heart of its mission, is already in place, or being put in place. In professional awards the involvement of externals from the profession is strongly rooted. The arrangements for external participation in programme validation and periodic review are appropriate and seem to be working well. The team found that the University has sound policies which are carefully managed to ensure appropriate and productive external participation in its quality assurance procedures.

External examiners and their reports

57 In the SED the University stated that it 'places heavy reliance on peer review by external examiners to support both quality and standards'. Procedures for the appointment of external examiners, their role and duties are laid out in the UPRs. External examiners are categorised as either subject or principal external examiners. Faculty, ADAQ, the DAQ, AQO and the Pro Vice-Chancellor check and review appointments for suitability in the light of academic criteria and degree of experience. Following the resultant recommendation, the Vice-Chancellor confirms the formal appointment on behalf of the Academic Board.

58 External examiners are fully informed about institutional assessment policies and are consulted in the assessment processes leading to all awards made by the University. Externals are offered formal training through a biennial combined induction and training workshop. This may be compulsory for inexperienced external examiners, and it is also offered to staff of the University who wish to become external examiners at other institutions. The University's

policies, regulations and expectations regarding assessment and awards are explained in an external examiners' training pack and training day, where examples of issues faced by boards of examiners are addressed. The University had recently amended its prescribed template for examiners' reports which complies with criteria in HEFCE's documents, *Information on quality and standards in higher education* (HEFCE 02/15), and *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance* (HEFCE 03/51), regarding publication of information, and in 2002-03 all external examiners were given guidance on using this new report format.

59 The audit team examined a wide range of examiners reports both from the DAT material and from additional documentary material supplied during the audit. This was amplified during the audit at meetings with academic and administrative staff. The team found that 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 University uses external examiners to check and confirm in writing that all awards adhere to external measurements of quality and standards, including subject benchmarks and levels of attainment. External examiners' reports are received by the Vice-Chancellor who forwards them to the AQO for consideration by a member of the senior management team. A cover sheet serves to identify university-wide issues such as plagiarism, production of data for examination boards, communication and resources. Where action is required on serious issues there is involvement and direction from the senior level. The subject programme committees respond, in the relevant AMER, to external examiners' comments that are subject or programme specific. Responsibility for ensuring that an appropriate response has been made remains with a senior member of faculty. The team was able to follow through action that had arisen from comments by external examiners in the DAT material provided. The UPRs set out procedures for resolving disagreements between examiners.

60 The audit team considered evidence of the University's procedure for examining considering and implementing comments made by external examiners, and found it to be robust and thorough. Concerns raised in the 2001 continuation audit report regarding adequate consideration of external examiner's comments at central institutional level had now been fully addressed. The team examined the external examiners' training pack, with report template, and feedback forms from the external

examiners training day, submitted by participants both from within and external to the University. There was clear evidence that external examiners themselves had found the report template and the training sessions offered by the University to be very helpful. These, and comments made by staff at institutional meetings, were strongly supportive of the usefulness of the training and guidance given.

61 The University has given careful attention to the way in which it appoints, supports and uses its external examiners and the team found good evidence that they played a positive role in the assurance of standards.

External reference points

62 In its SED the University welcomed the *Code of practice* and pointed out that staff from the University had contributed to the formulation of some of its sections. From 1999 onwards, the University had responded to the publication of the *Code* by initiating a gap analysis, undertaken to inform the development, design and production of university regulations. This analysis was conducted through the internal audit function of AQEC and covered all published elements of the *Code*. At the time of the present audit much progress had been made. The *Code, Section 3: Students with disabilities*, for example, had led to the review of procedures by the University. Consideration of the section of the *Code* relating to flexible learning has increased in importance with the rapid growth of the use of StudyNet. The most recent example of University's extensive use of the *Code* is in the development of its assessment strategy. The audit team found that a great deal of work has been undertaken by AQEC and FAQEC to check implementation of the *Code*, especially with regard to assessment procedures. The team appreciated that review of institutional policies and systems in the light of the *Code* is necessarily an ongoing process, and found that the University was making appropriate use of the *Code* to test and develop its systems for the management of quality and standards.

63 The SED stated that 'the University is fully compliant' with the FHEQ. All programme specifications and DMDs seen by the audit team showed that programmes and modules were appropriately aligned with relevant levels in the FHEQ. The University's regulations include a requirement that 'all courses must be identified with one of the following levels', and a series of level descriptors is provided in the UPR. The team was told that these descriptions were mapped onto the FHEQ, and the University argued that if a programme or module was aligned with one of

these level descriptors, it was thereby aligned with the FHEQ. However, the team found these statements imprecise and self-referential; they did not characterise academic levels in detail, and they did not appear to be based on the FHEQ.

64 External examiners' reports include a statement to the effect that the achievements of students match the relevant level descriptors in the FHEQ. The University also stated that it 'integrates the Framework within all validation and review events'. The audit team was told that validation and review panels were asked to make reference to the FHEQ in their deliberations, although the team found that not all validation and review reports mention the FHEQ. The team was also told that programme development groups were asked, at planning meetings for validations or reviews, to make use of the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements in the design of programmes and modules, and in the preparation of programme specifications. It was also suggested that the University's guidance documentation for programme development drew attention to the FHEQ and subject benchmarks as a frame of reference for programme design. The team noted that guidance documents did indeed draw attention to subject benchmark statements in this context. However, guidance on the use of the FHEQ appeared to be less comprehensive. A CELT document suggested that the FHEQ could be used as a guide to the writing of learning outcomes, but none of the regulatory or guidance documents seen by the team pointed to the FHEQ as a normative point of reference for programme and module development. For the sake of clarity and consistency the University is therefore advised to clarify and strengthen its published regulatory guidance, particularly with regard to programme validation, so as to include explicit reference to the FHEQ, or to other descriptors of levels and qualifications aligned with the FHEQ.

65 The audit team reviewed a large number of documents and heard evidence at meetings with academic and administrative staff that supported the University's claim to have used subject benchmarks in the development and review of its modules and awards, and to have produced programme specifications for all its programmes. The team agreed that the University addressed in a very positive way the development of programme specifications, together with their incorporation in its public literature and on its website. The revised programme specifications seen in the course of the DAT in the Faculty of Art and Design were considered to be exemplary practice.

66 The University has given careful attention to many of the expectations implicit in the Academic Infrastructure, and the embedding of these into the institutional procedures was clearly evident to the audit team. As indicated above, however, the University will wish to give more systematic attention to the FHEQ as an external reference point in its validation and review procedures, and strengthen its guidelines in this area. The team was confident that AQEC is well placed to monitor changes in University practices and to ensure that these take into account the reference points of the Academic Infrastructure.

Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

67 The University believes that external quality assurance reports reinforce its confidence in the quality and standards of its programmes. Since 2001 the University has participated in eight QAA subject reviews. It has also been the subject of Ofsted inspections of both primary and secondary Initial Teacher Training. Reports of these reviews and inspections are considered at all levels from programme teams to FAQECs, AQEC, Academic Board, OVC and the Board of Governors. The University reported examples of changes to policy and practice (for example, standardisation of AMER formats, and development of the Assessment Strategy) which have been influenced by the reports of these external engagements. Programme teams are expected to discuss external review reports in AMERs, and action plans produced in response to such reports are agreed by FAQECs.

68 The SED offered little information regarding other reviews or accreditation visits carried out by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs), but the audit team was told that these were combined with internal periodic reviews wherever possible. Until recently, PSRB review reports have been considered at faculty level, but the University has now decided that all such reports will also be taken to AQEC which, in the view of the team, will helpfully increase the institutional oversight of comments made. No specific concerns about provision at the University have been raised by any PSRB, nor by purchasers of healthcare education and training. On the contrary, the University has been successful since 2001 in gaining additional contracts for both health provision and probation education and training. The team saw evidence that PSRB reports were used effectively as stimuli for enhancement at department and programme team levels.

Student representation at operational and institutional level

69 There are opportunities for students to be represented at all levels of decision-making in the University. Student representatives have automatic membership of all the senior committees within the University. Representatives in turn operate down at programme level, at faculty level through membership of FAQEC and at University level on the Student Council. Some faculties have student liaison groups. The Pro Vice-Chancellor meets with officers of the Students' Union on a regular basis in the Vice-Chancellor's and Students' Union Group. The group meets at least four times in each academic year and reports directly to the OVC. The recent appointment of a Dean of Students means that there is a direct line through to the University senior committees. Thus, if a student concern arose it could be reported to a student representative then to the Dean of Students and, as necessary, through to deans and senior University committees. The officers of the Students' Union welcomed the personal relationship they have with senior members of the University and the opportunities they have to raise issues in this forum.

70 The audit team had the opportunity to meet with members of the Students' Union in the course of the briefing visit and with six groups of students during the audit visit. It found that the system for formal representation of students in the University committees is clear and comprehensive. It was apparent from the meetings that students are generally happy with the opportunities for representation that they are offered, and which is supported by the training which the Students' Union provides. Moreover, there was a consensus that the student voice is listened to and that action is taken where possible to address their concerns, and the team heard convincing examples of such action.

71 Officers of the Students' Union who had served in 2003-04 had been involved in the production of the University's SED. It was reported that they had also put a considerable effort into the production of their own SWS. They had devised their own questionnaire, undertaken an extensive advertising campaign and organised its distribution, completion and analysis. They felt that the level of response was high compared with those obtained by other Students' Unions and that the profile of the respondents largely matched the profile of the University population. The SWS was particularly well written and was to be considered in the autumn term of 2004-05 by staff and students at various

levels of the institution. The SWS report had indicated a generally high level of satisfaction with those areas relating to academic quality and standards, while identifying some areas for attention which were outside the direct concerns of the audit. The team was reassured to learn that these concerns were understood in the University and that it was working actively to address them.

72 Student participation in quality assurance is most significant at programme level. In all cases, student representatives met by members of the team in the four DATs considered that there was an adequate level of student membership on programme committees and that their concerns were being addressed. They gave some examples of responsiveness to student feedback, including additional support for modules and rescheduling of exams.

