

**Newman College
of Higher Education**

MAY 2003

Institutional audit

Published by
Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
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ISBN 1 85824 991 0

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

Printed copies are available from:
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Adamsway
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Preface

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

The purpose of institutional audit

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

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

Judgements

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

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

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

Nationally agreed standards

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

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

The audit process

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

The main elements of institutional audit are:

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

The evidence for the audit

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

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

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

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

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Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (the Agency) visited Newman College of Higher Education (the College) from 19 to 23 May 2003 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide information on the quality of the opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the College offers on behalf of Coventry University which, currently, formally awards the College's degrees.

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

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

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

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

Outcome of the audit

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

- broad confidence can be placed in the College's current arrangements for managing the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards, while recommending that the academic committee structure should discharge more explicitly its responsibility for academic management. The level of scrutiny afforded by current quality and standards processes in the College's relationship with its existing validating institution supports broad confidence. On the basis that the current rigour is maintained as the College changes validating partner, broad confidence can be placed in the College's ability to continue to manage quality and standards into the future.

Features of good practice

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

- the use of the annual monitoring process and the associated Academic Health Day for reflection on policy and practice;
- the range of formal and informal mechanisms for gaining student feedback and the opportunities provided for student participation;
- the procedures in place for identifying, supporting and monitoring students at risk of not progressing or completing awards;
- the range and integrated nature of the academic and personal support and guidance provided to students; and
- the extent of consultation and discussion with staff and students as part of the process towards changing validation partner.

Recommendations for action

The College has also been recommended to take further action in a number of areas to ensure that the academic quality and standards of the awards it offers are maintained. The Agency has advised the College to consider:

- ensuring that responsibility relating to academic management is located consistently and effectively within the academic committee structure;
- considering in detail the reports of external bodies, such as the Office for Standards in Education and the Agency, within the academic committee structure;
- addressing the turnaround times for students receiving feedback on assessments and to ensure that the assessment process has the capacity to cope with any planned expansion in student numbers and programmes; and
- maintaining the rigour of existing quality and standards processes in the context of the planned change in validating institution.

The Agency has also indicated that it would be desirable for the College to consider:

- reviewing the role and function of the Academic Action Committee, as well as its location in the College committee structure;
- ensuring there is a closer link between staff development activity and the College Strategic Plan;

- implementing systematic mechanisms for disseminating good practice and focusing on enhancement;
- managing carefully the learning resources to ensure these are adequate and appropriate to meet College plans for expanding the course portfolio and widening access; and
- adopting a more analytical approach to the use of statistics and management information.

Summary outcomes of discipline audit trails

To arrive at these conclusions, the audit team spoke to staff and students, and was given information about the College as a whole. The team also looked in detail at two discipline areas (theology and education studies) to find out how well the College's systems and procedures were working at that level. The College provided the team with documents, including student work and, here too, the team spoke to staff and students. As well as supporting the overall confidence statements given above, the team considered that the standard of student achievement in these two disciplines was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their places in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*. The team considered that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for a programme of study leading to the awards.

National reference points

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

From 2004, the Agency's audit teams will comment on the reliability of the information about academic quality and standards that institutions will be required to publish in a standard format. At the time of the current audit, the College was moving towards meeting this requirement in a timely manner, and the published information that was seen by the team about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards was reliable.

Main report

Main report

1 This is a report of an academic audit of the academic standards and quality of programmes of Newman College of Higher Education (the College). The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the institution's soundness as a provider of tertiary qualifications of national and international standing.

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

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

Section 1: Introduction: Newman College of Higher Education

The institution and its mission

4 The College operates from a single campus situated in the south west of Birmingham. The College was founded by the Catholic Education Service in 1968 for the training of teachers for Catholic schools. In the 1990s, the College diversified developing joint honours routes in its main subject areas and more recently has developed single honours programmes in a limited number of

other areas: Early Years Education Studies, Sports Studies and Psychology. Plans are in place to add Drama to this single honours portfolio from September 2003 and to extend the range of subjects further from September 2004.

5 The College does not have its own degree awarding powers. At the time of the current audit, its awards were validated by Coventry University but the College was in the latter stages of moving into a strategic alliance with the University of Leicester and Bishop Grosseteste College of Higher Education. This alliance will lead to the validation of the College's awards by the University of Leicester from September 2003. The audit team was able to explore aspects of this developing relationship through a review of the documentation, which the College made readily available, and through its discussions with staff and students.

6 At the time of the audit the College had nearly 1,500 full-time equivalent (FTE) students and employed some 70 FTE academic staff. The majority of students (840 FTE) were on Initial Teacher Training (ITT) courses funded by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA). Just over 600 FTE students were studying on HEFCE-funded programmes, of whom around 400 were studying joint honours and 100 studying single honours programmes, with the remainder studying a variety of other courses including a recently established Foundation degree, the Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies (CCRS) and a MA in Theology. Mature students comprised 32 per cent of the total student population and those from low participation neighbourhoods 24 per cent. The College had a very small number of students studying for research degrees.

7 The College restructured in September 2001 around two schools: Teacher Education, Training and CPD; and Science and Humanities. A third school of Community and Professional Development was established in September 2002.

8 The College mission statement is 'Newman, a Catholic college of higher education (HE), is a learning and worshipping community committed to holding university, church and society in creative and inclusive dialogue'.

9 This is accompanied by a 'vision' to be a 'university college which is:

- inspired by its distinctive Catholic foundation;
- developing a leading profile in Catholic education and serving the wider needs of the Catholic community;

- committed to serving the needs of the community of the West Midlands, its business, industry and schools;
- offering HE of demonstrably high quality;
- developing a national reputation for excellence in education and Catholic theology;
- committed to equality of opportunity and social justice;
- working in close and productive collaboration with other university colleges which share its values, including the college's European partners.'

Collaborative provision

10 Coventry University does not permit its partner institutions to engage in franchised activity and, therefore, the College was not engaged in any activity which could be defined formally as collaborative. However, it does operate a limited number of courses in conjunction with other institutions through joint ventures and the audit team was able to examine some of this provision, notably a Foundation degree in Voluntary and Community Organisational Development which has recently been validated by Coventry University.

Background information

11 The audit team was provided with a range of printed material including: the report of a quality audit of the College by the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) (May 1997) and reports of the Agency's subject reviews of psychology (May 2000), theology (November 2000) and sports studies (May 2001). The College produced a self-evaluation document (SED) for the audit which was accompanied by a range of published material including the College prospectus for 2003. During the briefing and audit visits, the team was provided with ready access to a range of internal documents, a number of which were available through the College intranet. The documentation included examples of recent student work relating to the two DATs in theology and education studies.

12 The audit team also received a written submission from the students. This had been compiled by the Students' Union and was based on information from questionnaires, and informal and formal discussions among the student body assisted by the College. The final document, which the students had shared with the College, proved valuable in the team's deliberations.

The audit process

13 Following a preliminary meeting at the College in October 2002, the Agency confirmed that two DATs would be conducted during the audit visit.

14 The Agency received the College's SED and supporting documentation in January 2003, following which the audit team agreed with the College that the DATs would be in theology and education studies. The College submitted its discipline self-evaluation documents (DSEDs) in April 2003. The SED and the DSEDs were written specifically for the purposes of the audit.

15 The audit team visited the College on 9 and 10 April 2003 for the purpose of exploring with the Principal, senior members of staff and student representatives matters relating to the management of quality and standards raised by the SED and other documentation provided for the team. During this briefing visit, the team signalled a number of themes for the audit visit. At the close of the briefing visit a programme of meetings for the audit visit was developed by the team and agreed with the College.

16 The audit visit took place from 19 to 23 May 2003 and included further meetings of staff and students of the College. The audit team was Dr M Atlay, Mr P Hodges, Professor G Roberts and Mr B Robinson, auditors, and Ms A Kennell, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for the Agency by Ms A K L Crum, Assistant Director, Scottish Office.

Developments since the previous academic quality audit

17 The report of the quality audit carried out by HEQC in 1997 commended the College in a number of areas including: a variety of its arrangements for creating a supportive educational environment for its students; the engagement with staff development opportunities jointly with Coventry University; the work undertaken to monitor academic standards by comparison to national data; the efforts to respond to internal and external feedback; the introduction of the peer observation process; and, the quality and accuracy of the College's promotional material.

18 The report also set out recommendations for the College to consider including: bringing its quality assurance policies and procedures into a single document; developing a mechanism for monitoring the quality assurance system as a whole; formalising its various approaches to assuring the academic standards of its programmes; clarifying its validation procedures; clarifying and promulgating the regulatory framework governing all aspects of

the quality assurance of its collaborative provision; and, establishing a formalised college-wide teaching and learning strategy. The SED detailed the action taken by the College in relation to these recommendations and also set out a number of significant changes that had taken place since 1997. A revised strategic plan had been introduced in 2000-01 which had set out the main direction for the College for the subsequent five years. Specific actions and changes included:

- changes to staffing at the senior level;
- amendments to the nature and function of the Directorate;
- the establishment of the College Management Group (CMG) as the locus of operational decision-making;
- revision of the committee structure;
- changes to the nature and function of schools and the addition of a new school;
- a revised estates strategy;
- changes to arrangements for administrative support;
- the abolition of the Staff Council.

19 The SED stated that these changes had, at their root, a desire to increase full participation by all College staff in decision-making, to improve communications and to develop capacity by using the limited resources as effectively as possible. The audit team was able to explore the impact of these changes in the course of the audit and considered that, in most cases, the action taken by the College had been appropriate and effective. Matters relating to the academic committee structure are set out later (see below, paragraphs 30 to 36). The SED indicated that the College had taken steps to address the matters relating to the return of assignments to students (which the 1997 HEQC report had invited the College to review) but acknowledged that this remained problematic (see below, paragraphs 51 to 53).

Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes

The institution's view as expressed in the SED

20 The College's approach to the management of the quality of its educational provision and the academic standards of its awards is based on its mission and its commitment to creating a learning culture which is:

- 'Catholic and inclusive;
- challenging yet supportive;
- open to new ideas;
- continuously working to enhance quality and promote excellence for all'.

21 Its procedures have been developed in recognition of the requirements of Coventry University as the validating body and are built around the processes of validation, annual monitoring and periodic review at the programme level.

22 In its SED, the College stated that, as well as the meetings that are held at a range of levels - senior management, subject, programme and school - the College had a structure which addressed 'specific questions of academic quality'. It went on to indicate that the structure had three committees within it: Academic Audit, Academic Development and Academic Standards, all of which reported into the 'main committee structure'.

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

23 The College has linked its internal processes closely to those required by Coventry University as the validating body. The College indicated that its relationship with Coventry had been 'fruitful and supportive' and that the College's quality processes had gained greatly from the association. Nonetheless, at the time of the current audit, the College was in an advanced stage of changing validating partner to begin a 'strategic alliance' with the University of Leicester and Bishop Grosseteste College of Higher Education. This development is considered in detail later (see below, paragraphs 37 to 44).

24 The College Academic Board is responsible for the development and oversight of the academic work of the College. It discharges this responsibility through its own work and that of its subcommittees: the Academic Development Committee (ADC), Academic Standards Committee (ASC), Academic Action Committee (AAC), Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC), Research Committee, and Ethics Committee.

25 After the HEQC audit in 1997, the College introduced an Academic Development and Quality Committee (ADQC) to address all questions of academic quality assurance. However, a review in 2002 indicated that the workload of this Committee was too heavy and, in session 2002-03, it was replaced by two committees: ADC, which manages the process of the development of new courses and their periodic review; and the ASC, which has a

remit for quality assurance. At the time of the current audit, the work of these committees and the relationship between them was still developing (see below, paragraphs 30 to 36).

26 The three schools have different approaches to their consideration of the subjects and programmes within their remits, reflecting their different scope, maturity and subject mix. The School of Teacher Education, Training and CPD holds separate subject and programme level meetings, while the School of Science and Humanities runs a joint meeting to discuss both programme and subject matters. The new School of Community and Professional Development had recently agreed to hold both school and programme meetings.

