Heythrop College

NOVEMBER 2005

Preface

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

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

The purpose of institutional audit

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

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

Judgements

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

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

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

Nationally agreed standards

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

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

The audit process

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

The main elements of institutional audit are:

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

The evidence for the audit

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

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

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

From 2004, institutions will be required to publish information about the quality and standards of their programmes and awards in a format recommended in document 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance,* published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The audit team reviews progress towards meeting this requirement.

Contents

Summary

Introduction

A team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Heythrop College (the College) from 28 November - 2 December 2005 to carry out an institutional audit. The purpose of the audit was to provide public information on the quality of the opportunities available to students and on the academic standards of the awards that the College offers on behalf of the University of London, which 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 read a wide range of documents relating to the way the College manages the academic aspects of its provision.

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

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

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

Outcome of the audit

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

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

Features of good practice

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

- the composite report of issues raised by external examiners, considered by Academic Board, as an effective vehicle for developing opportunities for enhancement

- the effective links between programme monitoring reports and the identification of staff development needs

- the ways in which the substantial and recent agenda for change has been achieved both through consensus and the enthusiastic engagement of the College's staff.

Recommendations for action

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

Recommendations for action that is advisable:

- to identify a person who can sustain the momentum already established in developing quality assurance systems, and to drive the quality and standards agenda

- to embrace the intentions of 'normalisation' in all aspects of its activities in relation to the recruitment, selection and appointment of staff, within the terms of the College's statutes.

Recommendations for action that is desirable:

- to ensure that all module evaluations are disclosed, critically analysed and incorporated effectively into the annual monitoring process

- to review achievement of students who are jointly taught in level 2/3 modules in order to ensure that the College's approach aligns with standard sector practice on progression and achievement. Such review should be informed by appropriate external advice, analysis of student achievement data and subsequent consultation with students

- to formalise the loci of responsibility for the oversight of the sections of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*) with appropriate timescales and reporting lines

- to standardise student representation at undergraduate programme level

- to review how the College might better achieve collective outcomes from processes which currently have a confidential element, in order to facilitate opportunities for quality enhancement more effectively

- to prioritise the production and consideration of data on the student profile in order to inform the development of the College's equal opportunities agenda

- to ensure that an overview is taken of the consistency and completeness of module handbooks.

Summary outcomes of the discipline audit trail

The audit team also looked in some detail at four Master's programmes in Theology and Religious Studies: MA Christian Spirituality, MA Pastoral Liturgy, MA Pastoral Studies/Theology and MA Psychology of Religion, to find out how well the College's systems and procedures were working at programme level. The College provided the team with documents, including student work, and members of the team spoke to staff and students from each programme. As well as its findings supporting the overall confidence statements given above, the team was able to state that the standard of student achievement in the programmes was appropriate to the titles of the awards and their place within *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), published by QAA. The team was also able to state that the quality of learning opportunities available to students was suitable for the programmes of study leading to the awards.

National reference points

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

The College is not currently funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and therefore is not subject to the requirements as set out in *Information on quality and standards in higher education: Final guidance* (*HEFCE 03/51*) regarding Teaching Quality Information.

Main report

Main report

1   An institutional audit of Heythrop College (the College) was undertaken during the week commencing 28 November 2005. 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 the degrees of the University of London.

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

3   The audit checked the effectiveness of the 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 the University of London. 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 a discipline audit trail (DAT), 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: Heythrop College

The institution and its mission

4   Heythrop College can trace its history as an institution of scholarship and education in theology and philosophy from the foundation of a College for English Jesuits at Louvain (now in Belgium) in 1614. Heythrop College became a College of the University of London (the University) by Royal Charter on the joint petition of the University and of the Society of Jesus in 1970. The College has been located in its current premises in Kensington Square since 1993 which it leases from the Maria Assumpta Centre. The site includes two libraries covering theology and philosophy respectively and teaching and social facilities for students.

5   The College is a constituent college of the University and has the same devolved powers under University Statutes as other colleges. Throughout the 1990s the University devolved significant elements of its academic responsibilities to its constituent institutions operating within its 'Academic Framework'. At the time of the audit, therefore, the College was responsible for the quality management of all aspects of its undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision, and the academic standards of the associated awards, while the University retains responsibility for the examination of research degree programmes (MPhil, PhD and higher doctorates). Research degree students are regarded as students of the College. The College philosophy degree operates as a federally managed programme, and is the Lead College for the Bachelor of Divinity (BD) and Diploma in Theology in the University of London External System. The University of London External System is part of a separate institutional audit.

6   The Academic Board is the formal academic authority of the College and is responsible for approval and regulation of all teaching; schemes of study; research and examinations leading to awards of the University; and setting, enhancing, and

reviewing the academic quality and standards of all teaching and research degree programmes delivered by the College.

7 Heythrop College is one of the smallest full colleges of the University, with some 570 full-and part-time students (approx 350 FTE) taking undergraduate, taught postgraduate and research degree programmes in philosophy and theology. Of these, approximately 300 are postgraduate students.

8 The College operates a recently established departmental structure, within which all full-time academic staff are located. Each department (Philosophy, Theology and Pastoral Studies) is led by a Head of Department and in addition there is a Dean of Research, a Dean of Undergraduate Studies and a Dean of Postgraduate Studies. The Senior Management Team comprises: the Principal, Vice-Principal, Director of Administration, Secretary and Registrar, and College Librarian. The Academic Management Team includes the Principal, Vice-Principal, Director of Administration, Secretary and Registrar, College Librarian, Heads of Departments, all Deans and the Chair of the Academic Standards Committee.

9 In 2005-06 the provision at the College included the University's federal BA and MA in Philosophy; four college-based undergraduate degree programmes, and 14 college-based taught postgraduate programmes in theology and related subject areas.

10 A distinctive feature of the College is that, though recognised by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) for purposes of tuition fee support, the College has not, thus far, received funding from the HEFCE, rather it receives approximately 50 per cent of its income from DfES-funded tuition fees, and approximately 50 per cent from the Trustees for Roman Catholic Purposes. In 2003 it was decided that DfES funding, in the form of tuition fee support would end and in autumn 2004 the Governing Body of the College decided to seek HEFCE funding on the basis of entitlement, as an established provider of recognised and quality assured degree

programmes within the federal University. In April 2005 HEFCE agreed that the College would become publicly funded in respect of students first registering in September 2006 onwards. The imminent change in funding status provides a unique context for the College and one which has, in part, instigated a process of 'normalisation' by the College - the 'incremental adoption of systems, practices and external relationships normal in English HEIs.

11 The College retains a mission, staff profile and Governing Body that reflect its Christian and Catholic heritage. Academic staff include members of the Society of Jesus and to a lesser extent diocesan clergy and other religious orders. The Royal Charter, granted in 1971, provides that the Principal of the College shall normally be a member of the Society of Jesus. There is as yet no hierarchy of academic posts and all academic staff are line managed by the Principal.

12 The College operates within the living Catholic tradition of theology but is open to students of other traditions. As an ecumenical and cooperative enterprise the College strives to be a community of scholars from different traditions working together to a common end of both freedom and commitment. A particular aim is to foster a critical understanding of the tradition and ongoing faith and life of the Catholic community, and to make this understanding available within wider theological studies.

13 The mission of the College is:

● to make a significant contribution in the fields of theology and philosophy to the intellectual and educational life of the College, of society in general and of the Christian community in particular

● to form men and women for ministry within the Christian faith communities, especially the Catholic community

● to foster a sustained theological and philosophical reflection upon, dialogue with and critique of contemporary secular and religious culture

● to promote and develop engagement and dialogue with other religious traditions

- to be a resource for the life and mission of the Catholic Church and the wider Christian community.

Collaborative provision

14   The College has entered into only one collaborative arrangement which involves the shared delivery of one M level module with the South London and Maudsley Hospital NHS trust. This was included within the scope of the present audit.

Background information

15   The published information available for this audit included:

- the information on the College's website

- the report of the previous Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) Quality Audit of the College (1994)

- the reports of QAA reviews of provision at subject level.

16   The College provided QAA with the following documents:

- the self-evaluation document (SED)

- the discipline self-evaluation document (DSED) for the one area selected for a DAT

- the Ordinances of the University of London

- the College's 2006 entry prospectus

- the Quality Assurance Handbook - issue 1 June 2004 and issue 2 September 2005

- the Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes 2005-06

- the Committee Handbook 2005-06.

17   The audit team was given ready access to the College's internal documents in hardcopy or on the College website and intranet, and to a range of documentation relating to the selected DAT, the latter including examples of student work.

The audit process

18   Following the preliminary meeting at the College in January 2005, QAA confirmed that one DAT would be conducted during the audit visit. QAA received the SED and the DSED in July 2005. The audit team's selection of the DAT was within Theology and Religious Studies discipline; four programmes were considered: MA Christian Spirituality (MASP), MA Pastoral Liturgy (MAPL), MA Pastoral Studies/Theology (MAPS), and MA Psychology of Religion (MAPY). The DSED was based on a self-evaluation for an internal programme review that took place in February/March 2005, prefaced by a contextual preamble and supported by a supplement, including additional material on the management of quality and standards, a summary of follow-up to the programme review, a copy of the report on the meeting with the programme review panel, and the subsequent action plan approved by the College's Academic Board.

19   The audit team visited the College from 24 to 26 October 2005 for the purpose of exploring with the Principal, senior members of staff and representatives of the College's Students' Union (HSU) matters relating to the management of quality and standards raised by the SED or other documentation provided for the team. During this briefing visit, the team signalled a number of themes for the audit and developed a programme of meetings for the audit visit, which was agreed with the College.

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

21   In July 2005, HSU submitted to QAA a students' written submission (SWS) produced by a small steering group led by the incumbent and designate student union Presidents. Student views were gathered primarily on the basis of a questionnaire, and focus groups. Students were also invited to comment on the

early drafts of the SWS. HSU indicated that the document had been shared with appropriate College staff. The audit team is grateful to the students for preparing this document to support the audit.

22   The audit team comprised Ms LH Leyland, Mr D Ferney, Mr P Griffiths, Professor A Torrance, auditors, and Mrs S Plumeridge, audit secretary. The audit was coordinated for QAA by Dr A Biscoe and Mrs E Harries-Jenkins, Assistant Directors, Reviews Group.

Developments since the previous academic quality audit

23   As indicated earlier in this report Heythrop College currently does not receive funding from HEFCE and therefore has not been required to undertake an academic quality audit; its previous external review was the HEQC Quality Audit that took place in June 1993. It was considered inappropriate to detail the developments since that audit given the time passed and the scale of the changes over the 11-year period. The following sections however, do outline the more recent relevant developments.

Section 2: The audit investigations: institutional processes

The institution's view as expressed in the SED

24   The SED described in some detail the distinctive characteristics that shape the College's identity, including its historical roots. It went on to explain that this history and these characteristics have particular relevance in terms of the development of the institution's processes for assuring and enhancing quality and standards. The underlying principles of the College's quality and standards framework are:

● an ethos which combines scholarship and friendliness

● the high quality of teaching

● the academic support given to individuals

25   The SED also described the strengths that the College has retained to support the standard of awards and the quality of learning opportunities:

● deploying teaching staff wholly within their areas of specialism

● working with specialist external examiners

● staff interaction with relevant practice

26   The College has made significant changes over the last five years as part of the process of 'normalisation'; examples include the development of quality assurance systems, curriculum structures and assessment practices and the shadowing of some HEFCE requirements or systems on a case study basis in preparation for the accountabilities associated with public funding which will commence in September 2006. Some of these developments have been applied for the first time in 2004-05 and the SED stated that changes may not yet be fully embedded.

27   The SED described an emphasis on ownership and on developing and nurturing a new culture of self-analysis, consideration of evidence, consistency of approach, and timely implementation and monitoring of actions agreed. The College believes that decisions have been made in a collegial and inclusive way.

28   The College indicated that it believes that the mechanisms now in place, in combination with more long-standing scholarly and pedagogic values, are fit for purpose in an institution of the College's size, and justify confidence in its likely future management of quality and standards. The SED stated that available evidence has led the College to believe that the standard of awards and the quality of learning opportunities have been safeguarded over time effectively.

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

29   As part of the federal University of London, the College, although self-governing, operates within a broad, shared, 'Academic Framework' as deemed by the University's

Ordinances. The College is therefore responsible for managing the quality and standards of its College-based programmes, specified aspects of the quality and standards of the federal awards on which it has registered students, and the University's External System awards in the BD and Diploma in Theology for which it is Lead College. The SED described the way in which the College lodges academic regulations and quality assurance arrangements with the University and makes an annual report on quality and standards to the University's Senate. Academic Board receives a summary of the reports received from all University colleges which includes examples of good practice.