73 Overall, the audit team formed the view that the systems for student representation were operating effectively on University committees and at programme level. It also found strong and helpful lines of communication between student representatives and the senior managers of the University.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

74 The SED explained that the University has an institutional approach to gathering student feedback at two levels, the main mechanism being through questionnaires. A common MSQ (Module and Staff Questionnaire) is used every year for all modules and the results from important sections of the questionnaires are contained within the annual monitoring reports. The MSQ informs the evaluation of the module delivery report in which module leaders provide their responses to the student evaluations. Not only does this include opportunities to comment on student feedback, but it also covers comments on the results of the assessment, the course team's reflections about the module and its delivery as well as future plans. The student evaluation and associated module leader responses are then fed back to the student body, thereby closing the quality loop. While finding these arrangements to be generally very positive, the audit team believed that the University may wish to consider systematically reporting response rates, as these are an important component in helping to decide what weight is to be attached to particular student responses. It might also be helpful to report overall module ratings. A particular point of good practice noted by the team was the fact that individual lecturer ratings derived from student feedback are fed into staff appraisals and are used as part of the process of identifying individual staff development needs.

75 The second level of feedback mechanism is the use of the SFQ (Student Feedback Questionnaire) which is issued to all students from all years on an annual basis and which seeks to gather more general feedback about the student experience in the University. The questionnaire includes specifics about the individual, questions on their studies, learning resources and the University in general including the Students' Union. The survey outcomes again reveal a high level of satisfaction from the students. There was less certainty from students met by the audit team concerning the precise fora in which the results of the SFQs were considered, and whether students were present. The continuing use of the SFQ is to be reviewed with the advent of the National Student Survey which is to be implemented early in 2005. The introduction of this new questionnaire may add to the concern, identified in the SED, that students may be suffering questionnaire fatigue. In addition to questionnaires, the University obtains feedback from the Students' Union and the various student representative groups. The team was convinced that student feedback is gathered systematically across the University and is used to feed into quality assurance and enhancement at all levels.

76 Feedback from employers is obtained from professional advisory groups which include industrial liaison groups and employers' forums. A number of the current group members are University alumni. Several of these groups are used explicitly to support both placement activities and project work as well as, where relevant, providing support for PSRB accreditation. They are also used for the planning stage of new programmes and for periodic review. The University recognised that obtaining graduate feedback is an area where there is room for improvement. In some parts of the University this was very strong (Automotive Engineering, for example) and in other areas, such as Health, the University was gaining employer feedback from recent graduates which in turn was feeding into the design of new programmes. The University has now put in place a professional advisory group, or its equivalent, for all programmes of study.

Progression and completion statistics

77 University statistics are produced using data from the central student record system, which forms part of the GENESIS management information system. This is exploited, in particular, in monitoring student progression on an annual basis. The audit team found that some monitoring reports considered statistical information covering a three year period, but this did not appear to be consistent

practice. The team found only limited evidence in the documentation that this information was used to monitor trends although staff reported that this happened on a more informal basis. Evidence was produced that overall trends are also monitored by the Academic Board, but the team would suggest that a more detailed review of what is happening at programme and even module level is necessary for a full analysis of the factors which affect a given cohort of students.

78 In 2001, the University identified that a number of its students leave programmes before the completion of their course. There was an attrition rate that was slightly higher (at 16 per cent) than the HEFCE benchmark norm for similar institutions (15 per cent). In recognition of this it set up a Working Group on Student Retention which reported in May 2002. The Working Group made extensive use of GENESIS in an attempt to analyse the retention problems. The final report made 34 recommendations and the majority of these were adopted by the University. The attrition rate at the time of the audit stood at 13 per cent, an improvement on the benchmark norm. One key recommendation made by the Working Group was that all programmes are provided with cohort tracking statistics. Indeed, in a recent validation report the panel recommended a more detailed cohort analysis to help monitor the progress of particular groups of students. The audit team was not convinced that such analysis was taking place across the institution and considered that a valuable opportunity was being missed, particularly in tracking specific cohorts such as direct entrants and international students (see also paragraph 112 below). It would therefore encourage the University to institute an annual process for tracking specific cohorts of students, and including in AMERs a discussion of longer term trends. This information could then be used to inform more directly its student admissions policy.

79 GENESIS not only deals with student records, but is an integrated system which also covers Personnel and Finance. Apart from day-to-day management, according to the SED, 'staff are able to download numerous reports including: data for the Board of Examiners; admissions and progression statistics for use in the AMERs; module grade profiles for use in Departmental Annual Reports; Pass Lists and University Transcripts'. A major product of the system is the generation of the monthly report received by the Vice-Chancellor which includes a large amount of statistical data including such things as updates on admissions and patterns of StudyNet usage. Following a useful

demonstration of the system, and considering its extensive and effective use in many areas of the University's work from course management to strategic development, the audit team formed the view that the University possessed an excellent management information system in GENESIS.

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

80 The SED stated that the appointment and appraisal processes for teaching staff were given in detail in the recruitment handbook which is available to all staff on the University's intranet system. The annual appraisal process, developmental in focus, includes a six month review, is not linked to remuneration and informs staff development plans. The SDC, reporting to Academic Board for this aspect, facilitates the consultation with key staff in the institution over the production and monitoring of the annual staff development plan. Faculties report annually on their progress with staff development activities. The Equality Unit reports on the outcomes of monitoring recruitment, staff profile and progression by gender, ethnicity, disability and age. All new and inexperienced teaching staff are required to attend the University's programme for Professional Academic Development (PAD), introduced in its current form in 2002, which was accredited by the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHe), now part of the Higher Education Academy. Inexperienced probationers must successfully complete the three day PAD1 module as a condition of their probation requirements.

81 The SED claimed that the University is able to 'reward academic staff in a number of ways' and described the introduction in 2001 of permanent posts of teaching fellowships as a 'means of providing career development for staff who are committed to, and able to demonstrate, excellence in learning and teaching'. The SED explained further that the 'academic staff may apply for a (teaching) fellowship at any time and an appointment carries automatic promotion to Principal Lecturer grade'.

82 The audit team in discussions with staff confirmed the SED claims relating to the embedding and effectiveness of the induction and annual appraisal process across the institution for all academic staff including those on fractional contracts, and to the contribution of the PAD programme for new, inexperienced staff. The team found evidence of good practice in the linking of the outcome of peer observation of teaching and of student feedback from MSQs to the annual appraisal process, thus providing a direct link with staff development.

83 The introduction of the teaching fellowships and Vice-Chancellor's awards were regarded by the University as important signals of the value placed on high quality teaching, and also as providing effective mechanisms for the dissemination of good practice. The discussions with staff confirmed that the seven teaching fellows had provided significant support and enhancement to learning and teaching through input into PAD, staff development workshops and contribution to the University's Journal for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching. Their role has been recently redefined to include an institutional dimension, for which they are attached to the CELT.

84 The SED described the establishment in 2002 of CELT as a new organisational unit sitting outside the faculty structure, with its role 'to provide pedagogic support to academic staff'. The six staff based in CELT are further supplemented by support from the University's teaching fellows. The University claimed that CELT's 'range of activities to support staff in their learning and teaching function include the Annual Learning and Teaching Conference, the new Journal, annually funding teaching projects and that CELT is the focus of supporting staff aspiring for national recognition'.

85 The SED stated that academic staff are further supported in their development through the availability of PAD modules, which provide the 'opportunity for staff to amass credit for an MA award'; through an institution-wide peer observation of teaching process; through the encouragement of staff to engage with national agencies concerned with enhancement; through the well-articulated Human Resources Strategy; and through an extensive range of development opportunities. Staff development, including that offered by CELT, is centrally coordinated by the Staff Development Unit and guided by the staff development policy. The monitoring of this policy, which includes the promotion of equal opportunities, is reported to Academic Board. This central unit also provides staff development, including management development programmes, and works with the AQO and CELT on areas of staff development directly related to academic quality assurance and enhancement. The responsibility for providing relevant staff support rests with the line manager who identifies training and development needs at appraisal. The staff development budget is devolved to heads of department; the departmental contribution to the centrally allocated staff development budget is considerable.

86 The audit team reviewed evidence of the annual monitoring and reporting arrangements for reviewing the effectiveness of the appraisal and staff

development activities across the University both at department and faculty level, and centrally. This confirmed the University's own view, as stated in the SED, that the current monitoring arrangements were over-complex. The team recommends that the University proceed with the planned review to enable simplification of the monitoring and reporting arrangements relating to development and appraisal.

87 From discussions with staff at DAT and institutional meetings, the audit team was able to confirm the SED's claims relating to the quality, range and accessibility of the University's staff development programme. The team particularly noted a number of areas of good practice in terms of the staff development activities available which would directly support quality and standards. The University provided training programmes for new supervisors of research degree students; for newly appointed external examiners and for University staff in preparation of taking on external examiner roles at other higher education institutions; for chairs of recruitment panels; for chairs and clerks of review and validation panels, and of examination boards. The meetings held during the audit also confirmed the availability and take up of staff development activities to all staff: new and experienced staff as well as staff on part-time or visiting lecturer contracts. Examples included experienced academic staff undertaking study of PAD modules towards an MA; recently appointed experienced staff participating in training on the writing of monitoring reports; and inexperienced staff being supported in developing the use of StudyNet.

88 In addition to the staff development opportunities provided at the University, staff are encouraged to engage with external national agencies concerned with enhancement. At the time of the audit, around 25 percent of University staff were members of the Higher Education Academy/ILTHE. The audit team also saw evidence of a number of engagements with national agencies through individual staff contributions to support benchmark groups, Learning and Teaching Subject Network (LTSN), to the LTSN generic centre and, through the institution hosting national conferences on learning and teaching, and of the presentation of papers on pedagogic research and practice.

89 The audit team concluded that the University provides strong and effective systems in support of its staff which will enhance students' learning experience and support the quality assurance of its programmes. The team believed that the quality and level of this support constituted good practice.

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

90 The University has a limited portfolio of distance-learning (DL) provision. The SED did not make any reference to specific quality arrangements for DL provision. In discussion with staff the University confirmed that any such DL provision is approved and monitored in the same way as other programmes, using normal department, faculty and University processes and committees.

91 The audit team was able to review the documents relating to the approval of a DL MSc Computer Science programme. This confirmed the institutional position on approval processes and indicated that the validation process had considered the guidelines for DL programmes, published by QAA, as a reference point. The team saw evidence to enable it to come to a view that current annual monitoring and review procedures provided the University with an appropriate means to monitor and manage the quality of the DL provision.