27 Since the 1997 HEQC audit, the College has sought to clarify the different ways in which programmes and subjects are managed. In the current scheme, programmes are managed within schools and programme leaders are line-managed by the head of school with responsibility for their programme. The management of subjects formally sits outside the school structure because subjects contribute to programmes in any or all of the schools as appropriate. Each head of school acts as the line-manager for a designated set of heads of subject. The SED indicated that this model was due to be reviewed and the CMG had begun a 'formal reconsideration' of the line-management system in autumn 2002.

28 The executive structure of the College is exercised through a Directorate consisting of the Principal, Vice-Principal (Academic Quality), and the Vice-Principal (College Services). The CMG has responsibility for operational decision-making. It meets weekly and its membership includes: the Directorate, the Academic Registrar, the Director of Library and Learning Support, the Head of Information Technology (IT) Services, the Head of Personnel, the Head of Finance, the Bursar and the heads of school. The Extended Management Forum (EMF) has the aim of ensuring that the middle-management layer is informed and has an opportunity to influence operational decision-making. The Forum meets twice each term and its membership comprises: all members of CMG, programme leaders, heads of subject, and heads of administrative and technical sections. The SED stated that the strength of this system was its ability to allow for a more inclusive and cohesive approach to decision-making.

Documentation

29 The College produces a Handbook of Legislation and Policies which includes the academic regulations, the College codes of practice, the terms of reference

for the main College committees, the terms of reference and constitution of examination boards and the student academic disciplinary regulations. It also produces an Academic Handbook which sets out its key quality assurance processes. The information contained in these documents is also available to staff and students through the College intranet. The audit team noted that changes to the regulations were discussed and approved through the academic committee structure. Staff who met the team said that they found the documentation clear and helpful in undertaking their duties. The team formed the view that the College had made significant progress since the last audit in its provision of clear and consistent guidance to staff on its procedures, rules and regulations.

Academic Action Committee

30 Following discussion within CMG and between heads of school and heads of subject in September 2002, the College academic committee structure was amended to introduce the AAC which was described in the SED as being 'on a par with the two quality committees (the ADC and the ASC)'. The AAC met for the first time in autumn 2002. Its membership includes all heads of school, all heads of subject, programme leaders, the Head of Learning and Teaching, and representatives from the library, student support and the academic registry. The SED summarised its terms of reference as being to 'address decisions which were related to common issues across schools and which fell outside the remit of the other committees in the layer between schools and Academic Board, and to provide a forum for the programme leaders and heads of subject to address matters of common concern'. The SED acknowledged that AAC and EMF might be regarded as duplications but highlighted the distinctions between them which it indicated were that AAC is a decision-making body which reports to the Academic Board while the EMF is part of the operational management structure and is not itself a decision-making body.

31 The audit team noted that its full terms of reference related mainly to operational matters, such as invigilation and timetabling arrangements, but also included consideration of some matters relating to academic quality and standards, for example, responsibility for reviewing and recommending amendments to examination rules. In discussion with the team, members of AAC highlighted the value of its meetings. The team noted, however, that its minutes, which took the form of notes, had not yet been considered by the Academic Board. While AAC is new and, therefore, still developing its

agenda, it appeared to the team that there was a potential for duplication between areas of its remit and those of the other academic management committees, notably the LTC and the ASC. The team considered that such duplication might impede the effective operation of these committees. While the team recognised the potential advantages of having such a group, it formed the view that the College could usefully review its role and function to avoid duplication with existing groups and that the College could consider locating it outside the academic committee structure.

Operation of processes and structures

32 As part of its enquiries into the effectiveness of the College's quality management framework, the audit team explored the relationship between executive action and deliberation through the academic committee structure. Aspects of the current academic committee structure were new and some of the key committees were still developing their roles. In its SED, the College had identified some difficulties with the new structures - for example, the SED indicated that meetings were not always well attended and contributions to agendas were still mainly from the relevant committee chair. The SED stated that the College was monitoring the effectiveness of the new systems and, in discussion with staff, the team heard of plans to address a number of these matters, for example, it was intended that committee members would be provided with training for their role. Nonetheless, the team noted a number of examples where it seemed that there was some duplication in the committees' responsibilities or where there appeared to be a lack of clarity regarding the manner in which they discharge their relative responsibilities (see above, paragraph 31 and below, paragraphs 33 to 35).

33 One example related to the ASC, which has a responsibility to consider an annual summary of external examiners' reports. The audit team noted that, in the current session, it had carried this out by receiving a tabled paper on the basis of which it had identified some areas for action but the team was unable to identify the mechanism by which ASC was monitoring the response to these actions. The team noted a further example in relation to the LTC, the remit for which indicates that it should receive advice from the other committees in order for it to build on strengths and address areas for development in teaching and learning. However, it does not receive the minutes or systematic reports from the other committees. Without this systematic information flow, the team was not clear how the Committee would be able to discharge its responsibility effectively.

34 The Board of Governors has a separate subcommittee for Academic Governance which monitors the quality processes of the College and, unlike the committees of Academic Board, receives as routine all external review and inspection reports and subsequent action plans. The SED stated that, in the future, this Committee would focus more specifically on matters related to the strategic plan. The audit team would support this change in emphasis which may help to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the academic management committees.

35 In relation to executive action, the audit team learnt that the Executive Management Forum and the CMG included in their discussions and considerations matters relating to the management of quality and standards. The team also learnt that CMG receives regularly and monitors closely statistics on student retention and progression. The team came to the view that matters were addressed within the College structures as a whole but were not always systematically discussed, agreed and monitored within the academic management structure as intended. It would, therefore, be advisable for the College to ensure that responsibility for managing matters relating to academic quality and standards is located consistently and effectively within the academic committee structure.

36 Overall, it appeared to the audit team that the College's structures generally provide a secure framework for managing quality and standards. The team acknowledged the mission of the College to engage staff in democratic debate but noted the relatively large number of committees at institutional, school and programme level in relation to the size of the College which may contribute to staff not engaging in committees in the manner the College would wish. The team agreed with the view apparent from its discussions with staff that the academic committees have a tendency to be more reactive than proactive in fulfilling their terms of reference and that, at times, consideration of quality and standards matters appears to be occurring more rigorously outside the academic committee structure than within it. The team would support the College's stated intention of keeping the academic committee structure under review, particularly as it implements the plans to change its validating partner.

Developing relationship with the University of Leicester

37 At the time of the current audit, the College was in the process of changing its validating institution from Coventry University to the University of Leicester. The College readily made available a variety of documentation relating to the change and

the audit team was able to discuss the matter with a range of staff and student groups.

38 The audit team heard that the proposal to change validating partners had originated from a review of the College and its future which had been carried out at senior management level. A number of possible options had been identified which were discussed with College staff. Following detailed discussions with a number of external bodies, the proposal to enter into a partnership with the University of Leicester and Bishop Grosseteste College of Higher Education was identified as the College's preferred option. Subsequently, the matter had been debated and approved by the University of Leicester Senate and by the Newman College governing body.

39 It was clear to the audit team that staff from across the College had been consulted about the proposals and that the change was widely supported. Students who met the team were also aware of the developments and the team learnt that students who were currently in the second year of their studies had been given the option of graduating with awards from either Coventry or Leicester universities. Overall, the team formed the view that the College had managed the change process to its current stage of development in a sensitive manner which reflected the College's mission. It seemed to the team that the approach was likely to lay an effective foundation for the future implementation of the partnership.

40 It was explained to the audit team that the College was entering into a long-term strategic alliance with the University of Leicester and Bishop Grosseteste College of Higher Education. In addition to the validation of the College awards, the arrangement would include: a pattern of distributed learning; sharing elements of staff development provision enabling staff at the Colleges to become recognised teachers of the University of Leicester in certain circumstances; administrative services; joint research activities; the supervision of research students by College staff; and joint bids to external agencies. Under the proposals, a senior member of academic staff in each institution would 'champion' the arrangement and a Joint Board of Studies between the University and Newman College would be established to assume responsibility for: programme approval; amendments to the regulations of validated programmes; and, the appointment of internal and external examiners.

41 Detailed discussions about the nature of the validation processes and procedures were underway

at the time of the current audit. As part of these discussions, staff from the University of Leicester had recently visited the College to meet with senior staff and members of the main College committees including the ASC. From the available documentation, the audit team noted that the key processes to be operated by the University in relation to Newman College would be based on the principles of those applied in the University itself. The team heard that the University aimed for lightness of touch in its validation arrangements but did not wish to be a distant partner. The University intended to set out its expectations in a written code of practice covering:

- admissions;
- course approval;
- amendments to regulations;
- progression;
- schemes of assessment;
- conduct of examinations;
- selection of examiners;
- certification; and
- complaints and appeals.

42 The College provided the audit team with draft documentation relating to some of these areas. Internal periodic reviews would be carried out at the school level following principles relating to the University's departmental review process. The periodic review panel would be chaired by a Pro Vice-Chancellor of the University and its membership would include University staff and an external subject specialist, selected by the University on the basis of nominations from the College.

43 Arrangements for programme approval and revision would be managed by the College through the ADC as a subcommittee of Academic Board. Final approval would be the responsibility of the Joint Board of Study of the University and the College. Areas to be covered in any proposal were set out together with the composition of the validation panel which would include representation from the University and an external subject specialist.

44 Given that the new arrangements had not yet been finalised, the audit team was not in a position to reach a view about their effectiveness. The team noted the detailed nature of the discussions currently underway and the desire of College staff to retain many features of current practice in the new arrangements. The team also noted the indication from both parties that a lighter touch would be

adopted in relation to the validation arrangements. As the new processes are implemented, the team would encourage the College to ensure that it maintains the current level of rigour in relation to its management of quality and standards (see below, paragraphs 62 and 67).

Management of assessment

45 The audit team explored the College's approach to managing assessment for a number of reasons. Both the subject areas selected for the DATs had moved away from formal examinations as a form of assessment, and the team was interested to explore how this was being monitored within the subject areas and by the College. Matters relating to assessment were also raised by the students' written submission (SWS) which identified some problems with the prompt return of coursework (see below, paragraphs 51 to 53).

46 The College has a code of practice relating to assessment and this, together with other aspects of its procedures and regulations, were provided in the Handbook of Legislation and Policies and in the Examiner's Handbook. Staff who met the audit team were aware of the procedures, and external examiners' reports indicated that they were being applied appropriately.

47 In its Learning and Teaching Strategy the College recognises the link between assessment, teaching and learning and states that it will continue to develop assessment practices to enhance learning. The SED noted that assessment driven curricula lead to problems in overall workload and students beginning to devalue elements of the curriculum which are not assessed. The SED indicated that the College intended to investigate more creative and imaginative forms of assessment that were themselves learning experiences. The audit team heard that formative assessment is regarded as an essential area for development and has been prioritised by the College.

48 The College had recently undertaken a review of its regulations relating to the determination of degree classifications with the aim of introducing a common mechanism. Students and staff were consulted about this process and, at the time of the audit, final proposals were with Coventry University for approval. The outcome of this consultation had not yet been communicated to students and the audit team learnt that this had resulted in some uncertainty among the student body about the way in which their final classifications would be determined.

49 The College had introduced a process of cross-subject moderation to compare marks given by different subject teams and to make recommendations and adjustments where necessary. This process currently involves the moderation of work placement activities. In discussion with staff, the audit team heard that the College is considering extending this to include dissertation and project work. The team would encourage the College to develop its work in this broad area of introducing commonality and consistency in its assessment and classification procedures.

50 The audit team noted that both the subject areas covered by the DATs had recently discontinued the use of formal examinations. The team noted that, in Theology, plans are in place to monitor the impact of this. The College may wish to consider how it monitors the effect of this change across the institution, in order to identify the impact on student achievement and to ensure that the good practice of cross-subject moderation in helping to ensure consistency of standards can embrace programmes which have retained formal examinations as well as those which have not.