30   The College's Quality Assurance Handbook (2005) states that it aims to be a single source of reference for arrangements for managing the quality of its programmes and learning opportunities at the College, and the standard of University awards in which the College has a responsible role. The audit team found that the Handbook offered full and clear coverage of quality management arrangements. This is exemplified through the Quality Assurance Handbook section on assessment which describes the management of assessment for college-based, federal, and external systems awards, and which is supported, in respect of undergraduate programmes, by a coursework assessment administrative guide for staff. Overall assessment strategies are described in the annually updated Strategy for Learning, Teaching and Assessment (SLTA), the implementation of which is monitored by the Academic Standards Committee (ASC). The team heard that staff are aware of an overall quality framework and the College's general approach to the management of quality and standards, but less aware of the Quality Assurance Handbook as a single source of reference on these matters. The College may wish to consider how the value of the Quality Assurance Handbook might be promoted internally.

31   The College has students registered on a number of awards on college-based, federal, and External System programmes. The taught undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in philosophy are federal, which means that while candidates may be drawn from several colleges, there is an agreed federal syllabus and a single board of examiners. The scope of the College's responsibility for these awards includes admissions, programme development and approval within the syllabus and regulations of the federal programme, learning opportunities and staff development, monitoring, assessment and progression, and data collection and analysis. It excludes final examination and appointment of external examiners which are agreed through the University Subject Panel, which also appoints external examiners and considers their reports.

32   The College's responsibilities for quality and standards in relation to federal programmes are clearly described in the Quality Assurance Handbook (2005). Matters relating to these responsibilities are considered through relevant College committees, in keeping with College-based programmes.

33   The College manages the quality and standards of External System programmes for which it is responsible through the College's External Programmes Committee. As part of its remit the committee reviews the provision in relation to alignment with the Academic Infrastructure, ensures parity with equivalent College programmes and makes recommendations to Academic Board via ASC on the basis of consideration of annual monitoring reports, including recommendations to be referred to the University External System Academic Board.

34   There has been a recent review of the College committee structure. The SED described the intentions of the review as to embed sector good practice through enhanced deliberative structures and to streamline the process of decision-making. To support effective change to the committee structure, formal constitutions, membership and terms of reference are documented in one place for the first time in the Committee Handbook 2005-06. The audit team heard that the increasingly transparent and democratic approach offered

by the streamlined committee system and membership, and the opportunity to access reports and minutes by the intranet, were contributing to more effective staff involvement in the deliberative structures.

35   Changes to the committee structure have been phased in over the past two years to formalise and enhance the deliberative structure. The key change has been to Academic Board which until recently included all members of academic staff in posts half-time and above. Whilst this reflected the College's inclusive and collegial approach, the SED described the remit of the Board as being unclear to some members, and tending to slow down the decision making process on some matters. The Board now has a smaller membership, and operates to a greater extent through focused sub-committees. Three sub-committees were established during 2004-05, the Admissions Committee, ASC and the Research committee. ASC replaced the free-standing Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) established in 2002 to identify and extend effective arrangements already in use, drawing on examples of practice elsewhere in the sector. The work of the QAU also included the embedding of the precepts of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* (*Code of practice*) in the Quality Assurance Handbook and the audit team noted clear examples of where process development has been informed by the Code of practice. The team consider that the QAU has been effective in developing quality and standards procedures and systems. In particular, the team noted the extensive use of appropriate external references, and the overall quality of the guidance documentation developed, in particular the Quality Assurance Handbook.

36   ASC meets once a term or more frequently if needed and may establish working parties on specific topics within its terms of reference. The audit team noted that when Academic Board agreed ASC's terms of reference it had not been evident that the QAU would cease to exist. These have since been adjusted and extended to take account of this, and to enable ASC to consider annual

monitoring reports and make recommendations to Academic Board.

37   The audit team, however, remained concerned that the specialist and responsive quality and standards perspective provided by the QAU might not be so readily available to the College in the new deliberative structures. In the context of continued rapid change and 'normalisation', the College is therefore advised to ensure that it identifies a person who can be provided with expert and focused guidance in quality assurance and standards matters. The team noted the way in which the College has established a senior position through which the research agenda is being driven and suggests that the identification of a member of staff, at a similarly senior level, to sustain the momentum already established in developing quality assurance systems, and continue to monitor and drive the quality and standards agenda would be a helpful development.

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

38   The SED stated that, 'the immediate future will involve further 'normalisation' of approaches to management and planning, and the introduction of the range of strategies, sub-strategies and external reporting expected of a publicly funded HEI.' The examples of planned developments cited, for which preparations are underway, include 'an Information Strategy, an internal audit system [and] reports to Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)'. The College is also committed to developing a strategy for research, with a view to entering the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in 2008, although no final decision has yet been made. This is likely to have an effect on the College's quality and standards through stimulating research-led teaching and, indirectly, through the impact on staff appointments and support.

39   The College also expects further enhancement of quality and standards through the SLTA 2004-7. This statement of goals and intentions, agreed in 2003-2004, provides an

indication of the College's plans to enhance the learning environment, and its specific targeted intentions for quality assurance and enhancement in the coming academic year. It outlines six distinct 'strands' each of which has a 'starting point in existing practice, or in developments already underway, or in related decisions already made' and includes an 'end of strategy period goal'. The articulation of these strands includes specific objectives to enhance teaching, the quality of the student learning experience, student support and students' personal development respectively including:

- 'an agreed College vision and strategy covering a range of approaches to individual attention and directed learning'

- 'visible progress towards an understanding of student needs more informed by statistical data and formal consultation'

- 'evidence of planning college-wide as well as programme specific initiatives for student support'

- 'Personal Development Planning (PDP) in place in years 1 and 2 of all Undergraduate programmes, understood and used.'

40   The audit team concluded that the College's proposals for quality enhancement were appropriate and relevant to its current stage of the 'normalisation' process and development. Continued work will be required to ensure that policies and procedures are embedded fully throughout the College.

Internal approval, monitoring and review processes

Programme approval

41   The College gained authority to award University of London degrees in the mid 1990s but did not seek devolved authority for programme approval until 2000. The College's current procedures for approval of new programmes and modules, monitoring and review are now fully documented in the Quality Assurance Handbook. This includes a clear description of the devolved relationship between, and respective responsibilities of, the University and the College with regard to programme approval for college-based, federal and External System programmes.

42   The SED noted that the development of new programmes in so small a college is relatively infrequent, and stated that the systems described in the Quality Assurance Handbook (2005) will be applied in full for the first time in 2005-6. The programmes in development are planned to start in autumn 2006, and are currently going through the planning process in readiness for an approval event in early 2006. Planning meeting documentation, seen by the audit team, provides evidence that the process is aligned with described procedures in the Quality Assurance Handbook. The origin of the proposed programmes is linked to strategic development of the College and proposals are scrutinised and endorsed by Academic Board.

43   The Quality Assurance Handbook (2005) describes the explicit relationship between development and approval procedures, the Code of practice and relevant subject benchmarks. It includes a reference section on the principles of programme design that is based on the precepts of the *Code of practice, Section 7: Programme approval, monitoring and review - May 2000*. The audit team saw evidence, through planning meeting minutes, that the enactment of these principles is taking place; and noted that the minutes included the specific consideration of external reference points.

44   The process of revision to existing programmes and the role of Academic Board and external input within this process is clearly described in the Quality Assurance Handbook (2005).In the case of revision to existing modules, the use of external input is on a discretionary basis which in the view of the audit team might helpfully be expanded. In relation to the creation or revision of modules, the team noted that ASC considers module revision prior to making recommendations to Academic Board. There is a pro-forma for proposed revisions that includes the requirement to record consultation with those who are affected by the proposed change.

While the team heard of an example of such consultation with students about revision to the assessment system for a module, this consultation process is not explicitly described in the Quality Assurance Handbook and there is scope for it to be neglected. The team considered that there would benefit in making the consultation with students a specific requirement.

Annual monitoring

45   The Quality Assurance Handbook (2005) outlines clearly the overall purpose of annual monitoring and the procedures, roles and responsibilities for the production and consideration of the programme monitoring report. The Quality Coordinator provides an additional guidance note annually to highlight the need to reflect on priorities in the SLTA within this process. In the 2005 programme monitoring reports Programme Convenors were asked to comment on new assessment arrangements, and if they wished to do so, to comment on the SWS. The audit team was unable to find explicit reference in the reports to the new assessment arrangements, and no comments were made on the SWS. The College may wish to consider making this requirement a more explicit part of the annual monitoring process. This would also provide an additional source of evidence for ASC in monitoring the implementation of the SLTA as this is a key remit of the Committee.

46   Programme Convenors prepare an annual monitoring report on each programme using common headings and drawing on the outcomes of discussions with other programme staff or students, the module teachers' evaluative reports on the delivery of the modules, any locally or centrally produced module statistics, and progression and award data, and external examiner reports. In some programmes there are additional open meetings for students, for example in the BD and BA Theology, and in BA Philosophy course representatives administer a questionnaire, the outcomes of which are discussed at the minuted Degree Monitoring Meeting with staff.

47   The Quality Assurance Handbook requires that teachers systematically seek feedback from students after each module and includes pro-formas for student module evaluation and for the module teacher's analysis of the responses. The use of questionnaires is not compulsory and other methods of gaining feedback can be used. If questionnaires are used they, and any analysis, normally remain confidential to the module teacher, although they are encouraged to share outcomes with colleagues and the relevant Programme Convenor, Dean or Head of Department can ask to see them. However, the audit team recommend as desirable that all module evaluations are disclosed, critically analysed and incorporated effectively into the annual monitoring process. This would promote greater transparency and proffer further opportunities for the sharing of good practice. The module teachers' report is expected to include a summary of the principal outcomes of student evaluation and includes commentary on teaching hours, student numbers, average student attendance, teaching and learning approaches used, mode of assessment, student feedback, changes made in light of the feedback, assessment results, actions to be taken forward, and an overall evaluation of the module.

48   Designated members of ASC, with the Quality Coordinator, review a sample of module and programme reports, and produce an synoptic overview report summarising the action points proposed by the Programme Convenors, and recommend subsequent actions to be undertaken at departmental or undergraduate or postgraduate levels. This draft report is then discussed fully at an ASC meeting, finalised and considered by Academic Board before being copied to all staff. ASC's 2004-5 report describes continued improvement in the extent to which module reports are critical and evaluative. The audit team noted examples of full and evaluative use of module reports, for example in BA Philosophy and BA Philosophy, Religion and Ethics. However Programme Convenors stated in their reports that in some cases there is considerable variation in the fullness of module

reports and in one case, that evaluation or feedback for two full modules which formed a substantial part of the programme had not been received.

49   Through reading Programme Convenors' reports it was evident to the audit team that not all programmes had received written external examiner reports at the time of writing and so had been unable to use full and considered comments from examiners. The team noted ASC's discussion of this issue particularly in relation to postgraduate programmes and a solution was proposed. However, the team noted that the problem was not confined to postgraduate programmes and examples were evidenced in the BA single honours Philosophy programme. The team noted ASC's discussion of this issue and the solution proposed. The team would encourage the College to implement changes to its procedures to ensure that full use is made of external examiners' reports in all of its postgraduate and undergraduate programmes.

50   The Quality Assurance Handbook (2005) notes that ASC may request additional information where a programme report is insufficient. However, it was not clear where the threshold for instigation of this procedure is set. The audit team would encourage the College to disseminate good practice in relation to Programme Convenor's programme reports and to use the described procedures to ensure that the quality of all reports meets required standards.

51   Student involvement in the development of annual monitoring reports is described in the Quality Assurance Handbook (2005). It states that the Programme Convenor or Degree Tutor should normally hold a meeting with student year-group representatives or the student body as a whole to discuss their experience of the programme. They should also inform students of programme specific actions taken as a result of the monitoring process. In meetings with the audit team students were unable to confirm their involvement in the annual monitoring process or having had information about outcomes. The team consider that the College would be likely to find benefit in involving students systematically and transparently in the annual monitoring cycle of all programmes.

52   The audit team reviewed both the most recent ASC minutes which recorded the discussion of the draft 2004-05 annual monitoring overview report, and those for Academic Board where the action recommended by ASC was endorsed. The team considered the quality of the evaluation and reflection in the report to be good, and overall, that it provided the College with an appropriate plan for enhancement.

Periodic review

53   The SED described the procedure for periodic programme review as one that is relatively less well established than some in this developmental period for the College. Procedures were approved by Academic Board in February 2004 and the Quality Assurance Handbook (2005) provides a comprehensive description of the scope and purpose of review and associated procedures, including the preparation of a self-evaluation of the programme(s) by a 'review team' (normally including one representative from each of the programmes being reviewed), its consideration by a peer review panel and their subsequent oral feedback. It also sets the procedures in the context of both College-based and federal programmes.

54   There have been two recent periodic reviews, that for the federal BA Philosophy in 2004 which was the first to use the new procedures, and that for a suite of College-based postgraduate programmes in 2005. The report of the BA Philosophy review was received by Academic Board in February 2005. The self-evaluation for the postgraduate programmes review formed the basis of the DSED for this audit. Peer review panel recommendations were translated into an action plan with responsibilities and timed action. The report and action plan for these latter programmes went forward to the ASC as is required in the revised committee structure. Progress on action from both reviews has been reported to the Committee subsequently. While recognising that it is still early in the

implementation of the periodic review process, the audit team saw evidence from the first two reviews that led them to confirm the view expressed in the SED that the process had been 'honestly, rigorously and constructively conducted, and that ownership of the process has been advanced'.