92 At the time of the audit, the University was considering the institutional implications of the guidance provided within the precepts of the recently published section of the *Code of Practice, Section 2: Collaborative Provision and flexible, distributed learning (including e-learning)*. The SED did not make reference to specific quality management arrangements for flexible or distributed learning; as with DL provision the discussion with staff confirmed that such provision is approved and monitored in the same ways as other programmes. With the planned further development of StudyNet to underpin the move towards a blended learning environment for all students, the incorporation of guidance from the *Code* will be helpful for the University in developing its quality management arrangements for this provision.

Learning support resources

93 The SED claimed that 'the University's approach to the provision of learning resources is founded on the delivery of fully integrated computing, library and media academic support services for students within a cohesive physical and on-line learning environment for access to information, its study, presentation and communication, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, on and off campus'. The SED explained that the delivery of this support is managed through the University's Learning and Information Services (LIS) who work in partnership with the faculties to ensure relevant resources, services and support are available for staff and

students. Each faculty has a named LIS consultant with LIS providing representation on faculty and University committees, on programme development and review processes as well as informal liaison with individual academic staff. The SED also claimed that the LIS development programme interacts with key University strategies including the Information Strategy and the Learning and Teaching Strategy.

94 Reflecting the campus orientation of the academic provision, the University has three dedicated campus Learning Resource Centres (LRCs) which provide access for staff and students to the support materials and provide over 2,900 study places to support individual study and group work. The LRCs house specialist facilities such as video studios, video conferencing and assistive technology for disability support and multimedia development laboratories. Approximately half of the study places (1,500) are equipped with computer workstations which offer access through the University's integrated student desktop to the range of networked resources and services. These include the internet, email, software applications, generic and specialist software, the Voyager library and resource management system, the StudyNet on-line learning environment, information databases, electronic journals, past examination papers, self-help guides, University information and self-service printing. The LRCs also house the University's collections of printed books and journals and audiovisual materials. The collections are arranged to support the subject areas delivered on each campus; the on-line access to the University's collections and search facility provided by the Voyager system was welcomed by students who met with the audit team.

95 The development of the University's managed learning environment, StudyNet, is a key element in the effective support of learning resources to students which enables access to textual and electronic resources (see below, paragraphs 157 to 165). The evidence available through the SWS and the student evaluation survey on which it was based suggested that the least positive aspect of the learning support was that related to the availability of core textbooks. The audit team recommends that the University continue to develop mechanisms that provide appropriate access and availability to hard copy textual learning resources.

96 The development of the learning resources is closely linked to the academic planning of the University through the detailed consideration of resources required for new developments by the ADC. The evaluation of the effectiveness of learning support resources is provided by staff and student

feedback through programme committees, monitoring reports and reviews/validation reports. Regular service usage monitoring data is provided to the OVC to identify trends and to inform future planning priorities and developments.

97 Overall, the audit team was able to confirm the claims made by the University for its commitment to high quality learning resources for students, and found substantial evidence of the good management and provision of a high quality learning environment. The team considered this to be a feature of good practice.

Academic guidance, support and supervision

98 Information relating to academic guidance is given to all students by means of programme handbooks and through StudyNet. Each student receives academic support from tutors. These may be personal tutors, year tutors, cohort tutors or programme tutors. The SED claimed that 'all students will have support from at least two of these types of tutor'. Generally, the role of the department is to provide academic support to students, and to guide students towards other support proactively, offering clear signposts to such services in handbooks and through StudyNet. The University is in the process of developing arrangements for student personal development plans (PDP) to support academic guidance, using StudyNet as a delivery vehicle. The implementation is planned for the 2005-06 academic year, following pilot projects in the current academic year.

99 Students have access to information in departmental handbooks, through StudyNet and on both departmental and individual service web pages. Students whose first language is not English have access to, or can be required to attend instruction classes, with the aim of supporting the development of oral and written communication. Students in need of support beyond the department have several routes towards it. They may be directed to it by an academic tutor or via other information sources, and are expected to take on the responsibility of taking up support. The University has recently established a Student Centre which offers a 'one-stop-shop' for administrative and other student support. Support is also provided by the Office of the Dean of Students (see below paragraph 105).

100 As part of the preparation of the SWS, a section of the questionnaire issued to the students covered the quality of teaching and also the academic support and approachability of the lecturers. Students were positive about lecturers'

approachability but were less positive with regard to the support given in practical sessions, the teaching material and the organisation and planning of lectures. During meetings with groups of students, the audit team found that the students were satisfied with the arrangements for academic support and, despite the variations in practice, most appeared to be aware of whom to approach for support.

101 The team saw evidence of appropriate support for international students and some very good practice in the nature and scope of support provided in English for academic purposes. International students have access to a wide range of supporting information through StudyNet and are provided with a well-structured induction experience and assistance on arrival as well as being appropriately supported during their studies.

102 Postgraduate taught course students receive academic support and guidance within the department responsible for the delivery of their degree. A programme of generic training, which is mapped against the Research Councils' postgraduate skills requirements, is provided to support research students with their individual programmes of study. It includes workshops and seminars. There is also a residential course designed especially for part-time and overseas-based research students. The international student induction sessions were particularly welcomed. Attendance at the training sessions varies according to individual research student needs and is monitored at faculty level. A 'Postgraduate Skills Development Training Card', is used to enable students to record and review their own progress. Postgraduate students are also encouraged to attend specific seminars within their own faculties. General and subject-specific sessions make up a research student's programme of related study and are intended to support students' overall development and their progress through their research studies. Support exists for research students through their research supervisors. Each student has at least two supervisors and sometimes up to four research supervisors also act as personal tutors. Students progressing from MPhil to PhD are given support and guidance about progression arrangements. The postgraduate research students whom the team met were particularly enthusiastic about the level of supervision they received as well as the praising the quality of the facilities made available to them. The University offers staff development and support to staff involved in the supervision of research degree students. There is a training programme for new supervisors and updating sessions for experienced supervisors. There are also training workshops for internal examiners of research students.

103 The audit team found that students praised the accessibility of support, and were able to choose for themselves which route to follow. Students in meetings seemed unconcerned about the nature of formal arrangements, but were always clear about the route or routes that they would take to seek help, often giving examples, which emphasised the accessibility of support. The systems appeared to offer an effective network of support, which would catch most individuals in most circumstances of difficulty, albeit through slightly different mechanisms within the different faculties. The team found a range of evidence indicating effective academic support for both undergraduate and postgraduate students, well matched to the University's educational aims.

Personal support and guidance

104 In its more pastoral aspect, student support is provided at departmental level, although the nature of the arrangements varies from faculty to faculty. The SED did not make direct reference to personal tutors, and the audit team learned that the University was phasing out the use of the term 'personal tutor', although there was also a confirmation of the importance of the role of personal tutors. It was acknowledged that a range of different models of personal support and guidance were operated in the University. For postgraduate research students, the role is undertaken by members of the supervisory team.

105 Tutors are able to refer students to a variety of sources of additional and specialist support. The University has established a Student Centre which acts as a single source of support for students on issues such as finance, accommodation and registration. It is also the location of the International Centre. The Office of the Dean of Students manages the provision of a range of support services. These services include the chaplaincy, childcare services, and counselling services, and the Dean of Students' Office is the main link with the Students' Union. There is also a medical practice on the College Lane Campus at which the students may register. The University Housing Service assists students in finding accommodation, although all first-year students are guaranteed a place in University accommodation. There is a Sports and Recreation Department which runs facilities rated highly by students and including a health and fitness centre which is open to the community. Careers support and guidance for students is provided by the Careers Advisory Service. This is supplemented by arrangements in individual faculties where career development skills are embedded within curricula and through PDPs. The

profile of the Careers Advisory Service was raised in 2003-04 when it became part of LIS and was more centrally located. It reports annually to the University. A strategy for increasing graduate employability has been drawn up by the University in consultation with the Southern Universities Management Services.

106 The SWS did not refer directly to these services or to personal tutoring; the comments in the appropriate sections of the student submission mainly referred to LIS and the LRCs. The audit team formed the view that for individual students it was of little concern which route they took to arrive at the support services, and many stated that they would explore sources of support via StudyNet. The team found evidence that, in general, the pastoral support framework works well, despite some variability of implementation. The University offers a good range of support services that are likely to be enhanced by the recent organisational changes which aim to improve accessibility.

Section 3: The audit investigations: discipline trails and thematic enquiries

Discipline audit trails

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

Business

108 The scope of the DAT comprised undergraduate programmes of study in business leading to the following awards: BA (Hons) Business Studies (Sandwich), BA (Hons) Business Administration (BABA), BSc (Hons) Business Information Systems (full-time and Sandwich awards) (BIS). All of the above programmes are based in the University's Business School on the de Havilland Campus. The DSED comprised a helpful short summary which articulated the nature of the programmes within the scope of the DAT; an overview of issues arising since the end of the last academic session (2003-04); an update on the action points arising from the AMERs for academic year 2002-03; and a summary of the effect of recent changes in University policies and procedures. The update on actions resulting from 2002-03 academic year monitoring reports included those from subject and award reports as well as departmental reports and student forum meetings. The DSED documentation

included a substantial number of internal reports relating to the management of quality and standards of the programmes within the scope of the DAT, programme specifications, student and programme handbooks, the faculty assessment handbook for staff, minutes of programme and student meetings, staff and student numbers, and correspondence from PSRBs relating to the accreditation of these programmes. Samples of student work were also provided.

109 The students on these programmes represent approximately 40 per cent of the undergraduate population in the Business School: 886 of 2,182 students registered in 2003 with an intake of 284 students in 2003-04. A particular feature of the provision is the percentage of direct entrants to these programmes. Such entrants account for 44 per cent of the year two and 58 per cent of final year direct entrants into the School's undergraduate programmes. This intake of direct entrants also accounts for a significant proportion of the year two and three students on the BABA degree. The direct entrants include those recruited from collaborative partners in the UK and internationally.

110 A complete set of programme specifications for the awards listed above was appended to the DSED. For each programme, the relevant subject benchmark statement, internal and external reference points, including the FHEQ, had been explicitly used to formulate the programme specifications. The programme specifications reviewed as part of the DAT indicated engagement with relevant subject benchmarks; in the case of the BIS degree this linkage between the two relevant benchmarks was very clearly explained in a supporting document to the programme specification. Changes at module level, which impact on the outcomes of the programmes, are incorporated in the relevant programme specification through an annual review. While the FHEQ was used as a reference point in developing the programme specification, it was less clear to the audit team how it was used to underpin the definition of expected performance levels, or in module development.