Return of assessed work

51 The 1997 HEQC audit report suggested that the College should consider whether the assessment turnaround time could be improved. Students who met the current audit team commented that they received extensive feedback on their work which was helpful in preparing for future assignments, but the speed with which work was returned was still a problem (see below, paragraph 52). The College code of practice on the assessment of students states that work should be returned within three weeks, except for large modules or where the timing is close to the date of an assessment board. Similar statements form part of the College's draft Student Charter (although the Charter appears to indicate a turnaround time of four weeks). In discussion with the team, staff commented that they provide the students with summary feedback when it is not possible to return assignments within the expected timeframe.

52 The audit team was able to review the assessment turnaround time in the DATs in some detail and the College provided monitoring data for the last three years. The team noted the steps that had been taken in the Registry to provide better facilities for the receipt, return and monitoring of assignments. However, the College still had some work to do to meet its own targets. It appeared to the team that the problem was more extensive in some areas than others and that, although it might be related to workload, it was not solely related to

student numbers on modules. The College will wish to consider whether its targets as set out in its code of practice and Student Charter are realistic and achievable given current resources and the plans to expand the programme portfolio. The College should also consider the steps that need to be taken to ensure that all students receive timely feedback on their assessed work.

53 The audit team considered that the issue of assessment feedback contrasted sharply with the generally supportive student-centred approach evident in other areas of the College's work. This matter aside, the team concluded that assessment processes were generally working well across the College and that there were examples of good and innovative practice which could be more widely disseminated.

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

54 In its SED, the College acknowledged that 'enhancement deserves more attention' and provided a detailed plan to 'further enhance practice and address shortcomings' over the period from 2002 to 2005. The plan identified action to be taken across a range of areas including:

- the awareness, ownership and involvement of staff and students in the work of the College;
- improved strategies for enhancement as an outcome of monitoring;
- improved and well-articulated focus on learning, teaching and assessment as drivers for change;
- assessment turn around to be significantly improved;
- development of a new validating relationship and strategic alliance;
- development of improved quality systems for internal review;
- development of an improved Resource Allocation Model (RAM) in which funding more closely follows students and resource decisions are devolved more closely to the point of delivery.

55 The audit team noted that a significant focus of staff development activity would relate to the change in validating partner with the accompanying changes to procedures. On the basis of the evidence of the careful approach adopted to managing this change to date, the team was confident that the College would support this process in an appropriate manner.

56 During the course of its discussions, the audit team heard of many examples of what it considered

to be good practice, for example, in relation to induction activities, monitoring, and the Academic Health Day (see below, paragraphs 63 to 65). The SED acknowledged that more could be done to identify and disseminate such examples of good practice. The team would support this view and encourage the College to prioritise a focus on enhancement and to implement systematic mechanisms for the dissemination of good practice.

57 Overall, on the basis of its review of documentation and its discussions with staff, the audit team concurred with the priorities for enhancement and development identified by the College. The team learnt of progress being made in all the areas included in the College enhancement plan, although improvements in assessment turnaround times seem to be problematic (see above, paragraphs 51 to 53).

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

Programme and module approval and review

58 The SED stated that the procedures in place for the approval, monitoring and review of academic programmes 'are those required by Coventry as validating university and enhanced by internal processes'. Within the College, the ADC oversees new programme developments to ensure they are consistent with the College's strategic plan and can be appropriately resourced. This Committee also has responsibility for the periodic review process.

59 There are clearly articulated procedures for the development and approval of new programmes and for managing changes to existing programmes. These were set out in the SED. New modules are considered internally through a module approval and review panel (MARF) which is established by the College Quality Office and includes an external panel member (for modules above level 1) and normally a representative of Coventry University with appropriate expertise. The procedures allow for this process to be undertaken by correspondence in exceptional circumstances.

60 Proposals for new programmes and changes to existing ones are considered initially by an internal review panel (IRP) to reflect whether the proposal is consistent with the College strategic plan, to establish the resource requirements and to confirm that it is suitable for onward transmission to the next stage in the approval process. IRP members are drawn from subject areas or programmes unconnected with the proposal, external representatives and Coventry University. Once

approved internally, proposals are then taken to a course approval and review panel (CARP) chaired by a member of staff from Coventry University. CARPs include external advisers and a member of College academic staff not connected with the programme.

61 The audit team was able to review a range of documentation including the minutes of the ADC and papers from the IRP, MARP and CARP stages. The team also discussed the process with staff who had been involved in approving and proposing modules and programmes. The team noted the tight timescales involved for some programme approvals and that, on occasion, matters identified at the IRP stage had not been adequately addressed in time for the CARP stage. The College had identified this matter through its annual academic audit process and had included reference to it in the detailed College annual report to Coventry University. The College intended to address the matter by promoting greater preliminary discussion at the programme and school level before proposals went to the IRP stage for scrutiny, the aim being for proposals to require less amendment following the IRP stage.

62 In general, the audit team considered that the process was functioning effectively to assure the quality of provision and secure the standards of awards. As the College develops its relationship with the University of Leicester, it will wish to ensure that the level of rigour currently applied in the approval and review processes is maintained (see above, paragraph 44).

Annual monitoring

63 The SED indicated that, following the HEQC audit in 1997, the College revised significantly its annual monitoring process and introduced a system of academic audit. Acting with delegated power from the Academic Board, the ASC manages the annual academic audit process, ensuring the cycle is iterative and that actions are followed through at all stages. A subcommittee of the ASC, the Academic Audit Committee, monitors the process in detail.

64 The process begins with written reports being produced at the subject level which inform the production of programme reports which are scrutinised at school and college level. Members of the Academic Audit Committee are present on the various occasions when the reports are being scrutinised and have a responsibility for confirming that the documentation is appropriate and has been thoroughly considered. The Vice-Principal (Academic Quality) produces the college-level evaluation of the process, supported by the chair of the Academic Audit Committee. The College acknowledged some

difficulties with the timing of the process, mainly in ensuring all stages are completed in time to avoid disrupting the 'intricate chain of progression', but believed that it provided a robust mechanism for reviewing the annual operation of its programmes. From its consideration of the associated documentation the audit team was able to confirm that the College's systems for annual monitoring were thorough and effective.

65 In 2003, the College introduced an 'Academic Health Day' at which samples of reports from all stages of the academic audit process were considered by an extended ASC. The College indicated that this had provided an opportunity to reflect on both the outcomes of the process and the operation of the process itself. It had also provided an opportunity to revise and amend systems accordingly. The audit team learnt that it was intended to hold the event annually. The team was able to review the summary report of the Academic Health Day and to discuss its value with staff who had been involved. Although this was the first year in which the event had been held, it was clear that it has the potential to provide for significant enhancement of the College's processes, particularly through the identification of examples of good practice and an opportunity for their dissemination. The team considered that the introduction of the event represented good practice and would encourage the College to explore further its role in quality enhancement in relation to the revised systems that may follow the change in validating partner.

Periodic review

66 The process for periodic review is set out in the College Academic Handbook. It is identical to the process for initial programme approval and is managed currently by Coventry University through the CARP mechanism. Programmes are subject to periodic review, normally, every six years. Because of the timing of the validation arrangement with Coventry University, many of the College's programmes had recently been through a periodic review and the College highlighted the strain that this had placed on its structures.

67 The audit team was able to confirm that the process had been undertaken in line with the College's stated procedures, including appropriate externality and reference to *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The team noted that, under the proposals for the new validation arrangements with the University of Leicester (see above, paragraphs 37 to 44), periodic review would be carried out on a school, rather than a

programme, basis. The team observed that this might create a challenge to ensure that all subjects received the appropriate level of external scrutiny through the process. In discussion it was evident that the College was aware of the potential problems in this area and was working with the University of Leicester to address them. The team would support the College moving to resolve this matter thereby ensuring that the current level of scrutiny will be maintained.

External participation in internal review processes

68 The College stated in its SED that 'all internal review processes routinely involve external peers', and explained specifically in relation to programme approval and periodic review that these were drawn from two main groups: staff from Coventry University, as the awarding body, and external consultants. Coventry staff constitute most of the membership of the CARPs, and are also invited to attend MARPs and IRPs. External consultants act as independent advisers and are routinely invited to take part in IRPs, MARPs and CARPs in order to provide a specialist subject perspective. External examiners, either current or recent, are specifically excluded from internal review processes, except for their involvement in minor modifications to programmes, which they must approve in writing. The College considered its system to have 'clear strengths', such as the distinctive combination of full external objectivity with the 'insider's' objectivity brought by the Coventry staff.

69 The audit team noted the clear and detailed procedures in place relating to the identification and appointment of external consultants. These allowed for an involvement by the College with the final appointment decisions resting with Coventry University. The SED acknowledged that on occasions there had been some difficulties in identifying external members who were mutually acceptable, particularly in relation to the TTA-funded programmes. This appeared to relate to tensions between the College's need for external consultants with substantial primary and secondary school experience and the University's concern for the HE experience of appointees. The tension had evidently eased in more recent times as the relationship between the College and the University had matured.

70 On the basis of a close consideration of the available documentation, the audit team was able to confirm that the operation of arrangements is in line with the statements made in the SED and that the College includes external participation in the full range of its quality assurance procedures.

External examiners and their reports

71 The College's procedural framework for managing external examining is described in its code of practice on external examining, which it has based on the relevant section of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)* published by the Agency. Key features of the College arrangements are: the appointment of external examiners for both subjects and programmes; the close control of appointments by Coventry University, as the awarding body; the systematic monitoring of external examiners' activity by the University annually through the academic audit process and periodically through the CARP mechanism; and, the firm expectation that subject heads will respond formally and seriously to the external examiners, using their reports as a basis for enhancing the quality of provision and further securing standards.

72 The audit team explored the robustness of the system in four main ways: by comparing the College and the *Code of practice*; by assessing the depth of understanding of the system among staff; by investigating the effectiveness of responses to external examiners' reports; and by reviewing the arrangements for engaging with the reports at institutional level. The team's analysis revealed strong evidence of adherence, and its discussions with staff showed they had an appropriate understanding of the procedures, coupled with a clear willingness to engage constructively with the external examiners' reports. The team noted that from session 2001-02 the Vice-Principal (Academic Quality) had produced an annual overview of the matters raised by external examiners across the College, consideration of which was included within the ASC remit (see above, paragraph 33). Given how recently this step has been introduced, the team considered that the College might monitor the timing of its production and the effectiveness of its dissemination.

73 The SED described the College external examiner system as 'robust' but acknowledged that there were 'still actions to be taken'. Among the specific suggestions for enhancing its operational effectiveness were: the need to provide students with fuller information about the reasons for any changes arising from examiners' reports; the need to ensure that reporting back on actions taken is full and timely; and the need to articulate the role of programme examiners more clearly. On the basis of the evidence seen, the audit team had confidence in the College's capacity to pursue this agenda, and would support the view of the system outlined in the SED.

External reference points

74 The SED stated that the College had 'taken careful account of the various elements of the national academic infrastructure'. The audit team noted that the College has developed a set of internal codes, based on the sections of the *Code of practice*. The College codes apply to all members of the College community and are available through a variety of channels including: the web site, the Academic Handbook, the Handbook on Legislation and Policies, and student handbooks.

75 The SED emphasised the College procedures for disseminating information about, and promoting understanding of, the codes, and for embedding relevant practice within the academic community. The audit team found a wide range of evidence suggesting the genuine engagement of staff and students. For example, annual subject reports are required to indicate how heads of subject are ensuring familiarity and adherence among their staff; IRP members are required to check that course proposals adhere to the College codes; and the team saw references to the codes within a range of subject materials. The SED indicated that the knowledge and understanding of the codes among individual members of staff was still developing, with the heads of subject playing a key role. The team noted that supportive strategies were in place for this, including the dissemination of good practice through College staff who are trained subject reviewers and raising awareness through the production of bespoke literature.

76 It appeared to the audit team that the College adhered to the precepts of the *Code of practice* in all areas except in relation to the supervision of research students, specifically in relation to monitoring. The team noted that the few research students at the College are covered by the *Code* as applied by Coventry University. However, the College should consider how it will itself adhere to the requirements of this section of the *Code* in future.