55   The section of the Quality Assurance Handbook (2005), which describes College responsibilities for periodic review of the federal Philosophy programmes, notes the primary concern of the review is the quality assurance of learning opportunities and approaches to teaching and learning. Elsewhere in the Handbook the responsibility for considering formative assessment is described, as exemplified by the recent review of the federal BA Philosophy programmes. The College may wish to review the Quality Assurance Handbook to ensure that formative assessment responsibilities are included clearly within the scope of the periodic programme review of the College's federal programmes.

External participation in internal review processes

56   The College has processes in place that ensure greater external participation in the periodic review of programmes and this was clearly demonstrated in the two most recent periodic reviews. The audit team was able to confirm that in all cases the College fulfilled the criteria for external members as described in the Quality Assurance Handbook (2005). The team also noted that the College's philosophy programme review panel included the same external member as for the University Subject Area review panel, thereby offering consistency and parity. The overall judgement of confidence and specific comments of the panels have been progressed to Academic Board and appropriate action proposed. The SED stated that these initial experiences of revised processes have laid a good foundation for 'strong and scrupulous' external participation. The team would concur with this view.

57   The Quality Assurance Handbook (2004) described the way in which consultation and external advice are included in the programme development process. It recommended that there is consultation with those outside the development group including students or graduates. This has been strengthened further for 2005-06 by the inclusion of an amendment to Section D of the Handbook to provide for an approval panel with at least one member external to the College to consider new programmes, as agreed by Academic Board.

58   The audit team also saw evidence in the minutes of ASC that the views of students are currently being sought in relation to the development of new undergraduate degrees: BA Philosophy and Psychology, BA Theology and Psychology and latterly BA Abrahamic Religions. From documentation seen the team was able to confirm that an appropriately qualified and experienced academic has been invited to be the academic external member of the programme approval panel for the Philosophy and Psychology, and Theology and Psychology programmes.

59   ASC is empowered to approve new modules on behalf of Academic Board and the Quality Assurance Handbook (2005) states that if a module is wholly new then external consultation is good practice though not essential. The audit team would encourage the College, in the context of the small and distinctive nature of the institution, to extend requirements for externality in the approval of all new modules to ensure objectivity.

External examiners and their reports

60   The SED described the distinctive features of the external examining processes for College-based, federal and External System programmes. The specific responsibilities that the College is required to undertake for its federal programmes are detailed in the University's Ordinances. For the remainder of the programmes, the Academic Board of the College carries the responsibility for the appointment of external examiners and, as the University encourages their appointment to

Examination Boards, also for the appointment of inter-collegiate examiners.

61   The nomination and appointment, role and reporting responsibilities, of the College's external examiners are set out in a comprehensive booklet 'Information for External and Intercollegiate Examiners' and in the College's Quality Assurance Handbook. The SED stated that the role of external examiners and the criteria for their appointment were initially documented in 2002, taking account of the first issue of *Code of practice, Section 4: External examining*. The audit team considered documentation which indicated that the College, initially through the QAU, had considered carefully the precepts of this section of the *Code of practice*, particularly in relation to the development of relevant procedures. The team also noted that, as the guidance relating to external examining developed further in the revised section of the *Code of practice, the* College had reviewed its own procedures to ensure that they appropriately reflected sector-wide practice and that the fuller expression of the role of the external examiner had subsequently prompted discussion at Academic Board.

62   The criteria used by the College for the appointment of its external examiners indicate that a nominee should possess relevant subject knowledge and have a familiarity with assessment practices and academic standards, including those specified in national reference points, such as the FHEQ. The audit team had the opportunity to review relevant documentation at institutional level which indicated that the criteria and appointment processes practised in the College were appropriate and followed correctly. In a minority of cases where external examiners were working outside higher education, further information was supplied to them by the College before commencement of the period of appointment.

63   The SED stated that additional briefing is provided for external examiners by the Assessment Convenor, the Registrar, and Boards of Examiners Chairs, and the audit team reviewed the very detailed briefing packs on regulatory and procedural matters provided to external examiners before each Board of

Examiners. Whilst noting that further arrangements for briefing were not standardised, the team considered that the general approach of the College to the briefing of its external examiners was thorough and likely to facilitate appropriate consistency in assessment practices.

64   External examiners are appointed for a three-year period initially with the possibility of extension for a fourth year, and are required to produce an annual report to the College using a standard template that encourages examiners to comment on strengths and innovative features, and is a source of opportunities for quality enhancement. The template was revised in 2004 to reflect the summaries required for the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) even though the College is not yet subject to HEFCE requirements. The SED indicated that the report template was also being revised in 2005 to encourage 'broader critical comment'. The audit team reviewed a number of external examiner reports and considered that the College might find benefit in vigorously following through its own recommendation in this regard.

65   External examiner reports are submitted to the Quality Coordinator who acts as the nominee of the Principal of the College in this instance. Reports are then forwarded to the Chair of the relevant Examination Board, to the Programme Convenors and at undergraduate level the subject area convenor, and are considered at a meeting of internal examiners. All external examiners are subsequently sent a summary of these discussions, although individual responses may be sent to an external examiner where a detailed response is required. The audit team saw evidence of these processes working effectively in accordance with College guidelines and the Code of practice at institutional and subject levels. The team formed the view that College policies and procedures pertaining to external examiners were generally robust and transparent.

66   Individual external examiner reports do not go to the Academic Board, but the Board receives an overview report spanning College-

regulated reports and those for relevant federal and external programmes. The College considers that this composite report allows the Board to draw together the totality of external examiner comments across all the programmes of the College. The audit team noted that this practice had only been in operation since 2003-04 but that, through its scope and thoroughness, it appeared to offer the College considerable opportunity to recognise and address recurrent themes, benchmark standards, develop assessment regulations methodically and identify areas of good practice. This was an interesting example of the systematic employment of quality assurance procedures by the College and was an effective vehicle for developing opportunities for enhancement. The team was of the view that this initiative was an example of good practice.

External reference points

67   The College has operated for thirty five years as one of the colleges of the federal University and, as such, has worked within a broad, shared Academic Framework as defined by the University Ordinances. The SED described the extent of, and opportunities for, intercollegiate cooperation that this has afforded the College. The audit team heard that the links with other Theology Departments within the University had, at times, been somewhat limited. In deciding to pursue a policy of progressive 'normalisation', the College recognised that greater engagement both within the University and with the wider higher education community, including that associated with HEFCE funding, HESA reporting and subscription to QAA, would 'contribute to institutional visibility and thereby to opportunities for interaction with academic peers elsewhere'. The SED provided examples of the ways in which external reference points, including the 'Academic Infrastructure' has informed the development of the College's formal systems for managing quality and standards over five years or so of progressive 'normalisation'.

68   The genesis of this engagement was the College's consideration of the outcomes of the 2001 QAA subject review and the subsequent decision by Academic Board to revise all of the College's programmes to take account of 'the arrival of benchmarking, levels and skills'. The establishment of a QAU, as part of the same initiative, provided a locus for the formal documentation of policies and procedures and enabled the production of the first Quality Assurance Handbook within an external framework. The SED provided examples of ways in which the College had previously engaged with, and responded to, the evolving Code of practice but noted that this activity had developed 'without the involvement of staff with specific responsibility for quality systems and without significant experience elsewhere. There had therefore been some variation in the pace of response and in the extent to which external reference points became well embedded in College documented systems and practice ' The subsequent active engagement of the QAU in this process appeared to the audit team to have been pivotal in aligning the development of the College's systems with sector-wide practice and in helping to develop a culture where the College is now genuinely referencing its work to the components of the Academic Infrastructure.

69   Programme specifications have been developed for all programmes, incorporated into student handbooks and subsequently used in the relevant programme approval and review procedures. The audit team read a number of programme specifications and found that these were in line with national guidelines. Programme reviews had specifically explored the enhancement of programme specifications and their further development has been incorporated into the evolving Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. The team formed the view that this aspect of the Academic Infrastructure has quickly become incorporated into the standard practice of the College in a helpful and adept manner. Although the SED did not include much reference to the FHEQ, it did state that 'awareness of the FHEQ…underlay the revised

structures' and the team noted that the 2002 to 2004 reviews of all of the College's programmes had indeed made extensive use of the FHEQ with the issue of 'level' featuring significantly in these discussions. In particular, a concern for student progression and achievement raised by some joint teaching that occurs in levels 2 and 3 has been a matter of ongoing debate. The team reviewed documentation indicating that these discussions had been substantial, but judged that the College would find benefit in gathering further data and opinion in reviewing progression and achievement of students who are jointly taught in level 2/3 modules. The team recommends to the College the desirability of initiating such a review and ensuring that this is informed by appropriate external advice, analysis of student achievement data and subsequent consultation with students, in order to ensure that the College's approach aligns with standard sector practice on progression and achievement.

70   Approval and review processes were identified by the College as the areas where it principally tested the compatibility of its programmes with subject benchmarks and the audit team saw evidence that the use of relevant benchmark statements featured in the two most recent periodic reviews. None of the postgraduate programmes in the DAT considered the available subject benchmarks to be applicable as they lacked subject-specificity at the postgraduate level. The team was informed that the psychology benchmark statement has been considered during the development of the psychology programmes although their joint status made the Statements less applicable than might have been the case. External examiners are required to certify that the programmes which they cover are of a standard defined by the benchmark statements.

71   Since its inception the QAU had been the recipient within the College for the sections of the *Code of practice* as they were circulated. The audit team reviewed documentation of the work of the Unit which indicated that its consideration of this matter had been thorough and systematic, and that College procedures

had been amended as appropriate with oversight being provided by the Academic Board. A conspicuous example of a change in College practice brought about by this process is the procedure for programme approval which is clearly and carefully aligned with guidelines set out in the relevant section of the Code of practice. The SED stated that, at the time of writing, the College did not yet fully comply with *Code of practice, section 8 Careers education, information and guidance*. The team heard that this matter had subsequently been addressed through subscription to the University's Central Careers Service and the provision of a regular on-site service by the University Specialist Institutions Careers Service. With regard to the ongoing review of College systems and procedures against the continuing evolution of the *Code of practice*, the SED did not provide a consolidated view of this, but the team heard that there were 'de facto' individuals or groups within the College who had specific responsibilities for each section of the *Code of practice.* The team judged this to be a somewhat informal arrangement and recommended as desirable that the College should formalise the loci of responsibility for the oversight of the sections of the QAA *Code of practice* with appropriate timescales and reporting lines.

72   In reviewing the ways in which the College has engaged with a variety of external reference points, the audit team also noted the substantial work undertaken by the QAU in 'ensuring that the College consciously keeps in touch with best practice in other Universities'. Its work in seeking national advice on matters as diverse as student evaluation, staff appraisal and the assessment of non-native speakers was found by the team to have contributed significantly to developments in 'progressive normalisation' at the College.

Programme-level review and accreditation by external agencies

73   The College underwent a HEQC audit in 1993, and since then there have been QAA subject reviews of two of the College's

disciplines occurring consecutively in 2001. There have been no other programme level reviews by an external agency. The outcome of the two subject reviews was approval of the quality of education in both philosophy, and theology and religious studies. As an institution not funded by HEFCE, the College decided to enter subject review voluntarily and the SED described this decision as one that set in train the more rapid development of quality and standards assurance systems, including the Academic Board decision to establish a QAU. The audit team saw clear evidence that would support this view. In the revised committee structure external reports in future will be considered by ASC and recommendations made to Academic Board.

74   Both reviews noted a number of strengths, including some uniquely distinctive provision, high quality teaching by committed staff including an individual tutorial system, a high level of student achievement, staff development that seeks to enhance provision, excellent student support in the context of university systems, and strong quality management.

75   The College currently has no externally accredited provision. However, it has put in place deliberative structures which include consideration of the provision for quality and standards in any partnership with any organisation outside of the University. These are clearly set out in the terms of reference for ASC listed in the Committee Handbook.

Student representation at operational and institutional level

76   The QAA subject review of theology conducted in 2001 found 'a lack of effective consultation procedures with the student body as a whole at college-wide level'. In the 2005 Student Survey, 78 per cent of students stated that they did not know how they were represented on College committees. The SED stated that attempts to extend student representation on committees below the level of Academic Board has met with limited success prior to 2005-6, and the SWS acknowledged a degree of historic reluctance on the part of the

student body to make the most of additional opportunities for representation provided by the College. The College undertook a wide-ranging review of its committee structure in 2004-5 consisting of two phases; the first addressed college-wide committees while the second sought to streamline deliberative structures at programme level. Student representation was an important consideration of both of these reviews.

77   The College's Committee Handbook 2005-06 details student representation on a range of committees including the Governing Body, Academic Board, ASC, Equal Opportunities Group, Finance and General Purposes Committee, Governance and Nominations Committee and Library Committee. On the basis of the evidence provided in the Committee Handbook, the minutes of meetings read and the comments made by students met, the audit team was able to confirm that students were now represented consistently on College-wide committees. Student representatives do not receive any systematic training for their role at present although the Quality Assurance Handbook (2005) notes that the Registrar, Quality Coordinator, Dean, or Clerk to the Governing Body (as appropriate) will arrange an initial briefing for student representatives.