111 At a detailed level, student data is derived directly from assessment. For the modules reviewed by the audit team each assessment, contributing to the overall grade, had a grading sheet showing the performance of each student, average and standard deviation; in addition, the information provided included statistical information on the performance of students within award cohorts. The individual module reports and the subject annual monitoring report utilise this data to discuss the student achievement for

the reporting academic session, but do not systematically indicate evidence of trend analysis at module or award level. In discussion, staff indicated that cohort and trend analyses were available and had been used, for instance, to inform the changes to English language entrance requirements. At programme level, the review of the annual monitoring reports confirmed the availability of performance data for the year under review but did not provide evidence of the availability of comparative data for other awards in the Business School, or of student cohorts such as direct entrants or those of previous years. The draft Faculty Report for 2003-04 indicated consideration by the Faculty of modules with high failure rates against the institutional benchmarks, by level. This report also discussed the performance of overseas direct entrants (which represented 40 per cent of the level 2 students, of which 63 per cent were new to the Faculty). The module failure rates on some modules and the performance of direct entrants were clearly of concern to the Faculty and the University because of the consequent impact on student progression and attrition rates. In discussion with staff the changed entry requirements and the development of embedded English language provision were seen as very positive steps in improving the performance of overseas direct entrants. There was also an indication that the Faculty had reviewed its admissions policy, such that in future overseas direct entrants will mainly be from established partner institutions. This was claimed to have had a positive impact on the quality of entrants for 2004-05.

112 The monitoring and evaluation processes reviewed at DAT level indicated the general soundness of internal moderating and review for the programmes. SMER and AMER provided clear evidence of consideration of student evaluations and external examiner reports, and evidence of updating on actions from previous year's monitoring. The annual monitoring and evaluation process is based on a dual stream of activity - one focused on modules, subjects and departments and the other on programmes. In addition, the Faculty produces an annual report which summarises the contributing reports. The reports reviewed by the audit team indicated engagement with, and responsiveness to, staff and student evaluation, external examiner reports and, where appropriate, PSRBs. There were examples of analysis and critical reflection within the reports although some still demonstrated room for enhancement in the evaluative approach to this process. In the light of the recent restructuring of the departments, the Faculty might now wish to review the current dual reporting arrangements which the team considered to be unnecessarily complicated.

113 The programmes had recently been subject to the University's internal periodic review process which included the modules/subjects contributing to the programme and a revalidation of the programmes. The documentation reviewed by the audit team included all the documentation for the periodic review of the BABA programme. This confirmed the involvement of panel members external to the Faculty and to the University, and the consideration of students and employers views in the review process. Extensive professional accreditation of the programmes reviewed in the DAT had also indicated the confirmation of the standards and the suitability of the programmes and learning resources by the relevant PSRBs.

114 The reports of external examiners, after receipt in the Faculty, are considered at subject and programme level. The Faculty had recently revised its process for responding to external examiners to improve the consistency and timeliness of response. The evidence available to the audit team suggested that the process was now effective. The reports reviewed also provided evidence of the central review of the reports and of issues arising from this review. However this evidence also suggested that there was insufficient clarity within the Faculty regarding the point of responsibility for chasing up late external examiner reports.

115 The Faculty Assessment Handbook, referenced to the *Code of practice* and University Assessment Strategy, provides an overview of the assessment process and guidance for practitioners. Some examples of helpful practice include the clear guidance on the assessment of presentations and group work and development of generic assessment criteria for postgraduate awards. The review of modules by the audit team showed that the guidance was followed. It also confirmed the use of assessment criteria at module level; however, the format of the criteria appeared to vary and they were not clearly related to the reference points of the Academic Infrastructure. All modules reviewed provided clear marking guidance for tutors and an indicative marking scheme to students; all confirmed operation of internal moderation process. Where appropriate from the form of assessment, feedback on modules was provided to students on a standardised faculty form, which provided indication of grade and how the work could be improved. Students who met with the team stated that they had sufficient information from which to understand academic expectations within assessment tasks and timely feedback. The standard of student achievement on the programmes investigated in the

DAT was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the national FHEQ.

116 A range of student handbooks provides information on programmes, modules, staff and support as well as procedures and regulations. The Faculty undergraduate student handbook is complemented by a programme specification handbook which provides detailed information on the programme and its contributing modules, assessment requirements and staff contacts. Student representatives who met with the audit team confirmed the availability, timeliness and accuracy of the course-related information as well as pre-entry information provided in the prospectus and through open days. Many of the students referred to regular use of StudyNet as a source of information. The team considered that the arrangements for induction and information to students generally worked well.

117 Induction activities for first-year students and the orientation week for international students, introduced in 2003, were seen as helpful by the students. The recent development of embedding English language skills developed in business modules was seen by staff as a significant contribution to improving the student experience. The DSED referred to the development of induction arrangements to support student motivation and also outlined sessions introduced to support those undertaking a work placement. The audit team considered that this would be a positive enhancement for students, particularly as in recent years the numbers undertaking placements had significantly declined. The DSED also referred to the changes in the classification system for students on placement degrees to bring the Faculty provision in line with the other similar degree arrangements in the University. The team considered that the implications of this change should be monitored with regard to its potential impact on the number of students on placements.

118 The DSED summary did not make any specific reference to learning resources although the monitoring reports and student evaluations contributing to the documentation included comments from staff and students. These indicated the generally high level of satisfaction with learning resources. The students who meet the audit team were very positive about the learning support resources and the development of the de Havilland Campus. The DSED referred to the strengthening of staffing arrangements in the Faculty to ensure that the staff workloads could be managed effectively. In the meetings with staff and students the team was reassured regarding the appropriateness of current staffing arrangements.

119 Evidence from the minutes of programme committee meetings and from the minutes of the student forum indicated that formal staff/student liaison was taking place at the level of the programme and at faculty level. The communication at these meetings is two-way: staff providing updates on previous items/actions, and students providing feedback on current experience. The students who met with the audit team confirmed the usefulness of the programme liaison and of the faculty-based student forums. The dissemination of the outcomes of these meetings was through the student representative system. Students felt, however, that this means of communication had some limitations where the student cohort was a large one.

120 On the basis of the written evidence it examined and its meetings with staff and students, the audit team was satisfied that the quality of the learning opportunities available to students was suitable for programmes of study leading to the awards of BA (Hons) and BSc (Hons).

Engineering

121 The DAT covered the BEng (Hons) Aerospace Engineering and the BEng (Hons) Aerospace Systems Engineering. The DSED included a self-evaluation which made reference to a number of documents provided. These included the Departmental Annual Report (2002-03 and 2001-02), AMER (Level 1 and Level 2, 3), programme specifications, a Student Handbook for 2004-05, Programme Committee Minutes (2003-04), the 2004 Undergraduate Programme Review Report and reports from the Institution of Mechanical Engineers and The Royal Aeronautical Society as relevant PSRBs. Samples of student work were also available.

122 Programme specifications were included within the DSED documentation. These had been produced by the Department and updated in line with the University template for the periodic review. The AMER includes a section which specifies whether any programme specifications have been updated. Consideration of the programme specifications showed very little difference in terms of both the learning outcomes or in the range of modules offered between the two programmes considered within the DAT. There was some confusion among the students as to the difference between the programmes, although the members of staff were able to articulate some differentiation. In the audit team's view the University should provide some clarification of the extent to which programmes need to vary before separate award titles can be used.

123 New programme and module approval processes are initiated by groups of staff within the Department through the identification of new areas or as a result of student demand. Proposals are presented to a departmental management group and then to the DAG. According to staff 'alignment with FHEQ and benchmark statements is part of the process', although the procedure for ensuring this did not appear to be explicitly laid down in any departmental or faculty documentation. There are three industrial advisory panels operating in the Department, one covering the aerospace programmes. These include graduates of the programmes and meetings take place at industrial partners' premises. A range of issues is discussed, including programme development.

124 Progression rates were not directly addressed in the DSED but they were included in other parts of the documentation. These reports referred to University produced statistics, but there was no evidence of year-on-year comparisons which might indicate whether trends (good or bad) were identifiable. The DSED discussed issues relating to the difficulties in maintaining 'student numbers in the face of increasing competition' and the actions that the Department was taking to overcome this. Evidence from annual monitoring showed use of both external examiner reports and student feedback from end-of-course questionnaires. The Departmental Annual Report included tables of modules with higher than average failure rates (some as high as 50 per cent) for levels 1, 2 and 3. There was discussion in the report of 'a number of modules with failure rates raising some concern'. These were identified by the University monitoring processes and reported in the 2002-03 Departmental Annual Report. The appropriate actions to address this matter were briefly touched on in the DSED, with a requirement for an action plan from the module team which was to be evaluated in the following round of monitoring.

125 Both programmes had been subject to the University's internal periodic review process, which incorporated review of the modules contributing to the programmes and a revalidation of both BEng programmes. The documentation reviewed by the audit team included the documentation for the review which confirmed the involvement of panel members external to the Faculty and to the University. It also demonstrated the consideration of students and employers views in the process. PSRB accreditation of the programmes reviewed also indicated the confirmation of the standards and the suitability of the learning resources.

126 The views of the external examiners as expressed in their reports were considered and acted on by the Department and Faculty. Where issues had been raised, there was evidence that the Department had considered them in detail and, where considered appropriate, identified remedial action. This was reflected through the annual monitoring process and through written responses to external examiners that are reproduced in the Departmental Annual Report.

127 Students initially received information about their programme of study through the prospectus and other programme-specific information. Open days are held for applicants and these often involved current students in providing information for prospective students. Students thought that the open days were helpful and accurate in their information content and that the prospectus information was generally accurate. Applicants also had the benefit of limited access to StudyNet prior to their enrolment. In the view of the audit team, these arrangements worked well and were enthusiastically supported by the students. Once enrolled, the students' main source of information on their programme, modules and University regulations and procedures was StudyNet, although hard copy was also available. In particular, StudyNet was cited as being extremely useful as a conduit for course information (programme changes etc) and as a forum for discussion. The content of the information was judged accurate and access did not appear to be problematic. There were no adverse comments from students on the accuracy of any information provided by the Department.

128 The DSED referred to the restructuring that took place in 2003, where the former Departments of Aerospace, Automotive and Mechanical Engineering and Design, Technology and Management were merged to form the new Department of Aerospace, Automotive and Design Engineering. Both the DSED and the Department Annual Report had identified concerns with regard to the sufficient level of academic and technical staff support for the programmes. However, the University had allocated additional posts to the Department in 2004, and the Head of Department believed that this had resolved the staffing difficulties.