77 Reference to the College's engagement with the *FHEQ* and *Subject benchmark statements* was made at a number of points throughout the SED. In particular, the audit team noted the requirement for all subjects and programmes to make reference to the *FHEQ* and the benchmark statements during the periodic review of programmes in 2001-02. The team also noted the College's decision to redesignate all of its modules using the Northern Ireland Credit and Accumulation Transfer System (NICATS) level descriptors which the SED stated had been agreed in order to aid the development of working

relationships with local further education (FE) providers and to develop smooth progression routes. During the course of the audit, the team became aware of the steps that had been taken to engage with these external reference points. For example, the College has established a set of institution-wide assessment criteria based on the NICATS scheme and it is a formal requirement that programme specifications should make explicit reference to the *FHEQ* and relevant subject benchmark statements in formulating aims and learning outcomes. The team also found appropriate references to the academic infrastructure in the literature prepared for students by subject and programme teams. The staff who met with the team demonstrated a clear understanding of these external reference points and talked positively about the ways in which these had assisted their work. The use of the NICATS descriptors had been particularly well-received by staff.

78 Overall, the audit team concluded that considerable success has been achieved in raising awareness of external reference points and that the College is pursuing successfully its stated aim of embedding their use within the culture of the institution.

Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

79 Since the 1997 audit, the Agency has carried out three subject reviews at the College in social and applied psychology (May 2000), theology (November 2000) and physical education and sport studies (May 2001). Each subject secured overall approval of the quality of its provision, and with a single exception in one aspect, achieved scores of 3 and 4. The outcomes of the reviews were summarised in the SED in some detail, both in terms of each aspect and from a subject perspective; this brought into focus common strengths and areas for development. Strengths included the effective embedding of key skills development in subjects, and the College's excellent progression, retention and completion rates. Areas for further work included the careers guidance strategy and some specific aspects of teaching quality.

80 The SED emphasised the extent to which the recommendations within the subject review reports had been used to inform changes. Among the new developments identified were: data production, learning and assessment, careers, student support systems and quality management and enhancement. During the visit, the audit team saw evidence of how some of these changes were beginning to enhance the work of the College.

For example, the team heard about improvements in the range and quality of College data and was able to review the revised arrangements for managing external examiner reports.

81 As a significant provider of TTA-funded education, the College has been visited regularly by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) since 1997. Ofsted inspected the management and quality assurance of the secondary ITT provision at the College in 2002-03 and an interim report was issued to the College in the spring of 2003. The audit team noted that the report made detailed observations concerning both the general management structure of the College and more specific matters concerning quality assurance procedures and their operation and management within the committee structure.

82 In the SED, the College stated that reports of Agency subject reviews had been considered by the former ADQC, Academic Board and the Academic Governance Committee of the Board of Governors. The terms of reference for the ASC indicate that it now has responsibility for considering the reports of external agencies. However, from the minutes, it appeared that only the Academic Governance Committee had received the full reports of the Agency subject reviews, with the other committees receiving oral reports. Ofsted and other external body reports appeared to have been considered within the schools and by the Academic Governance Committee but not by the ASC or Academic Board. Although the reports did appear to have been considered by the College, the audit team was unable to identify within the academic committee structure a systematic way in which this had occurred or in which responses were coordinated and resulting action monitored. The College should ensure that detailed consideration is systematically given to the reports of external bodies within the academic committee structure in order to give the institution a strategic overview of the comments within these reports and the College's responses to them.

Student representation at operational and institutional level

83 The College draft Students' Charter (2002-03) indicates that students can expect opportunities to participate in institutional decision-making either directly or through elected representatives. The SED stated that students were represented on all the College's committees within the academic committee structure except the AAC and the subject meetings (at which staff discuss matters of mutual interest relating to their subject specialism). The student

representatives on committees are mostly appointed by the Students' Union, although the Board of Governors includes an elected student representative as well as the President of the Students' Union.

84 The College also has staff-student consultative committees (SSCCs) for each subject and each programme. The SSCCs meet each term under arrangements made by the head of subject or programme leader. The SSCC terms of reference indicate that they link formally into the College's quality assurance systems with items of concern or for consideration to be included on the agenda of the relevant College committee. Every programme SSCC includes representatives from each year of the programme and seeks to ensure that there is coverage of subject interests and representation by students from the variety of modes of study.

85 The SED identified a number of operational difficulties that can occur, for example: securing student attendance at meetings, particularly during work placement periods; ensuring consistency in reporting back to students on matters discussed and action taken; and the timeliness of the election of student representatives. The SED went on to indicate a number of steps taken to ameliorate these potential difficulties, such as the provision of a training programme for student committee representatives and the availability of a student representative handbook (from December 2000).

86 The SWS prepared for the audit (see above, paragraph 12) did not comment specifically on student representation but, in discussion with the audit team, students spoke positively about the clear and direct links between the student body and the senior management. In this context, the regular meetings between the Students' Union President and the College Principal were highlighted. The students also spoke positively about their opportunities to become involved in the College activities more generally. They emphasised the extent to which staff at all levels are available for discussion and consultation.

87 The students recognised the importance of the SSCC system but had some reservations about its effectiveness in terms of decision-making. They highlighted that matters were not always dealt with through formal channels and recognised that this was, at times, appropriate. Among the matters that the students considered their views had influenced were: the development of the new library and the review of the assignment return mechanism. The audit team heard that the student representative system was sometimes problematic and this

appeared to be mainly due to some representatives being more proactive in their role than others, and there were also suggestions that representatives might be elected later in the academic year or have shorter periods of office.

88 The audit team learnt that the College was considering the possibility of financing a sabbatical post within the Students' Union and would concur with the view that such a development could help to overcome some of the organisational difficulties currently faced by the Students' Union by officially recognising the time commitment of Union officers generally and for developing Union policy.

89 Overall, the audit team formed the view that communication between the student body and the College was reliable and effective. The team considered that the range of opportunities available for student participation represented good practice.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

90 The audit team focused its enquiries on the feedback gained from students. The College draft Students' Charter (2002-03) sets out the rights and responsibilities of students regarding feedback. Specifically, it indicates that they are expected to provide the College with feedback as requested during the academic year. In return, the students can expect to have opportunities to express their views on their learning experience, both formally and informally, and to receive a response to their views.

91 The SED stated that all modules are evaluated both at their mid-point and at the end of the module. The end-of-module evaluations are administered using standardised Optical Mark Read forms which are processed centrally and a statistical analysis is returned to the module leader. Using a centrally available pro forma, module leaders are able to generate an end-point evaluation and brief action plan. The SED indicated that not all subjects monitor the use of this mechanism. This implied a lack of uniformity in the system, including restricted feedback to inform students of action that has been taken, with a consequent weakening of interest in future evaluations. The SED suggested that the introduction of a system for monitoring the completion of the evaluations by students would be timely, to include a formal response to the head of subject and to students.

92 The SED stated that the purpose of the mid-module evaluation was to allow students to influence the second half of the module, although it was recognised that time constraints limited

immediate implementation in some cases. The audit team learnt that tutors use a range of techniques for the mid-module evaluations, including questionnaires, face-to-face discussions, and email data gathering. The College does not currently monitor the process of mid-point evaluations.

93 The audit team learnt that the College also regularly seeks feedback from students on other aspects of their experience. For example, the team saw a review of the Fresher Programme and, more generally, the College has initiated an annual Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS). The first SSS was administered in May 2002 and covered a range of matters and services encapsulated within a total of 165 questions. The response rate was 21 per cent and the team was told that the College intends to build the SSS into its annual audit system and to seek ways to improve the response rate, learning from its initial experience. The team considered that drawing conclusions from the first SSS and feeding them effectively through the committee structure appeared to have been a relatively slow process and concluded that future revisions of the SSS and its implementation should take account of the need for the exercise to be seen to influence College policy and practice within a reasonable time frame.

94 The students who met the audit team expressed a mix of views in relation to feedback. Some did not appear to be aware of what happened to their module feedback or how it affected the student experience. Others were able to identify actions that had resulted from providing their views.

95 The audit team considered that the College's feedback mechanisms included examples of good practice, particularly in the way the mid-module evaluations were administered by some module leaders within an informal discursive context which allowed students to engage more meaningfully with the process and to see its impact. The more mechanistic questionnaires appeared to be less effective, particularly when students did not perceive that they had an effect on their own experiences. The team would encourage the College to build on the current examples of good practice and to ensure that there is an effective mechanism for providing feedback to students generally, in line with the draft Student Charter.

96 The audit team learnt that the College does not currently have a system, other than that within ITT courses, for systematically gathering feedback from its graduates. The team did, however, see evidence of an increasing awareness of the benefits to be gained from developing links with employers,

mainly in the context of identifying needs in relation to new curricular developments but also in the context of workplace experience. The involvement of the College schools and subject groups with employers is variable. The team formed the view that the establishment of the relatively new School of Community and Professional Development could build a platform for a more structured college-wide strategy for developing and securing employer links.

Management information including progression and completion statistics

97 The SED stated that the College has invested in a computerised student record system (Systems in Tuition Software), which was operated by the Academic Registry. A range of data is produced by this system and distributed by the Registry to heads of school, heads of subject and programme leaders. Such data form an integral part of the annual academic audit process and also feed into the relevant periodic review documentation. The data are a key component in a weekly audit undertaken by the Academic Registry of student retention. Data on student applications are also reviewed regularly through the work of the Recruitment Steering Group.

98 The audit team gained the impression that the Academic Registry is responsive to requests for statistics from staff. However, the team's discussions with staff suggested that the use of statistics to inform policy development remains patchy and that some staff were unclear as to the responsibility of committees on which they served in relation to considering relevant data on a regular basis. The team was informed of some examples of the use of statistics, for example, an analysis of destination data which had instigated new pathways within an existing programme. Other than in the areas of recruitment and marketing, however, the staff who met the team did not indicate a culture in which statistical information formed the basis for forward planning. Senior staff recognise that the use of statistics is not yet embedded within the College's deliberative structures, although they are used at subject and programme level to inform the academic audit process.

99 The audit team formed the view that analyses by the College in its documentation tended to be limited to the use of descriptive statistics and there is, as yet, little evidence of the use of information to develop and inform policy proactively. The College is encouraged to develop a more analytical approach in relation to the use of statistical information, for example, by exploring trends in student progression based on a range of variables so

as to inform the development of current programmes and to suggest new avenues for innovation. In particular, the College's aspirations in relation to widening participation and variable modes of delivery could be underpinned by analyses of the data currently available, based on comparisons of the progression and achievements of current student groups studying in different modes and with variable entry qualifications. It is, therefore, recommended that the College should consider adopting a more analytical approach to the use of statistics and management information.

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

100 The SED stated that appointments to the academic staffing base are agreed by the CMG on the basis of information from the RAM. The audit team heard that the RAM had been revised recently to make it more transparent and, at the time of the audit, was being reviewed further by a College working group with the assistance of an external consultancy.

101 The Staff Handbook outlines the procedures for appointing new members of academic staff. Systems to safeguard equity and transparency have been built into the appointment procedures, such as the production of job and person specifications.

102 The SED stated that 'annual appraisal related to peer observation reports and to staff development planning helps to maintain and develop staff capabilities'. There had been some difficulties with the process in recent years but, following a review in 2002 and consultation with staff, a revised annual procedure was launched. The audit team learnt that the new scheme seeks to link the process much more closely to the Strategic Plan and to target-setting by staff across a range of areas including personal and career development. The team noted the clarity of the documentation for the scheme, which has an entirely developmental focus and is not linked to reward or promotion arrangements. Both parties to the appraisal must agree on any recorded outcomes, with any staff development needs identified being forwarded to the Staff Development Office.

103 Despite the SED's statement about the importance of linking appraisal, peer observation and staff development, it was acknowledged that the College peer observation arrangements have been subject to 'interruption' in recent years. It was also indicated that the effectiveness of the scheme had become limited through a lack of clarity and focus. The SED highlighted good practice in the Theology

subject area where peer observation is connected to the quality assurance and enhancement process, and expressed the intention to implement a similar approach across the College. The audit team would encourage the College to pursue this.

104 The SED stated that 'where roles of responsibility fall vacant or are created but these do not justify an additional member of staff, these are advertised internally'. The audit team learnt that the College has developed a streamlined mechanism for internal applicants to apply for such roles, which avoids the applicant providing details already held by the College. It was highlighted that a paper had been produced in January 2003 to clarify the College arrangements in relation to internal appointments.