78   In respect of consultation at programme-level the SED acknowledged that while there is an established pattern of consultation with students on specific academic issues the precise nature of representation varies from programme to programme. The audit team noted that while responsibility for coordinating student consultation lies clearly with Deans of Studies and Programme Convenors, there is some operational inconsistency in the implementation of process at this level. Undergraduate Philosophy programmes appoint year representatives to liaise with students and report back to the Programme Convenor, while undergraduate Theology programmes do not make use of student representatives and rely instead on periodic meetings between students and Programme Convenors. Some of the students met by the

team were uncertain about the nature and formality of these meetings.

79   While the different consultation processes used by undergraduate programmes have in the past served to provide students with opportunities to make their views known to staff, the student contribution to assurance of quality and standards could be improved further if a standardised model of representation was adopted. The audit team therefore recommends as desirable that the College standardises student representation at undergraduate programme level.

80   Conversely, with regard to postgraduate provision, the audit team agree with the views of the students and staff met during the audit that the annual postgraduate consultation day is an appropriate means of consulting with a significant number of mainly part-time students dispersed across a wide range of programmes, particularly as it results in an action plan and a letter back to students advising them of the outcomes of the consultation.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

81   Formal feedback from students is elicited at both module and programme level through a variety of mechanisms. At module level students are asked to comment on their experience of taught modules by completing an anonymous evaluation questionnaire or through other more qualitative/informal mechanisms. The audit team found evidence to support the claim in the SED that annual monitoring reports show examples of changes prompted by both informal and formal student feedback. Conversely, while it is true that these changes are seen by student representatives on the College-wide committees, students at the level of the subject were in general unaware of action taken in response to their feedback.

82   Although tutors are, according to the Quality Assurance Handbook, required to have appropriate regard to student feedback, in practice this feedback may be obtained and reported in different ways. Notwithstanding the

College's desire to design quality management processes which are neither excessively burdensome for academic staff nor dismissive of trust and collegiality, its reliance on confidential module feedback places a high premium on the responsiveness of individual tutors and thereby adds further variability to the way in which student feedback is processed.

83   The audit team noted that the issue of how module tutors might use and disclose student feedback has been discussed recently by ASC and that the periodic sharing of completed module questionnaires is advocated in the Quality Assurance Handbook for 2005, and it is against this background that the team recommend the College to ensure that all module evaluations are disclosed, critically analysed and incorporated effectively into the monitoring process. In respect of year-long modules, the College may also wish to consider the value of obtaining student feedback at a mid-way point.

84   The College introduced an annual College-wide survey of undergraduate and postgraduate students in 2005. The audit team was able to confirm the accuracy of the claim made in the SED that responses indicated very strong approval for the quality of teaching, the nature of programmes and the ethos of the College. The team also noted that the College is using the results of the questionnaire appropriately to advise and direct action in response to areas of lower satisfaction, such as aspects of published information and the promptness of feedback on assessed work.

85   With regard to feedback from, and continuing links, with graduates an inaugural annual postgraduate consultation day was held in January 2005. As a result of which the College is now better placed to strengthen and utilise contacts with alumni. Additionally, in the context of its 'normalisation' agenda, the College conducted its first survey of first destinations of postgraduate students in 2005, and has commissioned the University's Careers Service to conduct a first destinations survey of graduates during 2005-06.

86   In respect of feedback from employers the SED cited the diversity of employment entered by Philosophy graduates as the basis for its decision to identify relevant transferable skills from generic information about employer needs rather than gathering feedback from employers explicitly. In discussion with staff it became apparent that whilst there was good knowledge of employer needs in theology it was not collected or analysed systematically. The College might wish to consider developing a more systematic process for gathering employer feedback in all disciplines.

Progression and completion statistics

87   The SED described the use made by the College of statistical data as being 'in its infancy', but considered that a start has been made in addressing an agenda that the College did not progress significantly for some years. The 1994 HEQC Audit report commented on the lack of formal data analysis in examining the relationship between entry characteristics and assessment outcomes, and the 2001 QAA subject review report described the omission of any process for tracking student progress as giving 'some cause for concern'. The SED indicated that, although action was not taken following the 1994 Quality Audit, a custom-designed student database was introduced in 2001 and that, by 2003, the College had agreed a major investment in a student information management system. A contributory factor to the delay in addressing this matter was that the College, not being in receipt of public funding, had not been required to provide continuation or completion statistics to HESA or to maintain records to HESA standards. As part of its 'normalisation' process, the College has recently started to consider how, in the context of a small institution, it might best develop the requisite 'tools, information-gathering and procedural sophistication' to address this matter effectively.

88   In the past, the College had 'periodically' considered quantitative data about recruitment and attainment. At the time of this audit the College was committed, according to the SED,

to the annual collection and analysis of data on 'progression, withdrawal, completion, failure and awards conferred'. It is also committed to the further development of data relating to student destinations and equal opportunities. The evolving College Strategic Plan sets as a target for 2005-06 the alignment of data collection and management practices with HEFCE requirements and the establishment of secure reporting procedures. The Governing Body, in considering the College's compliance with equal opportunities legislation, has established a sub-committee with a specific remit to collect equal opportunities data and to recommend the revision of College policies and procedures in light of its analysis. As part of the changes being made to the deliberative structures of the College, the new ASC and Admissions Committees have remits which included the consideration of relevant datasets. The audit team concurred with the College's view that these institutional commitments have started to establish a framework for the steady improvement in the availability and effective analysis of statistical data, although the College noted that 'it will take several years to develop a capacity for systematic consideration of reliable and accurate data. To help in moving this agenda forward, the College had commenced discussions with HESA in 2003-04 as part of its 'normalisation' agenda and is undertaking shadow returns as a precursor to full compliance.

89   Recognising the current position, and noting this historical background, the audit team focused its attention upon the actions taken since the major investment in student management information system in 2003. The annual overview reports following the monitoring rounds have been considered by the Academic Board in each of the last three years and they contain a detailed chronology of progress made in addressing this agenda. The 2003 report noted that progression statistics had been manually generated, but they were 'unlikely to be fully accurate' and then set the task for the future of incorporating entry qualifications in monitoring reports and also of requiring College committees and management

'to develop the habit of reviewing the statistical data'. The 2004 report observed that the previous year's recommendation regarding the incorporation of entry qualifications had not been achieved. It did however note progress made in establishing an initial plan for data collection and analysis and its inclusion in the Quality Assurance Handbook. The 2005 report noted that the entry qualifications issue had been addressed for the first time for the 2004 undergraduate entry and it also reported that additional data on progression, continuation and completion would be considered by the ASC later in 2005-06. The team noted the effective work on these and related matters that the ASC and Research Committees have conducted at institutional level to date. However the documentation provided to support the DAT did highlight a number of concerns for the team about the consideration of data at programme level where analysis did not appear to be grounded in clear reflection of evidence.

90   The audit team heard a clear articulation of the vision that the College had for the future development and use of statistical data and the proposed expansion in use of the student information management system. The team formed the view that steady progress was being made, but that, until the results of its investment materialise, the College would find itself at a disadvantage in addressing some of its strategic imperatives. One specific example of this concern was the absence of consideration of annual monitoring data relating to disability and ethnicity at senior management level. Although this had been flagged for action in 2005, the team heard that it had yet to take place. Having noted in much of the College's literature the importance afforded to welcoming student diversity, it was the view of the team that the College would find benefit from expediting this matter. Consequently the team recommends the desirability of prioritising the production and consideration of data on the student profile in order to inform the development of the College's equal opportunities agenda.

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

91   The College's Quality Assurance Handbook (2005) sets out the principles and procedures for the appointment of academic staff. Documentation supplied to the audit team described the College's aim to run recruitment and selection campaigns which allow for the most suitable candidate to be selected to fill a position, and consideration of equal opportunities legislation.

92   An institutional overview is maintained by the Staffing Committee which was established by the Governing Body in December 2003. Its remit was extended in 2005-06 in the context of the development of formal terms of reference for all committees and now includes oversight of policies on recruitment, appointment, probation and staff development.

93   The audit team gathered evidence that confirmed that current arrangements for the appointment, and support of new staff, have proved to be adequate over time and sufficient to assure the quality of teaching. The College has made substantial progress in developing a human resources strategy although it has not yet been published.

94   The Quality Assurance Handbook (2005) describes the staffing profile at the College as unusual in ways that make the complete application of some modern conventions of recruitment, development and reward difficult or inappropriate. There are three main categories of teaching staff - Jesuits who are fully funded by the Society of Jesus and in employment terms are currently classed as volunteers; staff from other religious orders and diocesan clergy who are partially funded by their orders or the Archdiocese of Westminster; and conventionally salaried staff who are normally lay people. The audit team read and heard of the ways in which the College is working to align appointment with current practice for example, in the case of staff classed as volunteers through the development of deemed contracts in which normal periods of notice are observed.

95   The SED described the College's endeavours to develop appointment procedures for academic staff which take into account these differing categories, conventional practice and the need to safeguard the quality of staff appointed. Currently, conventional staff are appointed through open advertisement and competitive interview. Religious appointments are not normally competitive, and may be made in two ways. The first is in response to the College's identification of individuals who can cover a specific academic area and secondly, as a result of staff being made available by their Order or the Archdiocese. In the case of staff who are proposed or who take up positions through these latter routes, the College offers a number of safeguards including the Principal's right to refuse proposed staff and the use of time-limited roles, followed by an interview for an identified role against a developed job description. There is a current review of policy and procedure that is intended to clarify recruitment and selection in this context.

96   The audit team recognised that the appointments policy and procedures reflect the history and tradition of the College. However, it advises the College to embrace the intentions of 'normalisation' in all aspects of their activities in relation to the recruitment, selection and appointment of staff, within the terms of the College's statutes.

97   New staff are invited to undertake teaching qualifications and the audit team heard that currently three staff have taken a qualification and six have been invited to do so next year, in both cases including non-conventionally appointed staff. There is a centrally provided induction for all new staff which is primarily an introduction to the College, with short sessions for academic staff giving an overview on tutoring and research. There is local level mentoring, observation of teaching, and advice in handling assessment for all categories of academic staff. Staff met by the team confirmed that these operated as stated in the SED. Whilst there is currently no formal mentoring policy, newly appointed staff that the team met found the arrangements made

for them to be helpful. The team noted the recommendations in the 2004 periodic review of the federal BA Philosophy programme which referred to the extended use of tutorial assistants in the context of increased student numbers, and the need to ensure that they were enabled to fulfil their role. The team would encourage the College to continue with its development of a formal mentoring policy to ensure that there is a systematic approach to support for new staff.

98   The College has probation policy and procedures which are outlined in the Quality Assurance Handbook (2005) and published on the intranet. The policy documentation states that the College places high value on the period of probation because it is a means through which the new employee's competence in a job is assessed. Procedures are appropriate and well described in the documentation but the SED described implementation as patchy. The SED stated that steps are now being taken to apply the policy more systematically, and this was understood and articulated by staff in meetings with the audit team. The team encourages the College to realise these intentions, particularly in view of the prevailing range of approaches to the appointment of staff.

99   Academic staff appraisal has been reintroduced to the College through a two-year pilot scheme which commenced in late 2004. The scheme documentation, which is available to staff through the College intranet, expresses clear and appropriate aims. Due to the flat organisational structure of the College, appraisers are not line managers but have been nominated by Academic Board and appointed by the Principal. A training session for appraisers and an appraisee briefing, took place in January 2005, and subsequently just over half of the staff have undergone appraisal. Evaluation of the pilot is planned for 2006-7. The College currently has no formal system for promotion or reward, although the Staffing Committee plans to submit a promoted posts scheme to the Governing Body by early 2007.

Assurance of the quality of teaching through staff support and development

100 One of the consequences arising from the Subject Review visits in 2001 was that the College reflected on its provision for staff development and considered the adoption of more proactive arrangements. The SED described the staff development activity traditionally as having been 'subject-related, selected by staff and not directed…monitored or recorded by the College. Funding considerations necessitated a low budget approach to staff development'. The audit team also noted that there had not previously been any system for prioritising staff development in relation to what the College was trying to achieve. To begin to address these deficiencies, staff development was identified as a theme in the SLTA in 2004 and concurrently was recognised as a priority area in the emerging Human Resources Strategy. As part of these initiatives a Staff Development Steering Group was established, as a sub-committee of the Staffing Committee, in order to develop a more proactive policy framework to staff development. The College considers that 'a start has been made to a more strategically focused approach to staff development…[but]...continued development is needed'.

101 The inclusion of staff development as a theme in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy provides a firm indication that the College considers that this has an important part to play in developing its 'agreed institutional approach to enhancement monitored over a period of time'. Although still in the early stages of its existence, the Staff Development Steering Group has taken some very practical steps to move this initiative forward, including the development, implementation and evaluation of an annual internal staff development programme, and the surveying of staff development needs. These activities have been supported by the recent production of the first Staff Development Strategy for the College. The Strategy commits the College to a very substantial agenda for change and seems to the audit team to be an essential initial step in formalising the College's staff development intentions.