129 The DSED did not include reference to staff peer observation and appraisal schemes. The University claimed that an institution-wide peer observation of teaching scheme was in place. Details of this were provided in the course of the DAT and these included a process where agreed comments from peer observation, together with reports on

teaching from the student questionnaires informed the appraisal process. This in turn fed into planning for staff development. There was also evidence also of staff development to support peer observation.

130 A variety of strategies are used for learning, teaching and assessment, including use of information technology (IT). Staff members in the Department make extensive and innovative use of StudyNet, with some sites, such as that for Fluid Mechanics and Thermodynamics extending its use in assessment and feedback. First-year induction events provided by the Department were particularly well received by students. There did not appear to be any difficulties with access to, or quality of, either laboratory or IT resources. In particular, students and staff were very enthusiastic about the flight simulator which is used at all levels in the programmes. The standard of student achievement on the programmes investigated in the DAT was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the national FHEQ.

131 The DSED described the personal tutoring system operated by the Department and commented that the 2004 undergraduate programme review had reported a positive student experience. The DSED also acknowledged that there were some concerns that not all students had regular meetings with their tutors and this was borne out by the minutes of the programme committee, which had taken action to address the matter. The students, however, were very complimentary about the personal tutoring system in the Department which assigned a member of staff to them in each year of the programme.

132 There are opportunities for students to feed back comments on the quality of the provision through end-of-module questionnaires, which contribute to the AMER. Students are also able to raise issues through their representatives on the programme committees. Students commented that these were effective, with minutes produced and actions followed up. Training is offered to newly appointed student representatives.

133 On the basis of the written evidence it examined and its meetings with staff and students, the audit team was satisfied that the quality of the learning opportunities available to students was suitable for programmes of study leading to the awards of BEng (Hons).

Computer Science

134 The Department of Computer Science is one of the largest departments in the University and manages a range of programmes at doctorate, master's, bachelor's and Higher National Diploma

levels in full-time, sandwich, part-time and on-line study modules. The DAT focused on the Modular BSc (Hons) Computer Science and the MSc Computer Science. The Department provided a well written DSED as well as extensive supporting documentation including Departmental Reports, AMERS for both the BSc and MSc programmes (all for 2001-02 and 2002-03), Programme Specifications, DMDs, Validation Reports (BSc 2004, MSc 2000), the Programme Handbook and Academic Staff Handbook. A sample of students' work was also available for inspection. The DSED had been widely circulated in the Department for discussion and programme tutors had met with students to discuss its content. The DSED, with the accompanying documentation, suggested an open and evaluative approach to the maintenance and enhancement of standards of its programmes, a view subsequently confirmed during the audit.

135 The programme specification for the modular BSc (Hons) in Computer Science covers the eight award titles of BSc (Hons) in Computer Science, Adaptive and Robotic Systems, Computing and Networks, Information Systems, Intelligent Systems, Interactive Systems, Software Engineering and Theoretical Computer Science. These different titles are used with only small differences between the programmes of study; in some cases, apart from the project module, there is only one compulsory module at level 2 and level 3 which distinguishes them. The similarity in programme content is reflected in the fact that there is only one programme specification covering all eight award titles. The University might wish to consider the desirability of establishing criteria which enable the appropriate differentiation of award and programme titles. Again, specific support for the current differentiation might be sought from external examiners. Neither the programme specification nor any other supporting documentation made explicit reference to the FHEQ, although the DSED reports that 'an important contributory factor in enabling Honours graduates to demonstrate achievement in line with the expectations of the FHEQ is the integration of novel areas of Computing, including relevant areas of current research, into the curriculum at a suitable level', and there is every evidence that this is indeed the case. In addition, there is clear evidence from supporting documentation that appropriate reference has been made to subject benchmark statements and the *Code of practice*. Indeed, in the case of the master's programmes, members of the Department were involved in the work of the professors and heads of computing in the development of benchmarking standards for taught master's degrees, and the Department sees its

own MSc as firmly located within the framework of 'generalist' master's programmes. The MSc programme specification is clear and comprehensive.

136 With regard to the use of student data, the AMERs reviewed in the audit included some statistical information covering student progression and completion that covered a three year period. However, the commentary was mostly restricted to consideration of data from the most recent year. There was less evidence in the documentation that this information is used to closely monitor trends, although staff reported that this happens on a more informal basis. Moreover, given the problems of retention, a more detailed cohort analysis would help to monitor the progress of particular groups. Indeed, in the 2004 BSc Validation Report the panel recommended that the programme team should monitor the performance of discrete groups of students within pathway points, for example, direct entrants, full-time students and sandwich students. However, there has been some monitoring more recently of overseas students on the MSc programme in response to a request from an external examiner.

137 The documentation supported the view that internal monitoring and review was in line with institutional requirements and was working well. External scrutiny was provided for periodic review events. In particular, the most recent BSc and MSc validation panels included appropriate external representation. Both the BSc and the MSc programmes were accredited by the British Computer Society in November 2000. The programme committees provided clear evidence of consideration of student views, and the AMERs demonstrated consideration of external examiner reports. The audit team found extensive evidence that the views of the external examiners were taken seriously by the Department and Faculty and at least one external examiner had commended the Department for the careful attention that had been given to his report. Where issues had been raised, there was ample evidence that the Department had considered them in detail and, where considered appropriate, identified remedial action which was reflected in the action plan. Examples of issues which had been addressed in response to reports included strengthening programming, industrial placement provision and the management of project-based learning.

138 The Department considered that it was close to implementing the new procedures required by the University's Assessment Strategy. Staff reported that they worked in teams to design assessments which met the validated learning outcomes and that this

contributed to a shared culture regarding curricular assessment. There was evidence that marking criteria were clear at module level, especially in relation to specific assignments. The audit team found that there was less clarity with regard to the process of converting marks to literal grades. For example, the conversion system used was found to be different at BSc and MSc level. However, the students reported that the criteria were clear to them and that they knew what was required to gain a particular award classification. They considered the feedback on coursework assignments to be generally informative and timely and they perceived the marking to be fair. The only reservation students raised concerning assessment was with regard to group work, where they felt that if peer assessment was involved then it was difficult for them to penalise colleagues who had not taken on their fair share of responsibility. However, the staff described their approach to group work which was progressively developed over the stages of learning in the programme. Some early group work was not formally assessed and the later pieces of group work involving elements of peer assessment were monitored in a number of ways.

139 The quality of the assessed work reviewed was considered to be appropriate for the various levels of study. However, the feedback on coursework assignments was rather variable in character and the Department may wish to consider ways in which a minimum level of feedback can be guaranteed. In response to a concern, raised by an external examiner, over the level of performance of students in programming, the Department had made a programming module compulsory at level 2. The audit team considered that the student work on this unit was of the appropriate standard. It would, however, encourage the Department to keep under review the extent to which students are able to design, develop and implement programmes directly from a specification. This would ensure that the educational aim of 'developing programmed solutions to problems' was being met. Overall, the standard of student achievement on the programmes investigated in the DAT was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the national FHEQ.

140 The students met by the audit team were complimentary about the information which was provided by the Department, including the student handbook, programme specification and DMDs, stating that information was generally clear and comprehensive. They were happy that this material was also available electronically through StudyNet.

141 The students confirmed that the learning resources were of an extremely high calibre. There was

particular praise for the LRCs and the general availability of PCs for study. Most of the students claimed they had laptops which interfaced well with StudyNet for which they expressed considerable enthusiasm. This related in part to the information that the system was able to provide but rather more to the way in which StudyNet supported modules through the group working facility that it offered. Students devoted considerable time to working in this electronic environment and were able to exploit the discussion sites provided, which tutors could in turn monitor in order to identify where students were having difficulties with their learning. Students did not think that the availability of lecture notes on StudyNet, for example, led to non-attendance at lectures. They appreciated the fact that specialist software was supplied by the Department. Their only reservation was that the library did not hold enough copies of core texts for some modules. A number of students made positive comments about the University 'one-stop shop' for student services. English language support for overseas students was also praised. The high level of learning resources support was one of the reasons cited by students for choosing the University.

142 The students were particularly complimentary about the academic support that was available. The Department runs an 'open door' policy and students stated that help was always available when needed. The personal tutor system appeared to be working well, especially in the first year. Students also have a placement tutor, if undertaking a placement, and the project supervisor acts as a personal tutor in a student's final undergraduate year. MSc students do not have personal tutors but are able to contact module lecturers when they need to do so. The students stated that the University felt like a genuinely multicultural community.

143 There is a well-embedded system of student evaluation and feedback in the Department through module questionnaire and annual University questionnaires. The main results of module questionnaires are reported in the AMERs and each module includes a structured response from the module leader. The questionnaire feedback is discussed with student representatives at the BSc and MSc programme committees. The audit team saw evidence of positive response to issues raised by students. Students reported that staff-student representation appeared to work well at all three levels, namely programme, faculty and university. Student representatives had received some training from the Students' Union which they had found helpful. Follow-up had been provided following the initial training. The students confirmed that 'real issues are

addressed' in the departmental forums. The Department has established a Computer Science Liaison Group which included industrialists who were alumni of the University. This served to consider curricular issues of mutual interest and also helped to maintain placement links for current and future students.

144 On the basis of the written evidence it examined and its meetings with staff and students, the audit team was satisfied that the quality of the learning opportunities available to students was suitable for the undergraduate programmes of study leading to the awards of BSc (Hons) and that the quality of learning opportunities available to taught graduate students was suitable for courses of study leading to the award of MSc.

Art and Design

145 The scope of the DAT covered the BA (Hons) Applied Arts programme and the MA in Art Therapy. The DSED was able to draw on three recent major reviews related to the two programmes: periodic review documentation for the BA (Hons) Applied Arts, 2003; validation documentation for the MA Art Therapy, 2002; and the Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine (now the Health Professions' Council) visit report Postgraduate Diploma in Art Therapy, 2002. The DSED was amplified in further documentation including the programme specifications for both programmes, the AMERs for the last two years, the student handbooks, and a paper explaining the rationale for changes made to the MA programme. Full documentation of the genesis and validation process for a proposed new degree in fashion was provided for the audit team. All members of staff had been invited to contribute to the SED, which had been developed by the Head of Department, and it had been circulated to students.