105 On the basis of the information available to it and from its discussions with staff, the audit team considered that the arrangements for appointing and appraising staff were clear. A revised set of arrangements for appraisal was being put into operation at the time of the audit and, therefore, staff were at an early stage in their practical experience of it.

Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development

106 The SED stated that a range of strategic documents informed staff development at the College. The Staff Development Strategy requires that: 'high quality development opportunities for staff training and development are identified, planned for and resourced to ensure that all staff are able to develop the skills, knowledge and capacity to secure the effectiveness of Newman College in fulfilling its mission and meeting the needs of both students and staff'.

107 The College has also had a Staff Development Policy in place since May 2000 which it updated in 2001-02 and incorporated into the College Human Resources Strategy. The Strategy is intended to include all staff at the College, not only academic staff. The SED also identified the ways in which the College funds staff development, including: financial assistance to join the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education; contributions towards the fees for higher degrees; funding to attend external events related to learning and teaching; and, through a small research budget which is administered by the Research Committee.

108 The SED indicated that support for newly appointed staff was offered in a variety of ways. All new staff have a mentor who is not their line manager and are offered an initial induction session

by the Director of Personnel. The audit team learnt that a revised induction programme had been very recently introduced (in January 2003) to assist staff to establish a peer support network. Staff new to teaching are provided with a short induction course and, in their second year at the College, are offered a place on a Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education at Coventry University. The team learnt that staff would continue to have access to a similar postgraduate certificate once the College changes its validating partner.

109 The College provides an internal programme of staff development seminars. The audit team learnt that a number of the topics included on this programme had been identified through the staff appraisal system (see above, paragraph 102). In discussion with a range of staff, it appeared that the topics for the spring and summer 2003 programme had been selected in a variety of ways including consultation with staff and discussion with the Vice-Principal (Academic Quality) and the Director of Library and Learning Support, but the team was not able to identify any systematic mechanism for this. The team also heard that, while there was support for staff to participate in development activity, and a willingness on the part of staff to become involved, workloads often precluded participation.

110 While it was clear that the College had carried out some positive work in this area, it appeared that the Staff Development Strategy had been implemented more quickly in some areas than others. Given the difficulties experienced by staff in finding time to participate in the available development activity and the College's plans for extending its provision, the audit team considered that the strategy could be reviewed to ensure, in particular, that it links closely to the College Strategic Plan.

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

111 In its SED, the College identified four groups of students who study away from the campus. First, ITT students who undertake school experience throughout their programmes of study. This provision is monitored by two Partnership Coordinators with support from the College Partnership Office.

112 The second group are all single and joint honours students who undertake a work placement. The SED stated that these placements were arranged in accordance with the College code of practice on

placements. The students are required to negotiate their own placements but the College provides guidance and support for students and information for employers. All these students have placement tutors with whom they must maintain at least weekly email contact.

113 The third group are students who undertake the part-time single honours degree in early years education within cohorts sponsored by local education authorities (LEA). These students are taught at locations provided by the sponsoring LEA, normally a professional centre within the authority. Teaching is provided by College staff who travel to the centres to deliver the modules. Students are full members of the College and have access to all the student facilities.

114 The fourth group are those students who undertake some element of study overseas as part of the College's international programme. These students are now located within the School of Community and Professional Development where the Director of European Enterprise is responsible for assuring the quality of their provision.

115 Those students with whom the audit team met generally spoke very positively about the support they received from the College both in identifying off-campus study opportunities and during their time away from the campus. The students on the part-time early years education programme had some concerns about the learning resources provided by the College in the outlying centres. Some students indicated that they had not been provided with training in the use of those resources made available locally. A number of students studying away from the campus indicated that they found it difficult to use the College library, particularly as it was closed on Sundays.

116 The audit team considered that the arrangements for supporting students off-campus were, broadly, working well. However, as the College implements its widening participation strategy, it will wish to monitor closely, and at College level, the support it provides to such groups of students.

Learning support resources

117 The SED claimed that one of the key strengths of the College student support system was the provision of an integrated support service from a centrally located resource centre to meet the academic, career, health, spiritual and technical needs of students. The audit team learnt that the College has recently been able to deploy funding from the HEFCE Poor Estates initiative to extend and

develop its library and learning resources centre to improve its layout and increase the availability of individual student study space and access to PCs. The team heard that this development has allowed some increased access to facilities and that the question of extending the opening hours remains continually under review. The team was told that the Head of Library and Learning Support was in the process of reviewing the role of the library and Student Support Centre. The College indicated that increasing the book and journal stock is problematic, given the size of the available budget, although the College purchasing policy ensures multiple copies of required texts are available together with at least one copy of additional recommended texts. A revised Collections Strategy was considered by the LTC in December 2002 and was due for approval by the Academic Board at the time of the current audit. A number of matters in relation to the library, including the need to plan forward to improve provision, particularly in relation to on-line publications, had also been reported to a recent meeting of the ASC and action points identified.

118 The SED identified accessibility of services, good communication and supportive staff as strengths of the library. The views of students are sought through a number of user groups, including a Library User Group, and through the annual SSS. The library also surveys customer views using its own service survey. The SED indicated that the level of concern about book availability is relatively low. The SED also indicated that although students regularly ask for increased access at weekends, use of the library during the weekend is low.

119 The College recognises that it has a particular duty of care to those students who study off-site for at least a part of their course. Such students retain membership of the College library and can access the College intranet remotely to use on-line teaching materials and other College services.

120 The College IT facilities include a network of open access machines available in a variety of locations throughout the campus. The SED stated that an extensive intranet was accessible to all users both on and off campus. Every module is allotted a dedicated area on the intranet to include copies of handbooks and lecture material. The College is seeking to increase the use of the intranet and recognises that its use by subject areas is currently patchy, but does include examples of good practice.

121 The College Student Support and Guidance Strategy identifies priorities for the work of the Student Support Centre. The Centre provides a range

of services, including those related to literacy, IT, numeracy and general study skills. Literacy support includes specialist support for dyslexic students, a feature which was praised by students in discussion with the audit team. The SWS suggested that not all students were as yet fully aware of the Centre's function. The College pointed out that the SWS had been produced when the College had been very recently established.

122 A number of the concerns recognised by the SED were also reflected in the SWS. The students praised the overall friendly working environment and the refurbished library, but support from library and computer staff received some adverse comment. The submission refers to a relatively high number of mature students who felt that they needed further assistance in order to make best use of the computer facilities. The submission also identified the perceived limitation of the book collection, the restricted range of journals, and the limited number of copies of essential texts for particular criticism, although it also praises the wide range of the practical resources which are available. The submission highlighted that 44 per cent of the students surveyed in the 2002 SSS had indicated dissatisfaction with the availability of course material.

123 In its discussions with students, the audit team heard a variety of opinions, which suggested an inconsistency of experience across subjects. The team was told that the availability of appropriate resources appeared to be felt particularly by final year students, off-campus students, and students on particular programmes. However, the team also heard that students could make use of other libraries, including local university libraries, although it appeared that such use was limited.

124 From all of its deliberations, the audit team formed the view that the College was aware of its shortcomings in the provision of learning resources for students and that it had begun to seek ways to address these. The team would encourage the College to take full account of the needs of groups of students who, increasingly, are following courses off-site and/or on a part-time basis. The widening access agenda also has significant implications for the further development of the College's policy in relation to the availability of supportive resources for students with a widening range of entry qualifications, backgrounds and needs. The team considers it is desirable for the College to manage carefully its learning resources to ensure these are adequate and appropriate to meet the College plans for expanding its course portfolio and widening access.

Academic guidance, support and supervision

125 The 1997 HEQC audit commended the College for the attention it had given to the creation of a supportive academic and social environment for students. It was clear to the current audit team that the College continues to place a high priority on this aspect of its provision and has in place a Student Support and Guidance Strategy, which is part of the College Strategic Plan.

126 The Student Support Centre offers a range of support (see above, paragraph 121) and its services are outlined on its own section of the College intranet. The Centre offers scheduled sessions and provides a drop-in service. The Centre has several group study rooms that can be booked only by students. Members of the Student Support team play an active role in providing staff development sessions and are also encouraged to participate in external conferences and workshops. From its consideration of programme and module documentation, the audit team was able to confirm that study skills are also embedded in all modules. The team noted that useful advice, for example on referencing, presentation and avoiding plagiarism, is included in student handbooks at the module, subject and programme levels (see below, paragraph 165).

127 The College has a well-established Academic Support Tutor system in place. Students are allocated a tutor from their subject area when they enter the College and this tutor remains with them throughout their programme of study. After initial contact, the system provides for the students to meet their tutors once a term. Guidance and an agenda for these meetings is provided in the College Student Handbook. Staff are also given written guidance on the effective implementation of the system. The audit team learnt that students also have access to academic support from module tutors who operate an open-door policy. Heads of subject and programme leaders are also very willing to give academic support.

128 In its discussions with students, the audit team heard that the formal tutor system is not always used by the students who may prefer to seek advice from an alternative member of academic staff. This was identified in the College review of the Academic Support Tutor System in 2000 at which time plans were outlined to link the system to the Personal Development Portfolio (PDP) arrangements. This linked system is planned for implementation in 2004-05. By linking the Academic Support System with PDP, it is intended that both will become fully embedded in the academic life of the students.

129 The SED made reference to the College's student retention statistics which demonstrate a non-completion rate well below the national average. The SED cited these positive statistics as evidence of the success of the College's policies and practices in supporting students.

130 The College has a clear and detailed system in place for monitoring students in difficulty. Academic support tutors, module tutors, heads of subject and programme leaders can all refer students to the Student Support Centre to receive additional help. Student attendance at classes is monitored and failure to attend triggers contact from the Student Support Centre. Students can also be referred for consideration by the Student Progress and Review Committee. This provides an opportunity for all staff involved in student support to share information and review possible action in individual cases. The SED did not mention the work of the Committee, nor could the audit team find reference to it in the Student Handbook but it became clear in the course of the audit that it played an important role in the support provided to students. The team considered that the arrangements for identifying, supporting and monitoring students at risk of not progressing or completing awards represented good practice.

131 All of the students with whom the audit team met were full of praise for the quality and variety of the academic support they received from the College. Overall, the team considered that the arrangements in place for providing academic support and guidance to the students were of a high quality.

Personal support and guidance

132 As noted earlier (see above, paragraph 125), the 1997 HEQC audit commended the College for the attention it had given to the creation of a supportive academic and social environment for students. The SED expressed the view that its provision of personal support continues to be effective. The audit team noted the wide range of support on offer, the main locus of which is the Student Support Centre.

133 Within the Centre there is a careers information room and a dedicated member of staff who is part of the Student Support team. There is a full-time chaplain and the Student Support team is also able to offer support for disabled student allowance applications. The College acknowledged that the absence of a crèche is viewed as a weakness by some staff and students, and the SED explained that the reason for its absence was essentially financial.

134 The audit team concurred with the College's view that the integrated nature of the support provided by the Centre is one of its key strengths. The team heard that communication between staff providing academic and pastoral support is very good. Students' views on the service are sought in a number of ways, for example through the Students' Union Consultative Committee and the College Students Services Committee. The students who met with the team spoke very highly of the personal support and guidance they received from the College indicating that staff were always willing to help. They commented very favourably on the Student Support Centre in particular.

135 The one criticism in this area, which came from the students, concerned the experience of those not living on campus. These included some full-time and all part-time students. The view was that those who did not live on campus had a different experience of the College. They found it difficult to participate in student representation and sometimes found it difficult to access resources. The matter was not identified in the SED and there was little evidence from the audit team's meetings with staff that this was regarded as a particular problem. As the widening participation policy of the College is anticipating more off-campus and part-time students, it may be appropriate for the College to ensure that it is able to recognise and meet the diverse needs of this student group to ensure that they feel an equal part of the learning community.

136 Overall, however, the audit team considered that the personal support and guidance provided by the College to its student body was of a high standard.