102 The recently revised deliberative structures of the College and the academic restructuring into three departments have provided new organisational frameworks for staff development. For example, budget allocations to departments are now planned to have specific staff development provision defined within them. The audit team also noted the recent work of Academic Board and ASC in this regard. For example, the annual monitoring reports to Academic Board now identify where staff development has contributed directly to the work of a programme. This is still largely restricted to listing such activities, but the team noted that the Board has recently identified areas of successful practice that might be shared through a variety of staff development mechanisms. In the view of the team, the effective links between programme monitoring reports and the identification of staff development needs is a noteworthy initiative and an example of good practice.

103 The established informal peer observation scheme was formalised in 2003 and the audit team was provided, through the DAT, with examples of the ways in which this functioned at subject level. The organisational framework within which peer observation is conducted and the confidential nature of the feedback on observations were described to the team. The confidential element of the process was raised with senior staff in light of the expressed intention to improve opportunities for dissemination of good practice in the College. The team was informed that the outcomes of peer observation have essentially remained a matter for individual staff and that there has been little impact more broadly. Whilst recognising that the scheme has been deliberately designed as a confidential system for use between peers, with any follow-up being at the discretion of the participants, the team considers that the College might usefully review how it might secure greater benefit at institutional level from this process.

Consequently the team recommends the desirability of the College reviewing how it might better achieve collective outcomes from the peer observation process which currently has a confidential element, in order to facilitate opportunities for quality enhancement more effectively.

104 The ASC, in monitoring the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, has also started to tackle the implications of a culture where 'there has historically been a wish to avoid any formal sharing of findings either from peer observation or from student feedback.' The appointment of heads to the departments has provided a new context and focus for staff development in that they will in future be required to report annually to ASC on steps taken to foster the sharing of good practice in teaching, learning and assessment, including the operation of peer observation. Whilst the audit team notes the start made to date in addressing the culture of reticence for sharing feedback from students and peers, it recommends as desirable that the College continues to establish and implement College-wide mechanisms to achieve collective outcomes from the peer observation process, in order to facilitate opportunities for quality enhancement more effectively.

105 The audit team judged these developments to have been very significant in helping to progress the College's agenda for change regarding staff development, and considered that a key to successful implementation is the effective evaluation and monitoring of the activities subsequently informing future developments. The team noted that many of the initiatives were very new indeed and that there were examples of slippage in monitoring process. ASC sees this as 'unfortunate but recognises that the College has been involved in an exceptional range of changes in 2004/5'. The team also recognises that the College is engaged in a substantial cultural shift and considers it all the more noteworthy that the substantial and recent agenda for change has been achieved both through consensus and the enthusiastic engagement of the College's staff.

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

106 The SED stated that the College does not directly offer any distance learning programmes, but is the Lead College for the BD and Diploma in Theology in the External System. Two hundred and fifty students are registered on these programmes (more than on the undergraduate attendance-mode programmes in theology) as students of the University rather than the College. Responsibilities for the quality and standards of the BD and Diploma in Theology are shared between the University's External System Academic Board and the Academic Board of the College. As the Lead College, academic oversight of the awards is the responsibility of the College and the specific responsibilities are set out in a detailed agreement between the University and the College. Responsibility for the administration of the External Programmes, including admissions, registration, dispatch of material, and the coordination of examinations and notification of results rests with the University central External and Internal Students Administration (EISA). As the Lead College, Heythrop commissions and approves study materials, undertakes assessment and appoints internal and external examiners. The audit team was informed that the emergence of the Academic Infrastructure has prompted the University External System Academic Board and Lead Colleges Committee to re-examine some of the quality systems in recent years and that a review of the BD Theology is to be conducted jointly by the College and EISA in 2005-06. The College has established the External Programmes Committee as a sub-committee of the ASC to have oversight of the College's responsibilities under its agreement with the University. The Chair of this Committee is also an ex-officio member of the College's Academic Board and coincidentally a member of the ASC. Cross-membership is intended to monitor and support the comparability of College-based programmes and their External System counterparts.

107 The Academic Board considers the annual monitoring report on the BD and Diploma programmes and appoints external examiners according to its standard practice. The composite report, to Academic Board, outlines issues raised by all external examiners including those emanating from the External System BD and Diploma. The audit team observed that the Board had received notification that external examiners had commented upon a greater variation in the performance of students on the External System programmes than would be expected in an attendance-mode programme. The team also noted that internal concerns have been expressed about how the College's exercise of academic responsibility for the programmes could be better integrated with the structures and processes applied to attendance-mode programmes. The team judges that these matters were being addressed systematically, but that there were emerging issues that could impact upon quality and academic standards and, as such, will need to be addressed appropriately in the forthcoming programme review.

Learning support resources

108 The SED identified the two most important physical resources to support learning at the College as the Library and computing facilities, with institutional oversight of both being determined by the College's strategic plan. The Library, owned and funded by the British Province of the Society of Jesus, is separately located for theology and philosophy. It contains one of the most extensive theology and philosophy collections in the UK, including a significant number of historic and rare books. The College's Library Committee, chaired by a lay Governor and including three student representatives, provides a forum for overseeing the management and policies of the Library and, in meetings with College staff, the audit team learned that the Library also involves library staff from other universities in assessing periodically aspects of its operations. The annual Library Report details progress made over the previous year and flags areas of concern and, where appropriate, action to be taken in the current year.

109 Although generally positive in their assessment of library provision, students agree with the SED's observation that 'there is not universal satisfaction with opening hours and borrowing allowances'. The SWS and the Student Satisfaction Survey 2005 corroborate these concerns. The general responsiveness of the Library to student concerns is evidenced by the recently modified loan rules - to provide a more generous entitlement for research students, and the use of a one-week loan scheme intended to provide a better service for part-time students. The Library's online catalogue is shared with that of the University Library and research students have access to the British Library. The Library also belongs to the M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries, enabling students to use the libraries at other HEIs in the London region.

110 Additional Library issues identified in the SWS concerned insufficient multiple copies of key texts and the ineffective use of the short loan collection for some modules. These issues were also raised by the students met by the audit team. A system for identifying essential and recommended reading and target holdings was gradually introduced in 2004 and the Library is now updating this procedure in order to enable academic staff to specify module book requirements via the staff intranet. While this might alleviate some problems, there may be considerable advantage in establishing a complementary process involving Programme Convenors or Heads of Department checking that module tutors make timely use of this new procedure. There are annual student satisfaction surveys for both the libraries and Information Communication Technology (ICT) facilities.

111 Both the SED and the SWS testified to a general degree of student satisfaction with the availability of computers, and student representatives confirmed this in meetings with the audit team. The team found evidence of responsiveness on the part of the College to student feedback; for example, the helpdesk support requested in the 2005 student survey was already in place by the time of the audit. Students considered that the newly introduced

student intranet - Heythrop Virtual Network (HeVN) was likely to become an important source of information once they had become accustomed to using it.

112 The College's premises constitute a third physical resource. The SED stated that considerable work has been undertaken in recent years to improve access for mobility-impaired students and visitors. The SWS acknowledged the difficulty mobility-impaired students may experience in accessing parts of the building, especially in the absence of a lift but, like the SED, also points to recent improvements in the provision of stair lifts and ramps. The College is currently using external consultants to conduct an extensive access audit of its buildings. On the basis of statements made in the SED and SWS and meetings with staff and students, the audit team concluded that the College's development of its premises is making a significant contribution to improving the learning environment for mobility-impaired students.

113 The audit team formed the view that the College has appropriate means for monitoring its learning resources and was making good progress in responding to feedback from students.

Academic guidance, support and supervision

114 Induction takes the form of a two-day programme for undergraduate students, followed by study skills sessions, and a one-day session for taught postgraduates (usually on a Saturday); with all students receiving an induction pack. In the course of the induction students are introduced to: the College, its mission, ethos and staff; their programme of study; student support and administrative staff; student representation processes; the HSU; and health and safety. Students are also shown how to use the Library and the College's computer provision. There is some variance in students' assessment of the usefulness of these programmes and, in respect of IT at least, the student satisfaction survey conducted in 2005 suggests that this is partly because the great majority of students now have their own

computer and are experienced computer users before joining the College. The College provides all students with written Guides to the Library and to 'Using Computers at Heythrop', and is sensitive to the specific needs of postgraduate students who are 'returning to study'.

115 The SWS described the registration process for first year undergraduates as 'slightly chaotic, with staff unsure of exactly the process to be followed, and conflicting advice and instructions being given'. The SWS also reported a number of student concerns about financial information received from the College prior to arrival and about financial procedures on arrival, the latter exacerbated by a lack of space during induction itself. However, students met by the audit team were broadly satisfied with their experience.

116 Following induction, Degree Tutors (at undergraduate level) and Programme Convenors (at postgraduate level) are the primary sources of advice to students on progression matters and also play a role in academic and personal support. The College has a clear view of the distinctions between these roles and their complementarity with other related roles, but this is not entirely shared by students. The SWS, for example, referred to a problem of nomenclature 'with degree tutors, degree convenors, programme tutors and so forth all being titles used' to identify staff who also have personal tutoring responsibilities.

117 Notwithstanding issues of formal nomenclature, the comments made by both staff and students to the audit team substantiated the College's claim that the high priority given to supporting students' learning is one of the College's core values. The SWS noted that undergraduate students become more appreciative of the College's small size as they progress through their studies, considering that this afforded them many more opportunities for discussions with their lecturers than would be the case in larger institutions.

118 The introduction of PDP for first-year undergraduates scheduled for 2005-6 had not

been implemented at the time of the audit visit. The SED observed that the heavy commitment of staff to one-to-one tutorial work is an impediment to 'active oversight' of PDP, and further suggested that some postgraduate and research students who are studying wholly for interest have little interest in personal and professional development planning.

119 Responsibilities in respect of the quality assurance of research degree programmes are set out in full in the separately published Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees. The Code was first issued in 2000 and is updated regularly. It provides details about the role of the Postgraduate Research Committee, admission procedures, timescales for completion, annual reviews, plagiarism, unsatisfactory progress, interruption of study, off-campus study, complaints procedures, and the responsibilities of: the Postgraduate Research Degrees Committee, Dean of Research students, Heads of Department and Subject Group Coordinators, Supervisors, Tutors, and students. The purpose of the Code is to 'ensure that all MPhil and PhD students at the College are closely and effectively supervised so that the full potential of their research may be achieved as rapidly as the nature of their research and their other commitments permit.' Although the SED notes that it has taken some time for some processes, including Annual Review reports, to be completed in a timely way by all supervisors, the audit team saw evidence that the Code was being implemented across the College and was making an effective contribution to the experience of research degree students as well as safe guarding academic standards.

120 One-to-one tutorials within every module remains a distinctive feature of the teaching provision at the College and are highly valued by staff and students alike with postgraduate students being particularly appreciative of the amount of one-to-one supervision they receive in preparing essays. The SED acknowledged the resource-intensive nature of such provision and indicated that amendments to present arrangements may be necessary if other developments are to take place. Both the SED

and Strand 4 (Individual student support) of the College's SLTA (2004-07) suggest that the increased use of electronic communication and a widening range of learning and assessment tasks may provide new perspectives on its continuing commitment to individual attention for students.

121 Programme and module handbooks represent an important source of academic guidance and support. The SED stated that a template for programme handbooks is prepared centrally to assist cross-referencing with the College regulations and web-based material. The audit team examined a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programme handbooks and was able to confirm the accuracy of this statement.

122 At module level, the College does not prescribe a template; module tutors may determine the scope and format of module handbooks, provided that certain key information is included. While the audit team was able to confirm broad similarity within the selection of module handbooks available to them for the DAT, students met by the team stated that there was considerable variability in the handbooks as a whole and that on occasions key information concerning, for example, assessment and assessment criteria was not included. The team concluded that greater consistency and completeness of module handbooks was desirable. This might also facilitate the provision of reading lists prior to arrival, the relative absence of which was noted in the SWS.

123 The team recognised the distinctive nature of the College's approach of offering one-to-one teaching support for individual students, but would encourage the College to keep under review the feasibility and effectiveness of current induction, communication, and support mechanisms in the light of a possible increase in student numbers.

Personal support and guidance

124 The SED identified a number of ways in which the College provides personal support and guidance for students. The audit team heard from students that, as reported in the SED, their first point of contact in many cases is academic staff who have traditionally have a pastoral as well as teaching role. Research degree students are allocated one designated supervisor, with provision for the appointment of an assistant supervisor in defined circumstances; and also have a tutor whose role is to advise on matters outside the specific programme of research. Other on-site sources of support include the College's chaplaincy service (which is available to students of all faiths), the Student Union's Equality and Welfare Officer, and the Dyslexia Teaching Centre also located within the Maria Assumpta Centre. In addition, the College has recently appointed an Information Technology (IT) Support Administrator and web developer whose responsibilities include providing an IT helpdesk service for students and maintaining the newly introduced student intranet (HeVn).