146 In the course of the DAT the audit team also reviewed a wide range of additional documentation including minutes of programme and faculty committees, external examiners reports, marked work and reviewed student feedback forms. The team visited studio and gallery facilities and was able to review examples of student art work. It met with a group of students from all levels of study, from both the BA and MA programmes, including two recent graduates, and with staff teaching on the programme. The team learnt that Art and Design has been located on the new University site for nearly four years. Staff changes in the last one and a half years had been considerable, with a number of course closures and modifications taking place. A more flexible undergraduate programme had proved popular with students. In the BA programme 75 per cent of the work is studio based and 25 per cent theoretical studies.

147 The DSED stated that programme learning outcomes are 'strongly influenced by the Subject Benchmark for Art and Design and together with the FHEQ, provide appropriate platforms for the development of learning outcomes'. Programme specifications for the MA Art Therapy conform to professional standards set out in the British Association of Art Therapists' regulations and revisions, and the recent validation of the MA had involved close engagement with FHEQ master's level descriptors. The audit team found that the staff of Art and Design and Art Therapy were more than usually alert to issues of quality and standards. Their detailed programme specifications were mapped closely onto external benchmarks and are very helpful to students. Individual module documents were also mapped directly on to the subject benchmark statements. In order to maintain quality and standards, staff regularly engage in peer review, and a detailed training pack is provided for visiting lecturers. Students met by the team confirmed that the varied module possibilities of the reformed BA syllabus, and the distinctive nature of the MA in Art Therapy, had proved very attractive to them.

148 Trends in student progression, completion and first employment destination are considered annually through statistics provided in the AMER and this was considered helpful 'up to a point'; but staff reported that their informal departmental methods for monitoring trends had proved more useful in informing planning.

149 Internal monitoring and review is carried out by means of the AMER, regular departmental reports and by periodic review. At these monitoring events external examiners' reports are carefully considered and an action plan is drawn up. The action plan of the AMER for 2001-02 indicated that external examiners' concerns had been addressed very promptly.

150 In addition to their involvement during the end of session examination period, external examiners visit at the end of the first semester to examine interim work on display, and to meet with students. In the case of the MA in Art Therapy, assessment of placements includes a contribution from the employers. Recent examiners reports are followed up through annual monitoring. The reports are examined at programme committee and at DAG for managerial issues; they then appear in the AMER and pass into the central system. Where areas of misunderstanding have arisen, these have been promptly solved through discussion.

151 Assessment strategies and policies are innovative and in accordance with the *Code of practice*. Several staff have external audit or

examining experience which informs internal developments. The opinions of external examiners are sought on all aspects of courses in order to enhance the quality of programmes. Account had been taken of the needs of dyslexic students in the design of the assessment strategy and learning outcomes. The assessment programme allows time to enable external examiners to talk together and express their views on quality and standard matters. The audit team saw a full range of examples of assessed project and essay work which matched the programme specifications and met the expectations of the external examiners. Students performed well, and examiners commented favourably on how they had responded to tutor encouragement and support. Students appreciated the variety of assessment methods, and had special praise for the emphasis in the Faculty on self-assessment. From level 1 onwards, students were trained in critical self-analysis of their studio work and their study skills. They commented that the self-assessment sections of the written assignments forced them to address and understand fully the marking scheme and its grade criteria descriptors. Feedback to students was found to be regular, timely and of generally high quality. Staff feedback on student independent project work was both formative and summative, involving supportive dialogue, through cover sheets and templates, between student and tutor. This was considered by the audit team to be an example of helpful practice which could be used more widely in the University. The standard of student achievement on the programmes investigated in the DAT was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the national FHEQ.

152 Students confirmed that the handbooks for both the BA and MA are comprehensive and helpful. They give full information about the aims, objectives, learning outcomes and criteria for assessment of all programmes, as well as providing general information about the University facilities including StudyNet. A handbook specifically explaining the duties and responsibilities of students on professional placement is provided to all those on the MA in Art Therapy. Students referred to these handbooks as their 'bible' and found them an indispensable aid.

153 Learning resources and support are appropriate and sufficient. The studios, gallery, libraries, IT provision and general facilities are excellent and are among the reasons reported by students as their basis for choosing to study Art and Design at the University. StudyNet is used in this discipline area as a convenient information source rather as an educational tool, as students prefer the direct

contact of the studio environment, but it has the potential for further development. Learning resource provision is monitored during the AMER and action is taken to upgrade or replace faulty equipment. The balance of assignments and studio work appeared to the team to be appropriate and programmes had been enhanced by the input of visiting lecturers. Students also mentioned with appreciation the general University support facilities and provision for international students.

154 Student feedback was sought at the end of every module through questionnaires and was carefully monitored at the end of each year through the AMER. In general, satisfaction levels were high. In the course of the DAT, students who met the audit team confirmed this positive view.

155 Students in Art and Design work mainly in the studio environment which allows a close and regular contact with staff. All tutors have published consultation hours for personal discussion, and the students reported that staff were very approachable. Depending on the discipline and year of study students have a year tutor and a group tutor. The student voice is heard both informally and formally through each module questionnaire. MA students have a placement tutor. Students considered that employability was built into the courses offered by Art and Design.

156 On the basis of the written evidence it examined and its meetings with staff and students, the audit team was satisfied that the quality of the learning opportunities available to students was suitable for the undergraduate programme of study leading to the awards of BA (Hons) and that the quality of learning opportunities available to taught graduate students was suitable for courses of study leading to the award of MA.

Thematic enquiry: the management of blended learning, with particular reference to StudyNet

157 The University definition of blended learning is as follows: 'Educational provision where high quality e-learning opportunities and excellent campus-based learning are combined or blended in coherent, reflective and innovative ways so that learning is enhanced and choice increased'. Blended learning featured strongly in the vision of the University articulated by the Vice-Chancellor as one of the differentiating factors of the University. The strategic plan made reference to the excellence of learning and teaching being 'central to the university's core business and outstanding study facilities...available

24/7 to support excellent learning and teaching. These include a versatile on-line learning environment (StudyNet) which is available both on and off campus'. The plan goes on to claim that the University was 'a leader amongst UK universities in the use of networked electronic systems to support learning and teaching'.

158 The SED articulated the spirit of the University's approach when discussing the principles of the Learning and Teaching Policy. One of these is 'the integration of information and communication technology into learning, teaching and assessment processes'. It goes on to describe its 'managed learning environment - StudyNet' as one of the keys 'to supporting a learner-centred approach'. Much of the relevant commentary in the SED concerned the use of StudyNet, although the University acknowledged that increased use of the system in itself 'only represents a first step on the route to the full exploitation of the e-learning environment'. The SED referred to the University's track record in blended learning when discussing the recent bid under the HEFCE Centres of Excellence initiative and indicated that the thrust of that bid is to establish a 'Blended Learning Unit'.

159 The SED included a full description of the StudyNet environment. This is 'custom designed to meet the needs of the university', being developed in-house from a Lotus Notes platform. Students and staff are able to access the system via a web browser from on or off-site. The claim for it to be a 'managed learning environment' is supported by virtue of the fact that it interfaces with both the University management information system and the Voyager library and resource management systems. Consequently, students can be provided with a personal portal that can be customised using data from GENESIS.

160 StudyNet provides a range of information services to students. It gives access to course materials (lecture notes, supporting materials and course management documents), provides email and discussion site facilities, communication forums, access to information sources (via links to other University websites and direct access into Voyager). StudyNet can also be used for on-line assessment and for reporting assignment results (suitably anonymised). The audit team noted as positive features the range of facilities offered by the system, its ease of use and its well defined user interfaces.

161 The University has invested heavily in appropriate staff development to support the penetration of StudyNet use throughout the

University. It has established a StudyNet Learning and Teaching Project Group to foster the widespread implementation of the system, and a network of faculty StudyNet champions has been set up in order to 'promote widespread use of StudyNet and disseminate good practice'. The University estimated that there were about 80 per cent of modules across the institution with a StudyNet presence and the target was for 95 per cent penetration by the end of the academic year 2004-05.

162 In its meetings with staff, the audit team found significant support for StudyNet. Members of staff acknowledged that there were differing levels of expertise, which meant that some sites were more sophisticated than others but that, through staff development events and the work of faculty champions, they were confident regarding the continued development of sites. It was acknowledged that some subject areas could more readily adopt and exploit the benefits of StudyNet than others.

163 Students were unanimous in their support for StudyNet. Some examples of excellent practice were quoted, where subject sites used appropriate on-line assessment and feedback as well as providing comprehensive links to support material. When asked where they would find certain University information (for example, on regulations) the reply from students often tended to be 'StudyNet'. The audit team hypothesised that the increased use of StudyNet could potentially raise issues with attendance as students may feel that all the information they need could be obtained on-line from the site. But from meetings with staff and students there seemed to be no evidence of any fall in attendance as a result of introducing a StudyNet site. Indeed the opposite view was expressed, namely that the system actually increased attendance levels by helping students with outside commitments or special needs to keep pace with the class, and therefore be less likely to drop out, while assessment monitoring could spur students on to attend and do better.

164 While the audit team acknowledged StudyNet as an excellent resource which is indeed worthy of commendation, it is in agreement with the University that the managed learning environment is just one part of an approach to blended learning as described by the University. Blended learning is about achieving the appropriate mix of face-to-face and e-learning. This mix is likely to be different for different subject areas and can also be influenced by class sizes, subject 'cultures', student expertise and expectations, and staff expertise and motivation (for e-learning). These variables would determine the extent to which the e-learning supports,

complements or replaces parts of the face-to-face learning. There was no doubt that in some areas of the University this debate and subsequent reflection and development was already mature, and some excellent sites were in place for supporting learning, where it was clear that considerable thought has been given to these issues.

165 The University has reflected on its journey towards blended learning and has defined the recent past as Phase 1 of that development, where StudyNet was being initially introduced into learning and teaching across the University. The staff development for this phase had largely been aimed at inculcating skills in the development of StudyNet sites and disseminating good practice in its use. Phase 2, which commenced in September 2004, was concerned with 'optimising the blend'. The audit team considered it likely that this second phase will require as much if not greater effort in staff development because of the difficulties in determining the appropriate 'mix'. The team were in no doubt, however, regarding the enthusiasm and determination within the University to achieve this and were reassured that the University was aware of the potential challenges ahead. Given the management commitment to innovation in learning, together with the achievements of Phase 1 of the strategy, the team had considerable confidence that the University will fulfil its ambitious mission in this area.