Collaborative provision

137 The College stated in its SED that Coventry University did not permit its partner colleges to engage in franchised activity and, therefore, the College had no arrangements which were formally collaborative. However, the College acknowledged that some of its programmes had similarities with collaborative provision, for example, the early years part-time programme which is delivered by College staff in various off-campus locations in and around Birmingham and the new Foundation degree in Voluntary and Community Organisational Development which had recently been validated by Coventry University to operate at two local FE colleges. The College had developed its own code of practice for collaborative provision, based on the *Code of practice*, to help and assist staff with these programmes.

138 The audit team met the programme leader for the Foundation degree and members of staff from the partner colleges who were teaching on the programme. The validation process had considered the programme in detail and had included scrutiny of the staff appointment process and the resources to underpin the course as well as the programme structure, content and delivery. A formal agreement between Newman and the partner colleges had been signed. The programme delivery had started in January 2003. Those teaching the modules were visiting lecturers of the College and had been given access to the College resources. All modules had module leaders who were members of staff at the College who would, amongst other duties, moderate the assessment of the module. The programme leader maintained a close oversight of the operation and delivery of modules and was involved in teaching observation. The staff from the partner colleges confirmed that they had been given sufficient guidance to enable them to assess effectively and were, in some instances, already teaching on other College programmes and hence aware of the College's policies and procedures. Student feedback was gained through similar processes to those operating at the College itself. Since the programme was in its early days of operation, a formal SSCC or programme committee had not yet been held.

139 The audit team believed that the College had approached the development of the Foundation degree in a careful and considered manner and had put in place sufficient safeguards to assure itself of the quality and to secure the standard of the award.

Section 3: The audit investigations: discipline audit trails

Discipline audit trails

140 For the selected DATs, the audit team met staff and students to discuss the programme, studied a sample of assessed student work, saw examples of learning resource materials, and studied annual monitoring reports for modules and programmes. The team's findings are as follows.

Theology

141 Two programmes formed the main focus of the Theology DAT: the BA/BSc Joint Honours Theology and the MA Theology. The CCRS, for which the College is a recognised centre of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, was also considered. The DAT did not consider activity relating to ITT or the Postgraduate Certificate in Education programmes which are subject to scrutiny by Ofsted.

142 The DSED described itself as a bespoke document but, helpfully, drew heavily on the course review documents prepared for periodic review in 2001-02 and on documents generated by the College's annual internal audit process. It provided an overview of Theology provision at the College and the audit team was grateful to the subject team for providing such an appropriate foundation on which to base its work. Programme specifications for both the main programmes, together with a brief statement about CCRS, were appended.

143 The DSED included progression and completion data for all three programmes, and also provided some commentary on entry qualifications, recruitment and progression. The audit team explored with staff how these statistical data were used and were told that their quality had improved significantly since the appointment of the current Academic Registrar. Staff claimed to find the statistical data useful, particularly in relation to recruitment. Overall, however, the team had some difficulty in establishing a transparent connection between statistical data and the monitoring of quality and standards, either in the documentation provided, or through discussion with staff.

144 The DSED stated that both main programmes were 'aligned with the *FHEQ* and with subject benchmarks'. The audit team identified appropriate references to these elements of the academic infrastructure in the programme specifications and in the various modular handbooks. The team also found a number of references to the NICATS level descriptors. The DSED referred to several of the College's codes of practice including those for programme approval and review, external examiners, admissions, work placement and IT. Through discussion with staff and by reviewing the available documentation, the team was able to establish that these references were underpinned by firm knowledge and understanding of the content and purpose of these external reference points.

145 The DSED indicated that handbooks were provided for students for every BA, MA and CCRS module in line with College policy. The range of information said to be in these documents was confirmed by the audit team, both by direct observation and through discussion with students. Students stated that they found the various module and programme handbooks useful and easy to comprehend. When questioned about handbook references to the skills development component of their programme, students stated that they were familiar with the concept and with the ways in which skills were developed within modules.

146 The audit team noted that, as part of the periodic review of the joint honours programme in 2002, the assessment strategy had been revised so that all modules would be assessed by coursework only. The staff explained that the decision had been reached only after extensive consultation within and beyond the College and in the light of general practice among theology and religious studies programmes within the sector. They outlined the academic case for change (including the particular needs of mature students who constituted an increasing portion of the College's intake) and pointed out that a wide range of assessment techniques remained. The staff also stressed that plagiarism is taken very seriously by the subject team. The change in assessment practice was also generally supported by students who confirmed that they were made aware of plagiarism in a number of ways: by tutors, through handbooks, through the plagiarism disclaimer on marksheets and through extended information in the dissertation handbook. The team noted the intention to review the effects of the change on an annual basis as part of the subject review process.

147 The audit team reviewed a substantial volume of assessed student work from a range of modules within the three programmes. The team noted that the standard of achievement was underpinned by a range of appropriate assessment and assessment-related processes. These included clarification of learning outcomes and assessment requirements in module handbooks; a commitment to the College's generic assessment criteria; appropriate double marking and monitoring arrangements; detailed and helpful comments on coursework mark sheets; and interaction with the external examiner in designing questions which enabled students to bring an appropriate critical focus to their engagement with material. The team reached the firm conclusion that the nature of the assessment and standard of student achievement in the programmes were appropriate to the title of the awards and their location within the *FHEQ*.

148 The audit team was able to study subject and programme external examiner reports for the last three academic years. Numerous positive comments were noted, both about the academic standards achieved by the students and about the quality of the teaching and learning environment through which the staff help students to reach their potential. Where matters for consideration had been raised by the external examiners, the team found evidence of a positive response in accordance with the expectations of the relevant College code. In

some cases this took the form of considered discussion and ongoing monitoring, as with the issue around the balance within the joint honours programme between theology and philosophy. Elsewhere, it resulted in specific changes, as for example, with the decision to refer all draft assessment questions to the external examiner for comment in order to ensure an appropriate critical focus. The team observed that a number of areas that had been identified by the external examiner in his early reports as requiring development had been effectively addressed by the end of the sequence.

149 The audit team found its discussions with the students particularly helpful in clarifying its view about the quality of different aspects of the learning environment. Students confirmed that the quality of the written feedback provided by staff was good and that it enhanced their work, thus reinforcing the view of the subject external examiner. The team was also able to see this from the generous sample of coursework and examination scripts provided. Students also confirmed the statement made by staff that the time taken to return marked assignments now, generally, fell within the target range determined by the College.

150 The DSED asserted that the staff operated 'a largely open-door policy with regard to student access to academic advice, as well as participating fully in the College system of Academic Support Tutors'. Discussion with students confirmed this was the case. The audit team was told that supplementary individual discussion with subject and programme leaders, module tutors and academic support tutors was available when necessary, and that this catered for both academic and pastoral needs.

151 The students confirmed that they had opportunities to make their views known on a wide range of matters. They were able to participate in the College-wide SSS, now in its second year, and agreed with the DSED's view that the SSCC offered 'a forum for dialogue with the student body of the subject area'. In general, the students felt that their voice was heard, and that the processes for providing their views were familiar to them. The audit team was informed of several specific examples of student-led change including: proposed modifications to the feedback form; prompt remedial action on the part of staff following a question on library resources; and changes to the content, delivery and location of an undergraduate module. However, the students were slightly less positive in relation to the formal module evaluation. In line with the College procedure, each module is subject to both mid-module and

end-of-module review. The team saw evidence of both processes in action in the form of individual returns and composite analysis. Discussion with the students, however, did not fully confirm the DSED statement that the arrangement was 'positively valued by students overall'. The practice of mid-module evaluation appeared to puzzle them and the end-of-module exercise was regarded as one that benefited staff rather than students, the students commenting that they rarely received feedback from the tutors after analysis of the forms.

152 The DSED provided a general survey of resources and identified both positive features and some continuing concerns. Although the DSED noted that 'some students continue to express concern about being unable to obtain the required books', the students who met with the audit team only spoke in positive terms about the availability of learning resources and support. They expressed satisfaction with the range of material and with current loan arrangements, and were familiar with procedures for accessing other libraries, for example, the University of Birmingham Library. They commented favourably on College initiatives to develop IT skills, particularly those involving early diagnostic testing and for providing special classes for students with no previous IT skills.

153 The audit team was impressed by the commitment and engagement of the subject staff, and by the atmosphere of mutual respect within which staff and students collaborate. The team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for programmes of study leading to the awards of BA/BSc Joint Honours Theology and MA Theology.

Education Studies

154 The DAT was based on the following programmes:

- BA (Joint Honours) Education Studies;
- BA (Honours) Early Years Education Studies, part-time work focused;
- BA (Honours) Early Years Education Studies.

155 The DAT was supported by a dedicated DSED prepared for the audit, together with programme specifications. The DSED for these programmes took the form of an evaluation of the current provision, drawing on a range of course review documentation and annual academic audits. It analysed strengths and weaknesses constructively. An annexe included progression and completion statistics which had been compiled centrally by the Academic Registry, but there was limited analysis of the implications of

these statistics in the main text. The DSED did note that the students' relatively low point-scores on entry had resulted in the subject area giving particular attention to how students are supported in the programmes throughout their first year of study. In discussion, however, staff reported that statistics were used mainly for recruitment purposes and to inform course development.

156 The programme specifications set out educational aims and learning outcomes, and link these clearly to teaching and learning styles, support and assessment that students undertaking the programmes would be expected to experience. Students are made aware of the criteria for assessment and how they link to their intended learning outcomes in a number of ways including through the student handbooks. The assessment systems for the schemes were rigorous and exhaustive and showed elements of originality, particularly in the practice developed for assessment of group presentations. Staff had taken a deliberate policy decision to move from written examination-based assessment to other modes, including written coursework assignments, syndicate/group presentations, seminar presentations and assignments based on internet materials. The DSED explained that the decision to remove traditional unseen examination questions as a form of formal assessment reflected a concern to ensure that assessment was 'fit-for-purpose' in relation to teaching outcomes, learning and teaching purposes, and subject content.

157 Staff were aware that this change, coupled with the implementation of the College's policy on double-marking, necessarily created a heavier burden in terms of securing an appropriate turnaround on feedback on assessments, but argued that such methods were more in tune with the overall philosophy of the course. The DSED explained that the subject area keeps under review the turnaround time of written assignments and endeavours where possible to meet the College's policy. However, the audit team heard from students that response time to assignments was sometimes unacceptably high, citing cases of assignments not being returned before the next assignment was set. The team considered in detail a sample of 12 education modules and noted that the average time between the submission of an assignment and its second-marking was seven and a half weeks, well in excess of the three week turnaround time stated in the College code of practice on assessment (see also above, paragraphs 51 to 53). On the other hand, the quality of the feedback provided by tutors was

very high and was appreciated by the students. In discussion, staff explained that they provided oral feedback to students on a regular basis and sought to do this in particular in the event of any delay occurring with the provision of formal written feedback. It was also explained that the subject team was looking at methods to factor the assessment load into overall staff workloads.

158 Staff were also aware that the shift from traditional examinations raised possible questions concerning plagiarism, but explained that the matrix of techniques adopted lowered this risk significantly. Staff also argued that their personal knowledge of students reduced the risks of not spotting plagiarism and that assignments related to the workplace effectively annulled the prospect of plagiarism in those cases.

159 The audit team reviewed a range of student work from all levels of the programmes. It was satisfied that the nature of the assessment and standard of student achievement in the programmes was appropriate to the title of the awards and their location within the *FHEQ*.

160 External examiner reports are considered by the appropriate programme board and responses are incorporated within the annual subject reports. External examiners' comments were very positive and, particularly in the case of the part-time early years programme, showed that a constructive relationship with an experienced examiner had assisted the programme team over a period of time to develop a meaningful and rich work-based framework.

161 Student feedback is sought at the end of each module and, in line with College policy, there are also opportunities to provide mid-module feedback to tutors. The students who met with the audit team appreciated the opportunity of providing feedback but saw this as being more valuable when it was administered informally in discussion mode rather than by completing questionnaires. Student evaluation of the programmes was generally very positive, but with regular comments concerning a perceived lack of availability of key texts and serious concerns regarding the timescale for the receipt of feedback on written assignments.