125 The College's students are able to use a number of external services such as the Health and Counselling Services of the University, as well as its Careers Service that visits the College once a week. The College also benefits from the services of the University's accommodation office and all first-year students were lodged in accommodation in September 2005, as a result of local initiatives within the College, supplementing enhanced allocations via the University Accommodation Office. With regard to international students for whom English is not their first language, the SED states that the College sets a high International English Language Testing System (IELTS) target partly as a consequence of being unable to provide in-house English language support. The team heard that international students are able to take part in informal 'buddying' arrangements with other students and benefit from remedial English classes offered by staff. The College also has a European Exchange Students Coordinator who is responsible for students from mainland Europe, including those on Socrates/Erasmus mobility programmes, and plans to further develop induction and support for international students.

126 The SWS noted that the induction process familiarises students fully with the welfare and support structures available at the College and that students are clear on where to go subsequently for help, support or advice. The Undergraduate and Postgraduate Student Handbooks 2005-06 contain a full and well-structured introduction to key aspects of student life including codes of behaviour, appeals and complaints procedures, and guidelines on harassment and discrimination. The SWS attests to reasonable levels of student satisfaction concerning the provision of study skills and support for students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia. The SED stated that research degree students have access to skills sessions and the audit team saw evidence of a comprehensive research seminar programme in theology which is open to both staff and research degree students.

127 The SED noted that the increasing numbers and widening profile of young entrants to the College will expect professional, campus-based student support services. In anticipation of this, the College established a Welfare Liaison Group to assess ways of enhancing student support. The work of this group has informed the College's draft Strategic Plan which identifies as one of its priorities the progressive development of integrated student support services during the period 2005-2008. The sections of the draft Strategic Plan dealing with student support correlate with the College's Access Agreement for 2006 Entry. Although the SED stated that 'comprehensive professional in-house student support services are not an option for an institution of this size', the audit team is satisfied that the College's strategies, which are based on a considered appraisal of current and likely future needs and a judicious mix of internally and externally provided services, are likely to lead to a significant enhancement of student support provision.

Collaborative provision

128 The College has no provision which might be considered to be collaborative as normally understood. There is a development in progress with the South London and Maudsley Hospital NHS Trust for the delivery of one module that will sit within the academic award MA Pastoral Studies. The College and the Trust are soon to sign a formal agreement which includes quality assurance considerations and has been discussed at Academic Board. The audit team was able to track the process of deliberation and scrutiny of the draft agreement and can confirm that the College has been appropriately attentive to quality and standards issues and would encourage an early finalisation of the formal agreement.

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

Discipline audit trail

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

Theology and religious studies

130 The scope of the DAT covered the four MA postgraduate taught master's programmes: MA in Christian Spirituality (MASP), MA in Pastoral Liturgy (MAPL), MA in Pastoral Studies/Theology (MAPS), and MA in Psychology of Religion (MAPY). The main body of the DSED was a self-evaluation document prepared for the internal periodic review of these same four programmes which took place in February-March 2005. For the purposes of the audit, the DSED was supplemented with the following:

- a contextual preamble
- a supplement, including additional material on the management of quality and standards, and a summary of follow-up to the periodic review which was the basis of the DSED

- a copy of the report on the meeting with the review panel

- the action plan subsequently approved by the Academic Board

- a list of evidence relevant to the DSED including that used in the periodic review and cross-references to other relevant material within the institutional audit evidence.

- a comprehensive range of external examiner reports

131 Full programme specifications were also provided for all four programmes. These are lodged on the College web-site and were included as appendices in the DSED. Since there are no benchmark documents for master's-level programmes in these fields, no such documents were available to be utilised. With respect to the FHEQ, the DSED stated that 'the reviewers believe that, in practice, the aims and learning outcomes in these programmes reflect the requirements set out in the FHEQ Descriptor.' The audit team noted that the use of the Quality Assurance Handbook constitutes the primary means by which the programmes and their operation are informed by the Code of practice. The team confirmed that the programme specifications provide clear descriptions of the aims and learning outcomes and are appropriately aligned with the FHEQ.

132 As explained in the Institutional SED, 'The College has not been required to provide continuation or completion statistics to HESA or to the University.' However, the Assistant Registrar has started to provide a year-by-year set of statistics which will feed into the next set of annual monitoring reports. The introduction of the new student management information system has facilitated the production of statistics and the audit team saw evidence of some initial consideration of these statistics at a programme level as part of the annual monitoring process. Although further work remains to be done to embed more detailed analysis fully.

133 The programmes are subject to the College's annual monitoring process and the audit team saw evidence of thoughtful and detailed analysis by Programme Convenors of different aspects of the programmes drawing on the module tutor reports and the postgraduate consultation day questionnaire. The team concluded that the monitoring processes were effective at discipline level.

134 The DSED stated that 'external and programme intercollegiate examiners for each MA programme moderate the assessment of modules in that programme, including the work of students from other programmes taking the modules as options.' The audit team noted that external examiner comments that are programme specific are considered in a number of ways including through a meeting of staff with a written response to the external examiner, or a meeting with the external examiner directly (as was the case in the MAPS in 2003-04).' From the evidence seen, the team formed the view that external examiners comments are followed up in a timely and appropriate manner. Examination of the external examiners' reports over recent years, by the team, reveals the extent to which the College has redesigned and refined the template which external examiners use. This has been effective in eliciting greater critical comment and to direct the external examiners toward issues bearing on quality assurance and enhancement.

135 The programmes considered in the DAT adopt an adult learning model. Teaching is by means of presentations given both by the module tutor and students. It is thus strongly interactive in style and supported by one-to-one tutorials that are seen as a strength of the provision by students. This interactive approach also feeds into the assessment strategy. The DSED stated, 'The introduction in 2003-4 of new, more flexible and varied forms of assessment has been broadly successful. Recent results and External Examiners' reports, both before and in 2003-4, indicate that the teaching on the whole prepares students for completing the assessment tasks successfully'.

136 Extensive examples of students' work submitted for summative assessment in the four programmes were provided for the audit team, together with the full complement of external examiners' reports. The DSED states that one external examiner had suggested that one of the programmes requires to give 'more careful attention to the setting of essay and dissertation title, so as to enable the better construction of critical pieces of work' and referring to 'a difficulty of engaging in good, critical theological analysis of and reflection on pastoral situations and issues'. The DSED also commented that 'these issues are clearly linked to FHEQ Descriptor iv.' From its examination of submitted student work, the team considered that the assessment tasks are generally appropriate and at an apposite level.

137 Students' summative assessment essays are double-marked and all students receive feedback on draft forms of the essay prior to submission but not all receive further feedback afterwards although all students can receive it if they ask for it. The origins of this lie with the regulations of the University which suggest that there is no obligation to provide feedback on students' exams when these are students' final summative assessment. However, students met by the audit team stated that they would appreciate further information on the final summative assessment of their submitted essay.

138 The DSED did not include progression or completions statistics but noted that 'The fact that the proportion of students gaining distinctions seems to be generally smaller than the national average (with the exception of MAPY) may be due to a number of factors including: the numbers of students with no previous first degree qualifications in the particular subject; possible stricter marking than in some other institutions (a comment made orally by some external examiners); more stringent criteria for awarding distinctions than in some other places.' The audit team did not see sufficient statistical data to corroborate the College's view. Students met informed the team that they were not aware that marking was 'more stringent' than elsewhere and did not

consider this an issue. The team also noted that, at present, there is no comparability of assessment results across the programmes and suggest that this might be a useful exercise when the data is more fully available.

139 Programme handbooks include information about programme learning outcomes, assessment tasks and assessment criteria. The teaching staff met by the audit team commented that module handbooks were becoming more refined and although there is no single template for the handbooks a shared practice is beginning to emerge. The students met by the team reported that programme-level information is excellent but occasionally at variance with College-level information. The example offered was that two different dates were published for the start of the present term. The team notes that the College considers that further development of the student intranet (HeVN) should enhance the accuracy and consistency of the information provided to students.

140 The Library forms a key element of the programme level learning resources. Staff met by the audit team referred to the high quality and extensive holdings of the Library that are acknowledged and welcomed by students. Careful consideration has been given to library opening hours given the large number of part-time students in employment. Copyright issues mean that there are limits on the use of the intranet to disseminate articles and reading. Students are given a detailed induction to the Library at the start of each year. The students met in the DAT were positive about the Library and noted that the College intranet (HeVN) was beginning to be used more widely by students and was likely to be a helpful source of information.

141 Resources are available for student with disabilities. A member of staff has been asked to teach remedial English from September 2005 and students can be referred for testing to the Dyslexia Teaching Centre also located within the Maria Assumpta Centre. In such cases this is paid for by the student. The students interviewed by the audit team were not aware

of other students being disadvantaged in any way because of learning disabilities, and further examples were provided of carefully organised attempts to address needs generated by student disabilities.

142 Student feedback is gained by a number of routes at the programme level, predominantly informal in nature, with some students preferring to use individual e-mail contact as a means of offering feedback whilst others go through student representatives on College wide committees. There is no staff-student liaison committee due to the large numbers of part-time students in employment, spread over a diverse geographical area. To address this matter a postgraduate consultation day was held in January 2005, where around 20 recent MA graduates joined some 40 current MA students, representing twelve taught postgraduate programmes. The day was also was attended by all the Programme Convenors. The purpose of the day was defined in the 'Postgraduate Consultation Day Report' (Feb 2005) as being three-fold: 'to help students and alumni to reflect constructively on their experience of studying at Heythrop; to allow the College to draw on the wealth of knowledge, experience and expertise of the postgraduate body; to find way[s] of involving postgraduate students more in College development and decision-making, including matters which may enhance their own experience at Heythrop.' The students met by the audit team considered that they had every opportunity to influence the quality of the teaching due to the closeness of links with lecturers and were also particularly positive about the consultation day.

143 From the DAT the audit team was able to confirm that the standard of student achievement and the quality of learning opportunities were suitable for the progression of students leading to the awards.

Thematic enquiries

144 The audit team did not select any areas for thematic enquiry.

Section 4: The audit investigations: published information

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

145 The College prospectus and its website are the major sources of information for prospective students, with Programme Convenors being responsible for updating entries as required. The Quality Assurance Handbook (2005) states that through the information provided to applicants and the admissions procedures, it aims to achieve 'a good match between the abilities and interests of students and the subjects, learning opportunities and ethos of the College'. Although the SWS observed that the College provides students with little in the way of reading lists or programme outlines prior to arrival and that there is a 'lack of information in writing' about links with the University, students are generally satisfied with the quality of information provided by the College in its prospectus.

146 The SWS stated that 'the College seems plagued by a difficulty in providing accurate and up-to-date information to enable students to choose relevant options or understand their contact time implications' - a view corroborated by some of the students met by the audit team. Staff confirmed to the team that, although postgraduate timetables were published two years in advance, new undergraduate entrants received their timetable during induction and continuing undergraduate students were provided with a draft timetable for the following academic year in the last term of the current year. This timetable was, however, often subject to considerable change.

147 The SWS referred to a perception of some post-graduate students that information 'wasn't always consistent or available', that 'there didn't seem to be a sense in which information was imparted from any central source', and that in a number of areas there was less written information than might have been expected. Some students considered that more reliance could be placed on information communicated verbally than in writing, while feedback from postgraduate students, at the Consultation Day (January 2005) suggests that too much reliance institutionally was placed on the 'grape vine'.

148 The College website contains a variety of information for prospective students. Philosophy and Theology portals provide both a general overview of these subjects and how they are taught at the College, and a detailed account of the programme and modules available. The 'Heythrop Gateway' and 'A Level Philosophy' sites provide an extensive set of subject links in Philosophy and Theology. The College website also contains information about term dates, financial matters and student support services

149 The College's draft Information Strategy envisages the development of the intranet and website as the major tool of internal and external communication. Although only recently implemented, the student intranet (HeVN) already contains useful information ranging from student forms to the contact details for the student union executive and student representatives on the Governing Body and other college-wide committees. Over 20 programme forums have been established, though at the time of the audit students had yet to use them in large numbers. The College is beginning to use the intranet as a way of communicating necessary information to students, though staff have a realistic view of the culture shift required for the intranet to become a primary tool for staff-student communication.

150 While acknowledging that the College still has some way to go in achieving consistent information to students, across the full range of its activities, the audit team agrees with the statement in the SED that the College has made considerable progress in recent years in becoming more 'information-aware'.

Reliability, accuracy and completeness of published information

151 As the College is not currently funded by HEFCE it is not subject to the requirements as set out in 'Information on quality and standards in higher education: final guidance (HEFCE 03/51) and therefore does not have to provide published information to the Higher Education Research and Opportunities (HERO) website for the purposes of Teaching Quality Information (TQI). However, the College has, on a voluntary basis as part of the 'normalisation' process, returned the institutional TQI information, the summary external examiner reports, and links to undergraduate programme specifications to time. The College is not permitted to publish quantitative information because it does not yet report to HESA but, as noted earlier, discussions are taking place about the possibility of undertaking shadow returns in advance of a first true HESA return in 2007.'