Section 4: The audit investigations: published information

The students' experience of published information

166 There are a number of sources of information provided to students by the University from the time when they enquire about a programme to the time they become alumni. The key publications for recruitment of students are the prospectuses, programme-specific material and StudyNet, to which applicants are given limited access prior to enrolment. The Director of Marketing is responsible for the accuracy of both the hardcopy and the web versions of the prospectus. Students in the general meetings and in the DATs were generally content with the accuracy and effectiveness of the prospectus information. There was support for the pre-enrolment open days as accurate and useful sources of information helping students inform their choice of programme.

167 At induction, students are issued with student handbooks, which provide details of their programmes of study, progression regulations and

other information. The majority of the respondents to the survey in the SWS believed that their student handbook was 'comprehensive', and that 'general literature about [their] course is easily available'. Students were also given access to StudyNet, which won significant praise from students as the main source of their information about their studies and as one of the main communication channels with the department and between themselves. Students at undergraduate and postgraduate level also use StudyNet to gain access to University rules, regulations and procedures through direction to printed or internet-based documents. The SWS reported that students are generally confident about their access to the regulations and stated that, for example, there is agreement that 'rules in respect of plagiarism have been made very clear'.

168 The students reported that they were aware of the assessment and grading criteria in use on their courses. The module descriptors contained details of the learning outcomes and assessment cover sheets often supplemented these by specifically stating the learning outcomes being tested. While programme specifications were in place for all programmes, the audit team found little awareness of these specifications as a means of disseminating programme information to students. The team heard no evidence from the students of instances of significant inaccuracies relating to curricular information.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information

169 The SED indicated steady progress by the University towards meeting the requirements for Teaching Quality Information. It claimed that the University was 'fully engaged with the final guidance from the Task Group on the Provision of Information on Quality and Standards in Higher Education, issued by HEFCE in October 2003 (HEFCE guidance 2003/51)'. The University had published appropriate information on the University of Hertfordshire Teaching Quality Information (TQI) section of the Higher Education Research Opportunities (HERO) website. This publication included the documents required by HEFCE together with documents describing the university external examining structure and a commentary on the quantitative data supplied by HESA. The TQI section of the website is linked to the University website to allow access to programme specifications and the undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses.

170 Following publication of *HEFCE 02/15* the University made arrangements for all its external examiners to provide summaries of their reports for

publication. For the academic year 2002-03 the external examiner report templates were amended, as a pilot, to include a publishable section. This demonstrated that the process of summarising the external examiner reports could be undertaken by their authors, and amendments to the template were made in 2004 following receipt of more detailed information from HERO. The University was well placed to implement publication.

171 The audit team sampled the various documents provided and had full access to the University's web pages. The web pages appeared comprehensive and easily accessible. Students and staff were confident that the published information provided by the University accurately reflected the reality of the operation and processes of the University and the team found no evidence to the contrary.

172 Overall, the audit team found that the University had made very positive progress towards meeting the requirements for published information and was confident that it would be in a position to meet all the relevant deadlines for the publication of relevant documentation on the HERO website.

Findings

Findings

173 An institutional audit of the University of Hertfordshire (the University) was undertaken during the week 22 to 26 November 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 the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Standing Conference of Principals and Universities UK, four audit trails were conducted at discipline level. This section of the report summarises the findings. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged during the audit, and making recommendations to the University for action to enhance current practice.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes

174 The University's procedures for the validation, monitoring and periodic review of its programmes are set out in formal regulatory and guidance documentation (Universities Policies and regulations (UPRs) and Standard Procedures and Practices). Their implementation is overseen by the Office of the Vice-Chancellor (OVC), and the Academic Board and its committees, among which the Academic Quality and Enhancement Committee (AQEC) and the Academic Development Committee (ADC) have particularly significant and generally effective roles. Indeed, the role of ADC in the scrutiny of proposals for new programmes has been considerably strengthened during the past year. Validations and reviews are generally managed by faculties, working with the Academic Quality Office, and are well documented. Independence of judgement is secured through the chairing of validation and review panels by senior academics from other faculties, and panels always include at least one external academic, and often other external representatives from the professions, business or industry.

175 Annual monitoring reports are produced at programme and departmental levels, although in some areas subject-based reports (Subject Monitoring and Evaluation Reports) are substituted for programme reports (Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Reports). Rightly recognising the vital significance of these monitoring processes for its management and enhancement of quality and standards, the University strongly emphasises adherence to its formal procedures, and has progressively standardised its systems and documentation where appropriate. Monitoring

reports are considered in detail by faculties, but the monitoring process, and its outcomes, is kept under review at institutional level by OVC, the Academic Board and AQEC.

176 The University's limited range of distance-learning provision is quality assured through the same validation, monitoring and review procedures used for attendance based programmes. On the basis of the limited evidence available, the audit team found that those procedures were effective in this context, and noted that the University was taking steps to make use of the recently revised version of the *Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice), Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)*, published by QAA, in the development of its portfolio of flexible and distance learning.

177 Students on postgraduate research programmes are monitored thoroughly and effectively through Faculty Research Degree Boards, which report annually to the University's Research Degrees Board. The University has moved with commendable speed to review its quality assurance procedures for postgraduate degrees in the light of the recently revised *Code of practice, Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes*.

178 Students are represented at all levels of decision-making in the University. They are able to give anonymous individual feedback annually through a standard Module and Staff Questionnaire (MSQ), and also to evaluate more general aspects of the student experience through the annual Student Feedback Questionnaire. The audit team confirmed that student feedback is gathered systematically across the University and is used to feed into quality assurance and enhancement at all levels. Student representatives met by the team felt that their concerns were appropriately heard and addressed. Good practice includes the use of individual lecturer ratings from MSQs to identify staff development needs through the appraisal process. As it continues to enhance the ways in which it takes student views into account, the University may wish to consider reporting questionnaire response rates and overall module ratings.

179 The audit team found that procedures for assuring the quality of programmes are aligned appropriately with the *Code of practice*, and concurred with the University's view that that they are broadly effective. Effective oversight is provided at faculty and institutional levels. While the University strongly, and justifiably, emphasises a requirement for compliance

with its quality assurance procedures, it seeks increasingly to promote an enhancement-led approach, and the team noted examples of enhancements driven by the quality assurance system. The University clearly recognises the significance of self-evaluation in its quality assurance procedures, and the team observed examples of good practice in annual reports and in documents produced for periodic review. It encourages the University to continue its efforts to spread this good practice, and also to promote the reflective and analytical use of statistical data, both in the annual monitoring and periodic review of its programmes. The University justifies, on largely pragmatic grounds, its continued requirement for parallel monitoring reports at programme (or subject) and departmental levels, and has improved the reporting process in its detail. It would be wise, however, for the University to keep these arrangements under review and to assure itself that this level of complexity continues to serve institutional purposes. Finally, the University is advised to make more explicit and systematic use of the *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) in its validation and periodic review procedures.

180 The findings of the audit confirm that broad confidence can be placed in the effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

181 The University publishes its framework for the management of academic standards in its UPRs. It specifies the standards expected of students through sound and thorough procedures for the development, validation and review of its programmes. The University's procedures make full and effective use of external peers from academia and from industry. Where appropriate, programme reviews are carried out conjointly with professional, statutory and regulatory body accreditation visits. Programmes are clearly defined and effectively documented in programme specifications and Definitive Module Documents using standard institutional formats. However, a clearer framework for consistency of policy and practice is desirable in the differentiation of award titles, since at present different titles can be used to designate very similar programmes.

182 Standards of student attainment are confirmed through the institution's strong and effective system of external examining, which appropriately reflects the relevant *Code of practice*. Reports from external examiners are used to good effect by programme

teams, departments and faculties, and the OVC also reads and comments on every report. Institutional responsibility for academic standards is vested formally in the Academic Board, supported by its committees and by Faculty Academic Quality and Enhancement Committees. The University is well aware of current challenges to the security of academic standards, and has taken proactive measures such as the appointment of Faculty Academic Misconduct Officers.

183 The University's strong infrastructure, with its interrelated emphases on administrative process, on external comparability of standards, and on 'signing-off' at a variety of levels, provides a basis for broad confidence in the institution's management of the standards of its awards. Nevertheless, the audit team noted some diversity of thinking and practice, at operational levels, in the definition and securing of academic standards. These variations seemed somewhat at odds with the increasing and deliberate promotion of consistency in matters of quality management in the University. The team believes that the University would wish to address these areas of variability in the context of its increasingly varied range of academic provision, and of widening participation. Indeed it was abundantly clear that the University is aware of issues where a greater institutional coherence of thinking and enhancement of practice would be helpful. The team strongly endorses the institution's current developments to address these matters, most notably through its Assessment Strategy, and seeks to encourage and support efforts to develop practices and frameworks which will give more consistent guidance and information to staff and students, and which will sustain and reinforce its confidence in the internal comparability of standards.

184 The University made the claim that it is 'compliant' with the FHEQ, and based this confidence on the confirmations made, not always explicitly, by validation and review panels, and more formally by external examiners in their annual reports. Moreover, the audit team found that all programmes and units which it saw were appropriately aligned with the FHEQ, although this was not always clearly and explicitly evident in programme documentation. In view of the insistence on 'compliance' with the FHEQ it was surprising to find that only limited written guidance seemed to be given to programme teams in the use of the FHEQ qualification descriptors, or indeed any other level descriptors aligned referenced to them. The cursory descriptions in the University's regulatory documentation do not provide clear and

unambiguous information about the institution's expectations and assumptions concerning academic levels. The team believed that all those involved with the development of academic programmes would benefit from more explicit information about the key frames of reference with which 'compliance' was expected. This could most readily be achieved through the inclusion, in all of the relevant regulatory documents, of explicit reference to the FHEQ and its descriptors, or to other such descriptors aligned with it, providing a frame of reference for the use of those developing programmes and modules and for validation and review purposes.

185 Two aspects of the University's assessment policy and practice also merit attention. At present, marks and grades are variously used and converted across the institution. As recognised by the University in the SED, the process is rather complex, and the relationship between marks and grades is not always explicit. The proposed adoption of a single marking scale would provide more clear and consistent information to students, staff and external examiners. Secondly, it is desirable that the University should address the differing guidance given to students, in different parts of the institution, about expectations of their academic attainment. In this regard, implementation of the Assessment Strategy would be facilitated by the development and publication of generic assessment criteria, so as to clarify the University's broad expectations of student attainment at different academic levels.