162 The availability of resources proved to be an issue in the audit team's meetings with students. For example some students considered that resources for final-year assessments were relatively scarce. Others, including those on the full-time early years course, expressed concern about the non-availability of key texts. The team heard that the College had made special arrangements for students on the part-time

early years programme for stocks of books to be made available at their off-site learning centres.

163 The students indicated that the information provided about the programmes was generally good, with the exception that some students on the full-time early years programme had been unsure of its content until they had enrolled. By contrast, those on the part-time programme had been well-informed. Part-time students also appreciated the opportunity to visit the College on occasions such as summer schools and to mix with their full-time peers. All of the students who met with the audit team indicated that they valued the support and care provided by their tutors and the overall supportive ethos of the programmes.

164 The audit team reached the view that, notwithstanding some issues around the assessment feedback and the availability of texts, the provision within Education Studies was of a high quality, that staff showed a considerable level of commitment and that this was reciprocated by the students. The team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for programmes of study leading to the awards of BA (Joint Honours) Education Studies, and BA (Honours) Early Years Education Studies.

Section 4: The audit investigations: published information

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

165 The 1997 HEQC audit identified the quality of information published by the College as a strength. The College provides students with a large amount of published information. A Student Handbook, outlining most aspects of College life, is given to all first-year students. Each module has a handbook, which outlines the aims, curriculum and assessment pattern of the module. There are programme handbooks, which include the aims and curriculum of the programme, along with advice on matters relating to academic support (see above, paragraph 126), and there are also subject handbooks. The audit team noted that these varied in quality. While the information appeared to be accurate, there was some repetition and some gaps in the information contained within the sample of handbooks provided. The team considered that there is scope for rationalisation of the suite of handbooks, and room for greater consistency in their layout and content. The language used in the

handbooks is accessible to students although they did not always use the most recent set of terms concerning, for example, programme specifications and learning outcomes. Some of the handbooks are now available electronically.

166 Students remarked that they were grateful for all the information they received, although several noted an information overload especially at the beginning of each academic year. The students also reported consistently that staff were very willing to help to interpret any published documents for them and that someone was always available to answer any questions.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information

167 The College Information Strategy states that it is working towards publication by September 2003 of the various items identified in HEFCE's document, *Information on quality and standards in higher education* (HEFCE's document 02/15). The SED stated that much of the information exists currently, the main exception being the summaries of external examiner reports. The audit team was able to confirm the accuracy of this position, and found that the relevant information published currently by the College was accurate and complete.

168 The Academic Registrar's office, whose remit includes marketing, oversees the publication of information. Statistics used in published materials are also the responsibility of the Academic Registrar. There is a Marketing Unit, led by a Marketing Manager, which is responsible for producing, or overseeing the production of, all publicity material including the prospectus. The Unit is responsible for producing all press releases and advertisements which relate to the academic programmes. The College web site is also centrally controlled; the Marketing Manager works with the Web Technologies Manager to assure the quality and accuracy of this material.

169 In general, the audit team was satisfied that the College was engaging constructively with the recommendations in HEFCE's document 02/15 and that the information the College was publishing currently about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards was reliable.

Findings

Findings

170 An institutional audit of the College was undertaken during the week commencing 19 May 2003. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the College's programmes of study and on the discharge of its responsibility for awarding degrees of Coventry University. As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with HEFCE, SCOP and UUK, two DATs were conducted. This section of the report summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged during the audit, and making recommendations to the College for enhancing current practice.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes

171 The College offers awards that are validated by Coventry University and the College has linked its processes closely to the University's requirements. At the time of the current audit, the College was in the final stages of changing validation partners to move into a strategic alliance involving the University of Leicester and Bishop Grosseteste College of Higher Education which was due to come into effect in September 2003. Given that many of the new arrangements had not been finalised, the audit team focused its enquiries on the existing arrangements with Coventry University.

172 Overall responsibility for the quality of provision at the College rests with the Academic Board. It discharges this responsibility mainly through the work of two of its subcommittees: the ADC, which oversees new programme development and periodic review, and the ASC which oversees annual monitoring and programmes in operation. These Committees were established to operate from session 2002-03 following a review of the committee structure. The audit team noted that the structure was relatively new and, therefore, still developing. From the evidence available it appeared to the team that, generally, these Committees were fulfilling their remits but that there could be greater clarity about the relative roles of the Academic Board and its various subcommittees, the Committees could be more proactive in meeting their terms of reference so that discussion of academic matters is clearly located within the academic committee structure, and that information flow between the Committees could be improved. The team also noted that, although the reports of external bodies (such as the Agency's subject review reports) were given consideration by the College, this did not happen systematically within the

academic committee structure. The College is advised to ensure that responsibility relating to academic management is located consistently within the committee structure and to ensure that reports of external bodies are given detailed consideration, systematically within that structure.

173 Partly in response to discussion with heads of subject and programme leaders, the College established the AAC as a subcommittee of the Academic Board in September 2002. The audit team noted that its terms of reference included a wide range of matters, some of which appeared to be operational in their focus (such as invigilation and timetabling arrangements) and others of which related to academic quality and standards (such as responsibility for reviewing assessment regulations). While the team could see the potential value of the group, it did consider that there was a potential overlap between its role and the remit of the existing key committees. The College may wish to review the role and function of the Committee and consider locating it outside the academic committee structure.

174 The College provides Coventry University with an annual report on the operation of its quality assurance procedures which are based around validation, annual monitoring and period review at the programme level. All new programmes are scrutinised by an IRP before progressing to a CARP, the latter being organised by Coventry University. Both stages include external participation. The College stated in its SED that it was seeking to introduce greater scrutiny of proposals prior to the IRP stage to help ensure that any matters are dealt with adequately before reaching the next step in the validation process. The evidence of the audit confirmed that the validation process was providing the expected level of scrutiny. The College stated that the processes required by Coventry University had been helpful to them in raising staff awareness of quality assurance matters and this was confirmed by staff. The audit team thus formed the view that the College had robust systems in place for the scrutiny of new programmes and for amendments to existing programmes and that these were being appropriately applied.

175 Under current arrangements, all programmes are reviewed on a six-yearly cycle using procedures defined by Coventry University which are similar to those applied to the validation of new programmes. Most College programmes had recently been through this process and the audit team was able to confirm that the systems in place for periodic review were operating in an effective manner.

176 Annual monitoring occurs through reporting from subject to programme, school and finally institutional level. Members of the College Academic Audit Committee monitor the process by observing at each level and reporting to the College's ASC. The College stated that the involvement of Academic Audit Committee members ensured that appropriate scrutiny took place at each stage and assisted with the identification of areas of good practice. The College had recently introduced an Academic Health Day, which occurs after the internal monitoring process has been completed and before the next round begins. It involves members of the ASC, as well as other members of College staff, and aims to identify the key themes arising from the previous round of monitoring and to help set the agenda for the next round. The College had recognised some difficulties in the annual monitoring process, mainly associated with the need to ensure all stages were completed in time to avoid disrupting future stages of the process, but believed that it provided a robust mechanism for reviewing the annual operation of its programmes.

177 The audit team was able to review the annual monitoring reports at each stage of the process, the College's final report to Coventry University and to discuss the operation of the monitoring process with staff at all levels. From this the team believed that the College had sound processes in place for monitoring its provision. Although aspects were new, the team considered that the detailed scrutiny undertaken at each stage, augmented by the Academic Health Day, had the opportunity to significantly enhance the College's ability to secure standards and enhance quality and, as such, represented a feature of good practice.

178 As noted above, the College was in the process of changing validation partner from Coventry University to the University of Leicester. Under the proposals, the College would take more responsibility for organising the validation process with oversight and final approval being the responsibility of a Joint Board of Study of the College and the University. The audit team heard that this would involve a 'lighter touch' from the University of Leicester than that currently exercised by Coventry University. The team formed the view that the College now had sufficient experience to assume greater responsibility for assuring the quality of its provision but would advise the College to maintain the rigour of the quality assurance arrangements currently in place.

179 The College has a wide range of formal and informal mechanisms in place for gathering feedback from students. Students are members of

many of the College's formal committees, SSCs operate at programme and subject level, and a cross-college annual survey of student opinion is undertaken. Furthermore, evaluations of student opinion are carried out at the mid-module and end-of-module stages. Other areas of the College, such as the library, operate student focus groups to obtain a more detailed evaluation of their services. The views of staff are heard through the committee structure, executive management groups and through meetings between the Principal and her staff. Feedback from employers and potential employers is gathered largely through the liaison connected with work-placements and the College is an active member of a large number of community and other interest groups locally and nationally.

180 The audit team heard of examples of good practice in gaining student feedback, such as the mid-module evaluation where thoughtful implementation provided valuable feedback, the timing of which allowed teaching to be refined to meet current students' needs. In addition, there were several examples of the effectiveness of the College's consultative approach, such as the proposals to review the College's future strategic direction which had been discussed both in formal committees and in consultation with staff and students. The audit team recognised the effort required to sustain such processes and considered the College was successful in fulfilling its mission in this area which specifically valued democratic debate.

181 The College has a limited number of programmes which are delivered in conjunction with local partners. The quality of all such provision is assured through the College's existing approval and review procedures. The College has developed a code of practice relating to collaborative provision. The audit team believed that the quality of such provision was being appropriately established and monitored.

182 The findings of the audit confirm that broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the College's current arrangements for managing the quality of its programmes, while recommending that the academic committee structure should discharge more explicitly its responsibility for academic management. On the basis that the current level of rigour in its quality assurance arrangements is maintained as the College changes validation partner, there can be broad confidence in the College's likely future ability to manage the quality of its programmes.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

183 The SED stated that the College was using the academic infrastructure to establish its academic standards, which were further secured through external representation on validation and review panels and through the external examining system.

184 External subject experts are involved in module and programme approval through the internal review and CARP mechanisms. External examiners are appointed at the subject and programme levels to ensure comparability between the academic standards at the College and those at other UK institutions. From its review of the external examiners' reports and their use in the annual monitoring process, the audit team was able to confirm the College view that external examiners played an important part in the setting and maintenance of standards. The team noted that the College has begun relatively recently to compile an institutional overview of external examiners' reports. The College also identified a set of actions it intended to take in relation to the external examiner system, including the need to ensure that there is full and timely reporting on actions taken, and the need to articulate the role of programme examiners more clearly. On the basis of the evidence seen, the team had confidence in the College's capacity to pursue this work.

185 The College stated that it benchmarks its activities against similar institutions and uses statistical data to monitor student progression and retention. The audit team heard that the College was still developing its use of the statistics, which are provided by its Academic Registry. In discussions with staff the team heard of some examples of the use of statistics, for example, an analysis of destination data had instigated the development of new pathways within an existing programme. The discussions with staff suggested that the use of statistics to inform policy development and planning, other than in the areas of student recruitment and marketing, was not uniform. Senior staff were aware that the use of statistics is not yet embedded within the College's deliberative structures, although they are used at subject and programme level to inform the annual monitoring process. The team considered that the College might develop a more analytical approach to its use of statistics.

186 On the basis of the evidence available to it, the audit team concluded that the College's arrangements for securing standards were effective. The findings of the audit confirm that broad

confidence can be placed in the soundness of the College's current arrangements for managing the academic standards of its awards, while recommending that the academic committee structure should discharge more explicitly its responsibility for academic management. On the basis that the current level of rigour in its arrangements for securing standards is maintained as the College changes validation partner, there can be broad confidence in the College's likely future management of the academic standards of its awards.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

187 The SED identified a key strength of the College student support system as the provision of an integrated support service from a centrally located resource to meet the academic, career, health, spiritual and technical needs of students. The audit team learnt that the College has recently been able to deploy funding from the HEFCE Poor Estates initiative to extend and develop its library and learning resources centre to improve its layout and increase the availability of individual student study space and access to PCs. The team was told that the Head of Library and Learning Support was in the process of reviewing the role of the library and Student Support Centre. The College indicated that increasing the book and journal stock is problematic, given the size of the available budget. A revised Collections Strategy was considered by the LTC in December 2002 and was due for approval by the Academic Board at the time of the current audit.