152 Module handbooks are produced by individual module teachers using centrally prepared guidance and the responsibility of overseeing the accuracy of these handbooks lies with respective Heads of Department. The preparation of Programme Handbooks is overseen by the relevant Deans and Convenors. The Deans of Undergraduate and Postgraduate Studies have overall responsibility for ensuing that student handbooks and other relevant information for students are published on time.

153 In February, 2005, the College's newly established Information Strategy Group held its first meeting with a remit to produce a comprehensive, management driven, information strategy for the College, and the audit team noted that the group still had some significant way to go in finalising the strategy.

Findings

Findings

154 An institutional audit of Heythrop College (the College) was undertaken by a team of auditors from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) during the week 28 November to 2 December 2005. 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 the degrees of the University of London (the University). As part of the audit process, according to protocols agreed with Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) and Universities UK (UUK), one discipline audit trail (DAT) was selected for scrutiny. This section of the report of the audit summarises the findings of the audit. It concludes by identifying features of good practice that emerged from the audit and recommendations to the College for enhancing current practice.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for assuring the quality of programmes

The quality assurance framework

155 The College is a constituent college of the University and, as a consequence of the University's increased devolution, now has responsibility for the quality management of all aspects of its undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision and the academic standards of associated federal and External System University awards. The University retains overall responsibility for the examination of research degree students, whilst the College takes responsibility for all other expects of student experience, including the quality of their research supervision. Currently the College is not funded by the HEFCE, but is preparing to change its status. The self-evaluation document (SED) described the way in which the College has been developing its quality assurance systems to mirror developments in other UK higher education institutions (HEIs) and believes that mechanisms now in place justify confidence in its likely future management of quality and standards.

156 The College's Quality Assurance Handbook (2005) states that it aims to be a single source of reference for arrangements for managing the quality of its programmes and learning opportunities at the College, and the standard of University's awards in which the College has a responsible role. The audit team found that the Handbook offered full and clear coverage of quality assurance arrangements.

157 Academic Board is the formal academic authority of the College and its responsibilities include setting, enhancing, and reviewing the academic quality and standards of all taught and research degree programmes delivered by the College. Over the past two years changes to the committee structure have been phased in to formalise and enhance the deliberative structure, including the establishment of an Academic Standards Committee (ASC) as a sub-committee of Academic Board which now operates to a greater extent through focused sub-committees. ASC replaced the free-standing Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) which was established in 2002. The SED described the work done by QAU as identifying and extending effective arrangements already in use and drawing on examples of practice elsewhere in the higher education (HE) sector. The audit team consider that the QAU had been effective in developing quality and standards procedures and systems and were concerned that the specialist and responsive quality and standards perspective provided by the QAU might not be available to the College in the new formal committee structure. The team therefore advise the College to identify a person who can sustain the momentum already established in developing quality assurance systems, and to drive the quality and standards agenda.

Programme approval

158 The College's current procedures for approval of new programmes and modules, monitoring and review are fully documented in the Quality Assurance Handbook. It describes the explicit relationship between development and approval procedures, the *Code of practice* and relevant subject benchmark statements and includes a clear description of the devolved

relationship between, and respective responsibilities of the University and the College with regard to programme approval for college-based, federal and External System programmes.

159 The SED noted that the development of new programmes in so small a college is relatively infrequent, and states that the systems described in the Quality Assurance Handbook were being applied in full for the first time in 2005-6. The audit team found evidence that the systems described in the Quality Assurance Handbook are being followed in current programme approvals. In the case of new modules, the Quality Handbook states that that if a module is wholly new then external consultation is good practice though not essential. The team would encourage the College, in the context of the small and distinctive nature of the institution, to extend requirements for externality in the approval of all new modules to ensure objectivity.

Annual monitoring

160 The Quality Assurance Handbook outlines clearly the overall purpose of annual monitoring and the associated procedures, roles and responsibilities. Through Programme Convenors' reports the audit team saw evidence of thoughtful and detailed analysis of different aspects of the programmes drawing on module tutor reports which outline student views on individual modules, other sources of student feedback, and discussions with staff. The SED described a culture where 'there has historically been a wish to avoid any formal sharing of findings from student feedback.' In some cases, Programme Convenors reported significant variation in the fullness of module tutor reports which have had implications for their reports. The need for transparency of student feedback is currently being discussed by ASC, and the team recommend that the College ensure that all module evaluations are disclosed, critically analysed and incorporated effectively into the annual monitoring process. The Quality Assurance Handbook noted that ASC may request additional information where a programme report is insufficient, and the

team would encourage the College to disseminate good practice arising from Programme Convenor's reports and to use the described procedures to ensure that the quality of all reports meets required standards.

161 The Quality Assurance Handbook describes student involvement in the development of annual monitoring reports through meetings to discuss their experience and planned actions, and the requirement to feedback to students on agreed actions. The audit team found implementation of these procedures was not consistent or well understood by students. The team consider it desirable that the College develop strategies to enable students to be involved systematically and transparently in the annual monitoring cycle of all programmes.

162 The audit team noted the clear link established between the SLTA and annual monitoring, and considered that the value of the annual monitoring overview report may be improved by the regular inclusion of a summary of the achievement in relation to the Strategy's annual priorities. A summary annual monitoring report, agreed by ASC, goes forward to Academic Board. The team considered these reports to be evaluative and to propose relevant action.

Periodic review

163 The SED described the procedure for periodic programme review as one that is relatively less well established than some in this developmental period for the College. There have been two recent periodic reviews, the self-evaluation for one of which formed the basis for the discipline SED (DSED). Tracking of the panel membership, content and stages of the reviews, including reporting on actions, enabled the audit team to conclude that the process was robust, although it is suggested that the Quality Assurance Handbook's description of the process, in the case of federal programmes, is reviewed for consistency between its sections.

Feedback from students, graduates and employers

164 The College introduced an annual College-wide survey of undergraduate and postgraduate students in 2005. The audit team was able to confirm the accuracy of the claim made in the SED that responses indicated very strong approval for the quality of teaching, the nature of programmes and the ethos of the College, and that action was taken in response areas where student satisfaction was low. Student feedback is gained through a number of routes at programme level, mostly informal in nature, with some students preferring to use individual e-mail contact as a means of offering feedback whilst others go through student representatives on College-wide committees. To overcome difficulties in gathering feedback from part-time students, who are predominantly postgraduate, the College has instigated a postgraduate consultation day which also included representation from graduates.

165 There is opportunity for student representation on College-wide committees although the SED noted that this has been with limited success prior to 2005-06 and requires a continued change in student culture. The structure of student representation at programme level varies and the audit team recommends that representation on undergraduate programmes is standardised. However, students met by the team considered that they had every opportunity to influence the quality of the teaching due to the closeness of links with academic staff.

166 Feedback from employers is not collected systematically by the College although the SED stated that there is a good knowledge of employers needs in theology. The lack of feedback mechanisms is due, according to the College, to the diverse range of employment entered by graduates particularly in relation to philosophy. The audit team would encourage the College to consider developing a more systematic process for gathering employer feedback in all disciplines as a means of enhancing programme monitoring and review.

Distance learning and collaborative provision

167 The College does not directly offer any distance learning programmes but is the Lead College for the Bachelor of Divinity (BD) and Diploma in Theology in the University's External System. Responsibilities for the quality and standards of the BD and Diploma in Theology are shared between the University's External System Academic Board and the Academic Board of the College, although the College is responsible for the academic oversight of the awards: including commissioning, approving student materials; the assessment process, appointment of internal and external examiners; via the External Programme Committee, ASC and Academic Board. The audit team noted that current arrangements are operating appropriately but that internal concerns about how they could be better integrated with the structures and processes applied to College-based programmes should be addressed in the forthcoming review of the BD and Diploma programmes.

168 Currently the College does not offer any collaborative provision, but is soon to sign a formal agreement with South London and Maudsley Hospital NHS trust to deliver one M level module. The audit team can confirm that appropriate consideration of quality assurance matters has occurred at each stage of the development and appropriate safeguards are in place.

169 From the evidence available to it, and from discussions with staff and students, the audit team formed the judgements that broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the College's current and likely future management of the quality of its programmes.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for securing the standards of awards

170 The College, although self-governing, operates within a broad, shared, Academic Framework as deemed by the University's Ordinances. The College is therefore responsible for managing the quality and standards of its College-based programmes,

specified aspects of the quality and standards of the federal awards on which it has registered students, the University's External System awards in Theology for which it is the Lead College and research degrees up to the point of examination which is the responsibility of the University.

171 The SED described the distinctive features of the external examining processes for College-based, federal and External System programmes. The specific responsibilities that the College is required to undertake for its federal programmes are detailed in the University's Ordinances. For the remainder of the programmes, the Academic Board of the College carries the responsibility for the appointment of external examiners and also for the appointment of inter-collegiate examiners, as advocated by the University. The nomination and appointment, role and reporting responsibilities, of the College's external examiners are set out in the Quality Assurance Handbook and a comprehensive booklet provided to examiners. The SED stated that the role of external examiners and the criteria for their appointment were initially documented in 2002, taking account of the first issue of *Code of practice for the assurance of academic standards in higher education* (the *Code of practice*) *section 4: external examining* and have subsequently been reviewed in the light of the revisions to the *Code of practice*. The criteria used by the College for the appointment of its external examiners indicate that a nominee should possess relevant subject knowledge and have a familiarity with assessment practices and academic standards, including those specified in national reference points, such as the *framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The audit team saw evidence of these processes working effectively in accordance with College guidelines and the Code of practice at institutional and subject levels. The team formed the view that College policies and procedures pertaining to external examiners were generally robust and transparent.

172 Academic Board receives an overview report spanning College-regulated external examiners reports and those for relevant federal and External System programmes. The audit team considered that this overview report appeared to offer the College considerable opportunity to recognise and address recurrent themes, benchmark standards, develop assessment regulations methodically and identify areas of good practice. This was an interesting example of the systematic employment of quality assurance procedures by the College and was an effective vehicle for developing opportunities for enhancement. The team was of the view that it was a noteworthy initiative and an example of good practice.

173 The SED described the use made by the College of statistical data as being 'in its infancy', but considered that a start has been made in addressing an agenda that the College had not progressed significantly for some years. A contributory factor to the delay in addressing this matter was that the College, not being in receipt of public funding, had not been required to provide continuation or completion statistics to Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) or to maintain records to HESA standards. The College has invested in a student information management system and as part of its 'normalisation' process, has recently started to consider how, in the context of a small institution, it might best develop the requisite 'tools, information-gathering and procedural sophistication' to address this matter effectively. The audit team heard a clear articulation of the vision that the College has for the future development and use of statistical data and the proposed expansion in the use of the student information management system. The team formed the view that steady progress was being made, but that, until the results of its investment materialise, the College would find itself at a disadvantage in addressing some of its strategic imperatives. One specific example of this concern was the absence of consideration of annual monitoring data relating to disability and ethnicity at senior management level. Although this had been flagged for action in 2005, the team heard that it had yet to take place. Having noted in much of the College's literature the importance

afforded to welcoming student diversity, it was the view of the team that the College would find benefit from expediting this matter. Consequently the team recommends the desirability of prioritising the production and consideration of data on the student profile in order to inform the development of the College's equal opportunities agenda.

174 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 and likely future management of the academic standards of the awards it offers on behalf of the University of London.

The effectiveness of institutional procedures for supporting learning

175 The SED identified a variety of ways in which the College supports student learning. One of the most significant of these is the amount of individual support students receive from tutors. Academic staff have traditionally had a pastoral as well as a teaching role, and there is consequently no distinct divide between academic and pastoral support. The resulting close relationship between students and staff remains both a distinctive feature and core value of the College. Since the two Subject Review visits in 2001 the College has reviewed its procedures for staff development which, since 2004, has been addressed as a theme in the Strategy for Learning, Teaching and Assessment (STLA). The audit team considered this linkage as an indicator of the importance the College places on staff development as a means of enhancing support for student learning.

176 In addition to staff resources, students are able to draw on physical learning resources ranging from the historic to the modern. In addition to the College's own extensive library, students are also able to use the University's Library, whose online catalogue can be accessed at the College, and the libraries of other HEIs in the London region as a result of the College's membership of the M25

Consortium of Academic Libraries. The operation of the College Library is overseen by the Library Committee, which is chaired by a Governor and includes student representatives. The Library also involves library staff from other HEIs in the periodic assessment of its activities.

177 The College has also made significant recent advances in making learning technologies available to students, including the introduction in 2005-6 of a student intranet (HeVN). The College's draft Information Strategy identifies the future role of the intranet as a major tool for internal communication. The College has a realistic view of the speed with which this can be accomplished and has made appropriate investment in technical support.

178 Although the College's premises were not designed with specific requirements of mobility-impaired students in mind, the College has procedures in place to support the learning of such students. The College is currently undertaking an extensive longer-term audit of its buildings and has already improved access to some areas by means of stair lifts and ramps.