186 The audit team concluded that the University's strong regulatory procedures, its effective use of external examiners, and active engagement of senior committees justified a judgement of broad confidence in the effectiveness of the University's present and likely future management of the standard of its awards.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

187 The University aims to provide 'fully integrated computing, library and media academic support services for students within a cohesive physical and on-line learning environment for access to information'. The audit found that through its two flagship developments - the de Havilland Campus and StudyNet - the University has made very effective progress towards the realisation of this aim. Learning resource centres at each campus provide access to text-based and on-line resources and other specialist learning facilities, particularly the StudyNet managed learning environment (see paragraphs 157 to 165). Students generally commended all these learning

facilities, although in some areas they reported difficulties in obtaining access to essential books and journals, and the University will no doubt keep this matter under review. The Student Centre, a 'one-stop shop' for administrative and other student support, is also a recent and highly successful innovation. These and other aspects of student support are overseen by the recently appointed Dean of Students.

188 Students receive effective academic and personal guidance and support through a variety of tutorial mechanisms. Tutors can refer students to a wide range of specialist support facilities, appropriate to the nature of the student body, through the Student Centre. Students' views about the effectiveness of teaching are generally positive, and they appreciate the approachability of lecturers. Other noteworthy features of student guidance and support included a programme of workshops and seminars for postgraduate research students, and a residential course designed especially for part-time and overseas-based research students. Induction and orientation provision for international students was also commended.

189 The University's confidence and pride in the range and quality of its staff development provision is well founded. Good practice was noted in a number of developmental activities, and the level of participation in many such events was reported to be high. The institution has justifiably noted a need to simplify its arrangements for the monitoring of staff development activity. The audit team also commended the linkage made from peer observation of teaching and student feedback to the annual appraisal process, and thus to staff development.

Outcomes of the discipline audit trails

Business

190 From its discussions with students and staff, and its study of students' assessed work, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the BA (Hons) Business Studies (Sandwich), BA (Hons) Business Administration, BSc (Hons) Business Information Systems (full-time and Sandwich) was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ. The programme specifications are referenced to the appropriate subject benchmarks.

191 Students who met with the audit team confirmed that they were satisfied with their programmes and the information given to them. The quality of learning support resources and facilities, particularly at the de Havilland Campus,

was highly appreciated. Many referred to regular use of StudyNet as a source of information. Support for international students, particularly in the use of English, was reported to be particularly effective. The team concluded that the quality of the learning opportunities offered to students was suitable for the programmes of study.

Engineering

192 From its discussions with students and staff, and its study of students' assessed work, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the BEng (Hons) Aerospace Engineering and the BEng (Hons) Aerospace Systems Engineering was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ. It was reported that development of these programmes took account of the *Subject benchmark statement* for engineering, although this was not explicitly evident.

193 Students' views, expressed in a meeting with the audit team, confirmed that they were satisfied with their programmes, and were particularly pleased with the induction process and activities at the beginning of the programme, the specialist learning facilities, and the personal tutoring system in the Department. Staff made extensive and innovative use of StudyNet. The team concluded that the quality of the learning opportunities offered to students was suitable for the programmes of study.

Computer Science

194 From its discussions with students and staff, and its study of students' assessed work, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the BSc (Hons) and MSc Computer Science was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their location within the FHEQ. The design of the undergraduate programme is based on appropriate reference to the *Subject benchmark statement* for computing.

195 Student evaluations of the provision, and views expressed in a meeting with the audit team, confirmed that they were satisfied with their programmes. They particularly noted the high quality of learning facilities and tutorial support available to them, and evidently made good use of StudyNet. The team concluded that the quality of the learning opportunities offered to students was suitable for the programmes of study.

Art and Design

196 From its discussions with students and staff, and its study of students' assessed work, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the BA (Hons) Applied Arts and MA Art Therapy programmes was appropriate to the titles

of the awards and their location within the FHEQ. The undergraduate programme specification is referenced to the *Subject benchmark statement* for art and design, and the programme specification for the MA Art Therapy conforms to professional standards set out in the British Association of Art Therapists regulations.

197 Student evaluations, and discussions between students and the audit team, confirmed that they were satisfied with their programmes, the information given to them, the guidance given by staff, and the studio facilities available to support their learning. Students expressed particular appreciation of the high level of feedback on their projects, and of the Department's emphasis on self-assessment. The team concluded that the quality of the learning opportunities offered to students was suitable for the programmes of study.

The institution's use of the Academic Infrastructure

198 The University has made positive use of the *Code of practice* and, through systematic 'gap analyses', has confirmed that its policies and procedures are appropriately aligned with it. Where necessary, policies and procedures have been developed with reference to the *Code*. All programmes are defined in programme specifications which use a standard University model. Subject benchmarks are used in the development and review of programmes, although programme specifications, and documents for validation and review, do not always make explicit reference to them. Programme validations and reviews are also expected to affirm alignment with the FHEQ, although this also is not always explicitly evident. Likewise, programme specifications are not always clearly referenced to the FHEQ. However, external examiners' reports include a statement that students' achievements are appropriate in terms of their level as defined by the FHEQ. Clearer and more explicit guidance for the internal use of the FHEQ is recommended.

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

199 The SED was clear and accurate, and generally thorough and comprehensive, although it was also mainly descriptive in style and approach. In some of its meetings with the institution the audit team found evidence of a considerable capacity for self-evaluation, but in some parts the SED did less than justice to this virtue.

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

200 The University gives a very high priority to excellence in learning and teaching, and the provision of modern, flexible learning resources and environments, and it seeks to engage all staff in the pursuit of these aims. The continued development of blended learning, on the basis of the well-established StudyNet managed learning environment, has a very high profile. The University's commitment to quality assurance and enhancement is expressed in the Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Strategy and its Implementation Plan. Its intentions for the continuing development of assessment strategy and practice are focused in the Assessment Strategy, which the audit team found to be particularly appropriate and timely. Staff development provision, particularly through the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching, actively supports measures for quality enhancement.

201 The team concluded that the University's intentions and plans for the enhancement of quality and standards were appropriate in the context of its mission and vision. The level of commitment to enhancement by senior management, and its record of achievement to date, engendered confidence in the University's capacity to achieve its plans for future development.

The reliability of information

202 The audit process included a review of progress made by the University towards the production and publication of the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) as required by HEFCE's *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance* (HEFCE 03/51). It also included a check on the reliability and consistency of that information. The range of documents required by HEFCE 03/51 is published on the University of Hertfordshire section of the Higher Education Research Opportunities website, together with documents describing the University's external examining system and a commentary on the quantitative data supplied by the Higher Education Statistics Agency. On the basis of documents seen and meetings held during the audit, the team found that the University had made good progress in fulfilling its responsibilities for TQI publication.

203 Information on University regulations, systems and procedures is found in a comprehensive single document but can also be referenced through departmental publications, websites and StudyNet. Students reported that the information presented to

them as part of their programmes of study did not contain any significant inaccuracies, although the students did not seem to be aware of programme specifications as a means of disseminating information.

Features of good practice

204 The following features of good practice were noted:

- i the strong student focus of the University's development plans, as demonstrated by a number of initiatives including the de Havilland Campus, the Learning Resource Centres and the Student Centre (paragraphs 5, 93 to 97, 99)
- ii the arrangements for the annual appraisal of academic staff, which integrate peer observation and student feedback into the appraisal process, and use the outcomes to inform staff development planning (paragraphs 74, 82)
- iii the establishment of GENESIS, a highly effective system which delivers timely and reliable management information to support institutional monitoring and planning (paragraph 79)
- iv the quality, range and accessibility of the University's staff development programme, which is well utilised by staff and includes specific training for quality assurance roles and activities (paragraphs 83, 84-85, 87)
- v the design, development and utilisation of the University's managed learning environment StudyNet, which offers outstanding potential for the University's planned move towards a pedagogy of blended learning (paragraphs 157 to 165).

Recommendations for action

205 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- i to establish, in the full implementation of its Assessment Strategy, the consistent use of a single university-wide marking scale, so as to provide clear information to students, staff and external examiners (paragraph 43).

206 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- i to establish institutional criteria which enable the appropriate differentiation of programme and award titles (paragraphs 37, 122, 135)
- ii to develop and publish generic assessment criteria so as to clarify the University's broad expectations of student academic performance at different levels (paragraph 41)

- iii to make the fullest use of its student data, particularly those relating to student progression and retention, and to reflect these in its ongoing management of student admissions policies (paragraphs 77 to 78, 111)
- iv to clarify and strengthen its published regulatory guidance so as to include more detailed reference to the FHEQ, or to other descriptors of levels and qualifications aligned with the FHEQ, as normative points of reference for programme and module development, validation and review (paragraph 184).

Appendix

The University of Hertfordshire's response to the audit report

The University welcomes the outcome of the institutional audit and the judgements of broad confidence in both the management of the academic quality of its programmes and the security of its awards. It is delighted to have six features of good practice identified within the report covering its strong student focus, StudyNet - our managed learning environment, appraisal including peer observation and student feedback, staff development encompassing quality assurance activities, and Genesis which was considered to be a highly effective management information system.

The University is also very pleased by the high number of positive comments within the report. These include the thorough and far-reaching way that we had responded to the last audit, our capacity for self-evaluation, the constant evidence of a corporate commitment to enhancement, the usefulness of the training and guidance given to external examiners as well as the robustness and thoroughness of our procedures for considering and implementing their comments, and the substantial evidence of the good management and provision of a high quality learning environment.

The University fully accepts the only advisable recommendation which concerns the need for consistent use of a single university-wide marking scale. Although the system for determining grades has been in place for many years and has not previously been criticised through audit or review of subjects, the University acknowledged concerns over the complexity of the system in the SED and is pleased that the audit has confirmed planned internal action through this recommendation. Each of the four desirable recommendations are fully accepted by the University and action has already been taken to address them.

Since the audit the University has received the results of the first major review of healthcare disciplines and was pleased to have received confidence judgements along with all aspects of the quality of learning opportunities being judged as commendable.

The University would like to thank the audit team for their perceptive and extremely helpful findings which have already proven to be very useful in informing further improvements. We would also like to thank the audit team for their professionalism and for the thoughtful and courteous atmosphere that existed in all meetings as well as the manner in which all correspondence about the audit was conducted.