188 The College IT facilities include a network of open access machines available in a variety of locations throughout the campus. The College intranet is accessible to all users both on and off campus. Every module is allotted a dedicated area on the intranet to include copies of handbooks and lecture material. The College is seeking to increase the use of the intranet and recognises that its use by subject areas is variable currently, but does include examples of good practice.

189 The College Student Support and Guidance Strategy identifies priorities for the work of the Student Support Centre. The Centre provides a range of services, including those related to literacy, IT, careers and pastoral matters. Literacy support includes specialist support for dyslexic students, a feature which was praised by students in discussion with the audit team.

190 The views of students on the library and other support services are gained through a number of

user groups and through the annual SSS. The audit team heard a variety of student opinions which suggested an inconsistency across subjects. The students praised the overall friendly working environment and the refurbished library. From the team's discussions it seemed that concerns relating to the availability of appropriate library resources were identified particularly by final year students and those studying off-campus.

191 From all of its deliberations, the audit team formed the view that the College was aware of its shortcomings in the provision of learning resources for students and that it had begun to seek ways to address these. The team would encourage the College to take full account of the needs of groups of students who, increasingly, are following courses off-site and/or on a part-time basis.

192 The audit team was able to explore the effectiveness of the range of mechanisms which the College has put in place to provide academic and personal support and guidance to students. The Student Support Centre plays a key role in this. From its consideration of module and programme documentation, the team was able to confirm that study skills are embedded in all modules and that useful advice on a range of matters including referencing and presentation, was included in the student handbooks at the module, subject and programme level. There is an academic tutor system in place whereby students are allocated a tutor from their subject area on entry to the College with whom they meet once each term. Written guidance on the system is provided for staff and students. The team identified some instances of the formal tutor system not being used by some students who prefer to seek advice from an alternative member of staff. This was identified by the College in a review of the system in 2000 and there are plans in place to link the tutor system to the PDP arrangements, which it is thought will address this matter. The team heard that the students are also able to seek advice from module tutors who operate an open-door policy.

193 The College has a clear and detailed system in place for monitoring students in difficulty. Academic support tutors, module tutors, heads of subject and programme leaders can all refer students to the Student Support Centre to receive additional help. Student attendance at classes is monitored and failure to attend triggers contact from the Student Support Centre. Students can also be referred for consideration by the Student Progress and Review Committee, providing an opportunity for all staff involved in student support to share information and review possible action in individual cases.

The audit team considered that the arrangements for identifying, supporting and monitoring students at risk of not progressing or completing awards represented good practice.

194 The 1997 HEQC audit report had invited the College to review the length of time taken for marked assignments to be returned to students. Difficulties with this were highlighted in the SWS prepared for the current audit. The College has targets for the return of assignments set out in its code of practice on assessment and the Registry has taken steps to provide better facilities for the receipt, return, and monitoring of assignments. However, it became clear to the audit team that the College still has some work to do to meet its own targets. The College is, therefore, advised to address the turnaround times for providing written feedback to students on their assessments.

195 The capacity of staff to support students' learning is facilitated through a range of staff development opportunities. The College provides an internal programme of staff development seminars. In discussion with a range of staff, it appeared that the topics for the spring and summer 2003 programme had been selected in a variety of ways, including through the appraisal system, but the audit team was not able to identify any systematic mechanism for this. The team also heard that, while there was support for staff to participate in development activity, and a willingness on the part of staff to become involved, workloads often precluded participation. While the team considered that the College has carried out some positive work in this area, it could also review its staff development strategy to ensure that it links closely with the College Strategic Plan.

196 In general, the students spoke very highly of the support and guidance they received from the College indicating that staff were always willing to help. They commented very favourably on the Student Support Centre in particular. Overall, the audit team considered that the range and integrated nature of the academic and personal support provided to students represented good practice.

The outcomes of the discipline audit trails

Theology

197 From its study of students' assessed work, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in the Theology programmes was appropriate to the levels of the awards and their location within the *FHEQ*. The programme

specifications set out appropriate educational aims and learning outcomes, and linked these clearly to teaching and learning approaches. Formal examinations were not used but assessment techniques were varied, ensured authenticity and used clearly articulated criteria to help ensure standards were appropriate to the levels of the awards. The outcomes of the programmes reflect the *Subject benchmark statement* for theology and religious studies.

198 Student evaluation was generally very positive with the accessibility of the teaching staff receiving particular mention. The students indicated that the information they had received relating to their programmes provided an accurate reflection of their experiences and that programme handbooks were useful and comprehensible.

199 The audit team concluded that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for programmes leading to the awards of BA/BSc Joint Honours Theology and MA Theology.

Education Studies

200 From its study of students' assessed work, and from discussions with students and staff, the audit team formed the view that the standard of student achievement in Education Studies was appropriate to the level of the awards and their location within the *FHEQ*. The programme specifications set out appropriate educational aims, learning outcomes and linked these clearly to teaching and learning approaches. Formal examinations were not used but the assessment techniques adopted ensured authenticity and used clearly articulated criteria to help ensure standards were appropriate to the level of the awards. Some innovative assessment techniques were used, particularly in the practice developed for assessing group presentations. The audit team had some concerns about the prompt return of assessed work, a matter which was problematic elsewhere in the College. The content and outcomes of the programmes reflect the *Subject benchmark statement* for education studies.

201 Student evaluation was generally very positive with the accessibility of the teaching staff receiving particular mention. Some concerns about the availability of appropriate learning resources were raised and the audit team explored with the College the ways in which this was being addressed. In discussion, students indicated that the information produced by the College regarding their programmes generally provided an accurate reflection of their experiences and that course handbooks were useful and comprehensible.

Part-time students were more positive about this aspect of the provision than full-time students.

202 The audit team concluded that the quality of the learning opportunities available to students was suitable for programme of study leading to the awards of: BA (Joint Honours) Education Studies and BA (Honours) Early Years Education Studies.

The institution's use of the academic infrastructure

203 The SED stated that the College had taken careful account of the national academic infrastructure. The College has developed a set of internal codes of practice, based on the sections of the *Code of practice*. The College codes apply to all members of the College community and are available through a variety of channels including: the web site, the Academic Handbook, the Handbook on Legislation and Policies, and student handbooks. Staff who talked to the audit team had a good understanding of these codes and their application to their practice.

204 The College uses the *FHEQ* in conjunction with the NICATS level descriptors and subject benchmark statements to define the level of each module and the overall standard of each award. Staff commented positively on the advantages of this process and how it assisted them in ensuring that standards were appropriately set and maintained, a view which was generally reinforced by external examiners in their reports. It is a formal requirement that programme specifications should make explicit reference to the *FHEQ* and relevant subject benchmark statements in formulating aims and learning outcomes.

205 The audit team was satisfied that the College had responded appropriately to the *FHEQ*, relevant subject benchmark statements and the requirement for programme specifications.

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

206 The SED provided a clear, accurate and largely comprehensive picture of the College's quality assurance and standard setting procedures which proved a valuable reference point for the work of the audit team. As with other areas of the College's work, the SED might have made greater use of statistical evidence to aid self-evaluation. Generally, the extent of self-analysis displayed in the SED demonstrates the College's current capacity for

effective self-evaluation. This should prove helpful as it moves into new arrangements for validation and assumes more responsibility for assuring the quality of its provision and securing the academic standards of its awards.

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

207 The SED acknowledged that enhancement deserved more attention at the College and provided a detailed action plan for the period 2002 to 2005. From its review of documentation and discussions with staff, the audit team concurred with the priorities established by the College which seemed appropriate and timely. The team heard of actions being taken in each of the areas identified in the SED, although work to address the assessment turnaround remained problematic. The team noted that the move to validation by the University of Leicester with its accompanying changes to procedures will undoubtedly set the agenda for much of the work in the period following the current audit.

208 During the course of its discussions, the audit team heard of many examples of what it considered to be good practice, for example, in relation to annual monitoring and the Academic Health Day. The SED acknowledged that more could be done to identify and disseminate such examples of good practice. The team would support this view and encourage the College to prioritise a focus on enhancement and to implement systematic mechanisms for the dissemination of good practice.

The reliability of information

209 From 2004, the audit process will include a check on the reliability of the information set published by institutions in the format recommended in HEFCE's document 02/15. The audit team found that the College was moving in an appropriate and timely manner to fulfil its responsibilities in this matter, and that the information it was publishing currently about the quality of its programmes and the standards of its awards was reliable.

Features of good practice

210 The following features of good practice were noted:

- i the extent of consultation and discussion with staff and students as part of the process towards changing validation partner (paragraph 39);
- ii the use of the annual monitoring process and the associated Academic Health Day for reflection on policy and practice (paragraph 65);
- iii the examples of good practice in the mechanisms for gaining student feedback and the opportunities provided for student participation (paragraphs 83 and 95);
- iv the procedures in place for identifying, supporting and monitoring students at risk of not progressing or completing awards (paragraph 130);
- v the range and integrated nature of the academic and personal support and guidance provided to students (paragraphs 131 and 136).

Recommendations for action

211 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- i ensuring that responsibility relating to academic management is located consistently and effectively within the academic committee structure (paragraph 35);
- ii addressing the turnaround times for students receiving feedback on assessments and to ensure that the assessment process has the capacity to cope with any planned expansion in student numbers and programmes (paragraph 52);
- iii maintaining the rigour of existing quality and standards processes in the context of the planned change in validating institution (paragraphs 62 and 67);
- iv considering in detail the reports of external bodies, such as Ofsted and the Agency, within the academic committee structure (paragraph 82).

212 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- i reviewing the role and function of the AAC, as well as its location in the College committee structure (paragraph 31);
- ii implementing systematic mechanisms for disseminating good practice and focusing on enhancement (paragraph 56);
- iii adopting a more analytical approach to the use of statistics and management information (paragraph 99);
- iv ensuring there is a link between staff development activity and the College Strategic Plan as the development activity becomes embedded (paragraph 110);
- v managing carefully the learning resources to ensure these are adequate and appropriate to meet College plans for expanding the course portfolio and widening access (paragraph 124).

Appendix

The College's response to the audit report

The College is pleased to receive the judgement of broad confidence in the quality of its programmes and standards of its awards as well as in the College's ability to maintain this into the future. The identification of good practice in many aspects of student support and guidance and the contribution this makes to student progress and achievement is also welcomed. The College takes its responsibilities to students very seriously and is glad to see acknowledgement of the reflective approach taken to student learning and the resulting positive outcomes. The College notes the audit team's comments on the importance of maintaining the rigour of quality processes as the move to a new validating university is managed but would stress that the change to the University of Leicester is planned further to enhance quality.

The college has taken immediate steps to address the issues raised by the audit team. Since the audit was completed the College has taken the following action:

- reviewed the existing committee structure and strengthened the responsibility for academic management by dispensing with the AAC and locating the LTC more centrally;
- revisited the terms of reference of other committees to ensure that decisions are appropriately located;
- highlighted the need to include further evidence in committee minutes of the thorough way in which the reports of external bodies are considered;
- identified the timeliness of assessment processes as a major theme for action through the quality committees in the coming year;
- strengthened the process for new course approval including resource implications;
- enhanced the budget for staff development whilst requiring specific evidence of the links between planned activities and institutional priorities;
- set up a Management Information Systems working party to improve the consistency and use of management information in all aspects of decision making. This will enhance existing good practice in the publishing of information to students;
- in response to the suggestion that the College implements systematic mechanisms for dissemination of good practice internally, the Academic Audit Committee will be required to develop an appropriate approach. The College is already engaged in the dissemination of good practice nationally through its participation in, for example, the project 'From Elitism to Inclusion' (2001) which identifies Newman College as outstandingly successful in widening participation and in retention of students.

The College has found the process of institutional audit to be helpful, informative and rigorous. The positive outcomes of the process, including the recognition of good practice and strength in both Theology and Education Studies, are most encouraging and action taken as a result of the recommendations will contribute to maintaining and enhancing existing high standards. The institutional audit report is a valuable contribution to the range of information on quality currently scrutinised by the College.