179 The SED acknowledged that the size of the College makes it difficult to provide the comprehensive student support services that entrants, particularly younger students, increasingly expect. However, the College makes good use of some of the student services offered by the University and has established a Welfare Liaison Group to take forward the development of student support with the College.

180 Staff development is recognised at the College as an important part of supporting student learning and although some initiatives, according to the SED, are still in their early days, significant progress has been made since the two Subject Reviews in 2001. A Staff Development Steering Group has been established and is leading the development, implementation and evaluation of an annual internal staff development programme, based on a survey of staff development needs. The first Staff Development Strategy has been produced and mechanisms are now in place

within the deliberative structure to identify successful practice and ensure that it is shared across the College. An example of this is the effective links between programme monitoring reports and the identification of staff development needs which the audit team consider good practice.

181 From documentary evidence and meetings with staff and students the audit team confirmed that the SED provided an accurate account of its approaches to supporting learning. The team formed the view that the learning environment is generally effective and considers that the College's analysis of student needs and the managed mix of internally and externally provided services with which it plans to satisfy them, are likely to enhance the provision of student support further.

Outcomes of discipline audit trails

Theology and Religious Studies

182 Four programmes in the field of theology and religious studies formed the focus of the DAT:

- MA Christian Spirituality
- MA Pastoral Liturgy
- MA Pastoral Studies/Theology
- MA Psychology of Religion.

183 The body of the DSED was helpfully the self-evaluation prepared for the purposes of periodic review. This stated that 'the College has recently revised the structure and especially the forms of assessment of all its MA programmes.' These are now assessed purely by a combination of coursework and an end-of-year essay. The students met by the audit team reported that feedback on draft end of module essays was normally provided in one-to-one tutorials and was particularly helpful. Some, however, expressed disappointment that feedback on the final summative essay was only offered on request. In the light of the interviews with staff and students, consideration of external examiners' reports and examples of student work, the team considers that the forms of assessment now in place are apposite

and effective. The standard of student achievement, moreover, is deemed appropriate to the level of the award as are the programmes to their location within the FHEQ. After considering the programme and module details; the level of teaching and supervision of students; library, information technology and research resources available; the published information for students; and student feedback on the quality of the student experience, the team considers that the quality of learning opportunities met and exceeded sector practice and were suitable for the programmes of study leading to the awards.

184 The College has developed programme specifications for all its programmes. Those provided for the MA programmes were judged to be clear, accurate, well-suited to their purpose and easily accessible via the student intranet (HeVN). The programme and module handbooks seen by the audit team were also considered helpful and appropriate, although care is needed to ensure that programme-level information is consistent with College-level information.

185 The audit team saw evidence of the timely and appropriate manner in which external examiners' reports and recommendations were followed up. The team also had access to annual monitoring reports and were satisfied that the careful and detailed consideration by Programme Convenors of student evaluations, external examiners' reports, limited progression data; and the resulting actions taken constituted evidence of an emerging culture that would continue to sustain and enhance quality and standards in the future.

The use made by the institution of the Academic Infrastructure

186 The SED provided examples of the ways in which external reference points, including the Academic Infrastructure, had informed the development of the College's formal systems for managing quality and standards over five years of progressive 'normalisation'. The genesis of this engagement was the College's consideration of the outcomes of the 2001

Subject Reviews and the subsequent decision to revise all of the College's programmes to take account of 'the arrival of benchmarking, levels and skills'. The SED provided examples of ways in which the College had previously engaged with, and responded to, the Code of practice but noted that this activity had developed 'without the involvement of staff with specific responsibility for quality systems and without significant experience elsewhere'. There had therefore been some variation in the pace of response and the extent to which external reference points became embedded in College documented systems and practice.

187 Programme specifications have been developed for all programmes, incorporated into student handbooks and subsequently used in the relevant programme approval and review procedures. The audit team read a number of programme specifications and found that these were in line with national guidelines. The team formed the view that this aspect of the Academic Infrastructure has quickly become incorporated into the standard practice of the College in a helpful and adept manner. Although the SED did not include much reference to the FHEQ, the 2002 to 2004 reviews of all of the College's programmes had indeed made extensive use of this element of the Academic Infrastructure with the issue of 'level' featuring significantly in these discussions.

188 Academic and review processes were identified by the College as the areas where it principally tested the compatibility of its programmes with subject benchmarks and the audit team saw evidence that the use of relevant benchmark statements featured in the two most recent periodic reviews. External examiners are required to certify that the programmes which they cover are of a standard defined by the benchmark statements.

189 Since its inception the QAU had been the recipient within the College for the sections of the Code of practice as they were circulated. The audit team reviewed documentation of the work of the Unit which indicated that its consideration of this matter had been thorough

and systematic, and that College procedures had been amended as appropriate with oversight being provided by Academic Board. With regard to the ongoing review of College systems and procedures in the context of the continuing evolution of the Code of practice, the SED did not provide a consolidated view of this, but the team heard that there were 'de facto' individuals or groups within the College who had specific responsibilities for each section of the Code of practice. The team judged this to be a somewhat informal arrangement and recommended as desirable that the College should formalise the loci of responsibility for the oversight of the sections of the Code of practice with appropriate timescales and reporting lines.

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

190 The writing of the SED was overseen by the Quality Coordinator and approved through the College's committee structure. A copy was seen by all full-time and part-time academic staff.

191 The audit team found that the introduction to the SED provided a concise, informative and helpful overview of the origins and mission of the College, its current funding status, and its staffing profile. This contextualisation was instrumental in conveying from the outset both the uniqueness of the College and the magnitude of the agenda for change it had set itself.

192 A key feature of this contextualisation was the clarity with which the College had assessed its position in a changing national HE environment, and the frankness with which the SED in general addressed the challenges posed by the incremental adoption of sector norms, a process referred to by the College as 'normalisation'. In this regard, the introduction noted that the audit fell in the midst of a 2 to 3 year period of unusually rapid change as the College has progressively put new systems and procedures in place to meet the exigencies associated with becoming publicly funded from 2006-7.

193 Following the introduction, the SED adopted the main sub-headings suggested in the *Handbook for institutional audit: England*. The information provided within these sub-headings was clear and well evidenced. Appendices to the main document served to provide the audit team with focused information about recent and ongoing change in the academic, organisational and committee structures of the College, with further appendices providing key statistical indicators, a glossary of terms and an evidence list.

194 The audit team formed the view that it was largely because of the College's capacity for informed self-evaluation and identification of clear, staged goals that the process of 'normalisation' was generally well understood and supported by staff. This understanding played an important role in the achievement of consensus-driven change, and was particularly noteworthy in the context of the College's unique staffing profile. The team considered that the form and content of the SED, and the process by which it had been written and approved, provided evidence of the College's ability to reflect upon its own strengths and limitations, and to bring a high degree of institutional self-awareness to the process of change.

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

195 The College's commitment to the process of 'normalisation' was evidenced both in documents presented to the audit team and in meetings the team held with staff. This commitment is in harmony with the aims set out in the SLTA (2004-7), namely, 'to sustain and extend excellence in supporting student's learning experience; to identify and respond appropriately to changes in students' needs as learners; to contribute, with other strategies, to a coherent framework for reflection and decision-making'. These intentions were informed by values, also set out in the STLA, which included the prioritisation of teaching in addition to 'facilitating, supporting and supervising students' learning'; the maintenance

of a supportive learning environment, which took account of national benchmarks and expectations; and the enabling of students' learning through individual attention. During the audit the team was presented with the draft strategic plan outlining 'key strategic aims 2005-2015.' Although much of this document was devoted to the College's research plans, the key intentions articulated in the SED and STLA found further reiteration here while other significant intentions were outlined in greater detail - most significantly, intentions relating to the provision of human resources, information, and student support. The aims relating to human resources include, for example, performance reviews of all staff and staff development with the intention of equipping staff for new technologies for learning and teaching. Further aims and objectives are set out with the purpose of enhancing information handling and management. For example, improving mechanisms for sharing information with regard to learning resources between library, IT staff, academic staff and students' and an extensive set of objectives are laid out with respect to student support services including, the development of personal development plans, the publishing of a student support handbook, analysis of student support data, all of which have 2006-7 as their target date for implementation.

196 The College's commitment to the 'normalisation' process is significant and it was the view of the audit team that the College's intentions to 'normalise' and to enhance quality and standards were timely, appropriate, well-conceived and well-articulated in the documentation available to it. Moreover, the team concluded that the College's aims, objectives and express intentions were sector congruent and consequently is confident that the institution is cognisant of its enhancement needs and is defining its policies accordingly. The team is also aware of the ongoing nature of the process to embed these intentions, policies and procedures at all levels of the College.

Reliability of information

197 The SED stated that 'Until recently, the College's externally published information has mainly consisted of marketing and related materials about taught programmes, in the form of the prospectus, programme leaflets, CD-ROMs, and the website.' 'Internal' information provided to students included either an Undergraduate Handbook or a Postgraduate Handbook together with a Programme Handbook and further published guidance to the Library and computing facilities. The SED goes on to note that in the last three to four years considerable progress has been made in improving these in terms of accuracy, integration and user-friendliness. In the light of the SWS and meetings with students, the audit team noted that there remained some frustration for students with the quality, accuracy and timeliness of information provision and that the communication of information was too contingent on 'word of mouth'. The College expects that the increased use of the student intranet (HeVN) will provide an effective means of disseminating information.

198 To enhance the quality of information further, the College has established an Information Strategy Group to coordinate and enhance its information provision and the draft an information strategy; however, the audit team noted that the Group has still some significant way to go in finalising the strategy.

199 Since the College is not currently funded by HEFCE, it is not subject to the information requirements expected of HEIs to provide published information in relation to Teaching Quality Information (TQI). Despite this, the College produced, on time, the institutional TQI information, the summary external examiner reports, and links to Undergraduate Programme Specifications in line with the rest of the HE sector. The audit team noted the positive advances made in this direction by the College in preparation for receipt of HEFCE funding in 2006.

Features of good practice

200 The following features of good practice were noted:

i   the composite report of issues raised by external examiners, considered by Academic Board, as an effective vehicle for developing opportunities for enhancement (paragraph 66)

ii   the effective links between programme monitoring reports and the identification of staff development needs (paragraph 102)

iii the ways in which the substantial and recent agenda for change has been achieved both through consensus and the enthusiastic engagement of the College's staff (paragraphs 105).

Recommendations for action

201 Recommendations for action that is advisable:

iv   to identify a person who can sustain the momentum already established in developing quality assurance systems, and to drive the quality and standards agenda (paragraph 37)

v   to embrace the intentions of 'normalisation' in all aspects of its activities in relation to the recruitment, selection and appointment of staff, within the terms of the College's statutes (paragraph 96).

202 Recommendations for action that is desirable:

vi   to ensure that all module evaluations are disclosed, critically analysed and incorporated effectively into the annual monitoring process (paragraphs 47, 83)

vii to review achievement of students who are jointly taught in level 2/3 modules in order to ensure that the College's approach aligns with standard sector practice on progression and achievement. Such review should be informed by appropriate external advice, analysis of student achievement data and subsequent consultation with students (paragraph 69)

viii   to formalise the loci of responsibility for the oversight of the sections of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic standards in higher education* with appropriate timescales and reporting lines (paragraph 71)

ix   to standardise student representation at undergraduate programme level (paragraph 79)

x   to review how the College might better achieve collective outcomes from processes which currently have a confidential element, in order to facilitate opportunities for quality enhancement more effectively (paragraphs 83, 103)

xi   to prioritise the production and consideration of data on the student profile in order to inform the development of the College's equal opportunities agenda (paragraph 90)

xii   to ensure that an overview is taken of the consistency and completeness of module handbooks (paragraph 122).

Appendix

Heythrop College's response to the audit report

The College has found the exercise of self-evaluation internally useful during a period of significant development of its quality management arrangements, which have included progressively more critical engagement with evidence and more formal strategic planning for enhancement. The timing of the visit has allowed the self-evaluation and discussions with the audit team to inform, constructively, a wider agenda for change in preparation to become a publicly funded institution.

The College is pleased with the audit team's judgement of broad confidence in the present and likely future management of quality and standards. The College recognises that its process of 'normalisation' is not yet complete, and is heartened by the audit team's support for the early implementation of some processes relatively recently introduced. It is satisfying that the report broadly confirms both the findings of self-evaluation, and the spirit in which that self-evaluation was conducted. The commendation for what has so far been achieved 'through consensus and the enthusiastic engagement of the College's staff' is particularly welcome.

The College is committed to following through the recommendations made. The draft report has been considered by the Academic Standards Committee and by the Academic Board, and some priorities for action identified, to be addressed before the start of the next academic year. More detailed consideration of the helpful suggestions in the body of the main report is ongoing. Recommendations for 'desirable' action are generally matters of which the College was aware, within its policy to develop the quality framework in a measured and prioritised way, ensuring broad ownership. The College is pleased to have endorsement of the inclusive approach so far taken, encouragement to continue broadly as planned, and suggestions for developments which might usefully be accelerated.

The College is grateful for the team's concern to understand the distinctive features of Heythrop, the pace of change currently affecting it, and its desire for streamlined systems appropriate to a very small institution.